Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 4 June 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Martin Cameron, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Wayne Farnham, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Paul Mercurio, Kim O'Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak 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

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

Brad Battin (from 27 December 2024 to 18 November 2025)

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024 to 28 January 2026)

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

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 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[8]	Werribee	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel[1]	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	Marsh, Anthony[9]	Nepean	Lib
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Cheeseman, Darren[2]	South Barwon	Ind	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pallas, Tim[10]	Werribee	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Smith, Ryan[11]	Warrandyte	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Foster, Eden[3]	Mulgrave	ALP	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fowles, Will[4]	Ringwood	Ind	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Groth, Sam[5]	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hibbins, Sam[6, 7]	Prahran	Ind	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Werner, Nicole[12]	Warrandyte	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Westaway, Rachel[13]	Prahran	Lib
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
			Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

[1] Resigned 27 September 2023
[2] ALP until 29 April 2024
[3] Sworn in 6 February 2024
[4] ALP until 5 August 2023
[5] Resigned 13 February 2026
[6] Greens until 1 November 2024
[7] Resigned 23 November 2024
[8] Sworn in 4 March 2025
[9] Sworn in 2 June 2026
[10] Resigned 6 January 2025
[11] Resigned 7 July 2023
[12] Sworn in 3 October 2023
[13] Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 4 June 2026

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

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notices of motion 15 to 16 and 40 and order of the day 6, 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:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Results of 2025 Audits: TAFEs and Universities – Ordered to be published

Commission for Children and Young People – Left behind: Systemic inquiry into responses to children and young people who are the subject of multiple reports to Child Protection – Ordered to be published

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Administration and Probate Act 1958 – SR 57

Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 – SR 60

Family Violence Protection Act 2008 – SR 61

Gambling Regulation Act 2003 – SR 58

Taxation Administration Act 1997 – SR 62

Worker Screening Act 2020 – SR 59.

Motions

Motions by leave

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the One Nation and the Liberal–Nationals policy to cut the departments of health and education and the opposition's own $40 billion cuts plan, which will gut teachers, nurses and hospitals.

Leave refused.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that raw explosives for shells, bullets, missiles and bombs are being manufactured in a facility right here in Benalla, to be used by the Israeli army in its illegal attacks on Gaza, Lebanon and Iran, in an Australian government facility leased out to arms company Thales. We call on the federal Labor government to end its relentless complicity in the murder of thousands of innocent people and break all ties with the Israeli and US war machine.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Kororoit for providing character references to six individuals that were 'inappropriate' and questions whether someone who has sided with domestic violence and sex offenders is fit to be Minister for Youth.

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the opposition to come clean about their secret preference deal with One Nation to form the cuts coalition that will wreck schools, teachers and the rest of our community and economy.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Laverton for turning a blind eye to the poor judgement demonstrated by the member for Kororoit in providing character references for individuals convicted of serious criminal offences, including sexual and violent crimes.

Leave refused.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for announcing cuts to the Department of Transport and Planning. The last time the Liberals held government public transport investment was slashed by more than 66 per cent.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Labor government for concealing advice recommending expanding activity centres from 60 to 210 across Melbourne while misleading Victorians about its housing agenda and calls on the government to immediately release all advice and information relating to the proposed density developments.

Leave refused.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that the national plan for regional funding would actually cut funding to Victorian public schools.

Leave refused.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Mordialloc for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save his seat.

Leave refused.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the opposition's cuts plan would slash one in seven public servants, directly threatening schools, hospitals and services across regional Victoria.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Monbulk for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seats.

Leave refused.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the opposition for guaranteeing the abolition of activity centre zoning, cutting over 300,000 new homes and driving up housing costs for Victorian families.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Niddrie for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seats.

Leave refused.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for announcing cuts to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the agency responsible for child protection in Victoria.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Eureka for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seats.

Leave refused.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that under the Liberal cuts plan no new infrastructure will be built, just as last time they were in government, when they failed to deliver a single regional rail project.

Leave refused.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Ripon for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seats.

Leave refused.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Liberal–Nationals cuts plan would eliminate 430 jobs in Geelong, 350 in Ballarat, 260 in Bendigo, 230 in Gippsland and 200 in the Hume region.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Mulgrave for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seat.

Leave refused.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house notes that when last in government the member for Rowville, as Treasurer, promised there would be 'no cuts to the public service' full stop and then proceeded to cut $250 million per year and over 4000 public sector jobs between 2011 and 2013.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bayswater for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and the union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seats.

Leave refused.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the opposition has committed to abolishing the State Electricity Commission, meaning higher power prices for families and greater profits for overseas corporations.

Leave refused.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Albert Park and her mates the Greens for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party and the Greens in a desperate attempt to save their seats.

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Tarneit for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save their seat.

Leave refused.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns Jess Wilson and Danny O'Brien, who last week announced they would –

The SPEAKER: Member for Albert Park, it is inappropriate to not use members' appropriate titles.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Point Cook for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and the union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate move to save his seat.

Leave refused.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the National Party for failing Victoria's regions and backing the Liberals' cuts plan.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Narre Warren North and the member for Mildura can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Narre Warren North and Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for announcing cuts to the Department of Government Services, which is currently delivering 20 per cent off your rego, putting up to 186 bucks back into the pocket of millions of Victorians during a cost-of-living crisis.

Leave refused.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That the member for Yan Yean undertakes a form of remedial program that helps her understand which grass she is responsible for cutting.

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:45): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the member for Bentleigh for doing a dirty deal on donation laws that allows rivers of gold to continue to flow from the CFMEU and union movement to the Labor Party in a desperate attempt to save his seat.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Horseshoe Bend Community Group

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (09:46): Horseshoe Bend community garden in Keilor is a place where people come together to learn, connect and give back. That is why I am so proud that our government is delivering $93,000 to support its ongoing restoration and future community-led projects. This is not just an investment in a garden, it is an investment in people. It is about creating a place where families can spend time together, where children can learn and play, where volunteers can share their knowledge and where people can reconnect with nature right in the heart of our community. In a growing and busy urban area, places like Horseshoe Bend matter. They bring people together, they support wellbeing and they build strong community partnerships. It is really important that a place like Horseshoe Bend gets supported, and our Labor government is doing that to make sure this historic site continues to be a thriving community hub for learning, connection and environmental stewardship.

I want to give a special mention to Cynthia Frain, the president of Horseshoe Bend Community Group, and vice-president Margaret O'Neill, whose outstanding leadership and dedication have helped make this vision a reality. This investment will ensure Horseshoe Bend continues to grow and thrive for many years to come, with more opportunities for people to connect and more community-led projects and environmental restoration, preserving our much-loved local spaces in Keilor and building a benefit for people and the environment. This is a great example of a government backing community passion and delivering real outcomes for local people.

Brighton electorate students

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:47): Our school students give us the best ideas and insights for the future. Recently Lucas from Hampton Primary School wrote to me about his concerns with a reported 8.2 billion pieces of junk mail in Australia each year – surely my mail was not part of that tally – and Alex wrote to me about the need for a swimming pool in Hampton. Both are terrific ideas, and I thank them.

Rotary Club of Brighton North

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:48): The Rotary Club of Brighton North recently had their annual business awards. The professional excellence award went to Katherine Cross of PhysioTrain in Brighton and the excellence in business award went to Mandeep from Styleyes in Hampton. We were also joined by last year's winners, the operators of Bakers Delight in Brighton. Congratulations to the winners and past president of the club Ross Rice and president Anne Cobham for your leadership.

Brighton Croquet Club

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:48): The Brighton Croquet Club was unofficially formed in December 1910 to play croquet on the lawn of Mr Leith's home in William Street. On 28 March 1911, at a meeting at Brighton town hall, the club was formally established and land was purchased for £170 in Bleazby Avenue. The club continues to grow, and club president Bill Marks should be congratulated on a successful recent open day.

Housing

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:49): The state Labor government has been caught with a secret plan to stuff high-rise towers across all Melbourne train stations. The plan would radically increase the number of communities attacked with towers from 60 to 210. We know that is Jacinta Allan's plan if she is re-elected. We have a commitment to rip up these towers.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton, you know better. You need to refer to members by their correct titles.

Monash–Oakleigh Community Support and Information Service

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Sport and Major Events) (09:49): They have been part of our community for over 50 years, and our Labor government is proud to back the amazing MOCSIS with an additional $70,000 of funding. Monash–Oakleigh Community Support and Information Service in Oakleigh provides support, information and material aid. I would like to thank every person who is part of MOCSIS and recognise their fantastic work on behalf of those in our community who need support.

Oakleigh electorate pedestrian crossings

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Sport and Major Events) (09:49): Our Labor government is committed to making our community safer for pedestrians. In the last two budgets we have funded two new pedestrian crossings in my area, the first near the corner of Ferntree Gully Road and Dandenong Road, which is near completion, and the second in this year's budget on North Road between Fenton Street and Clayton Road. This is very welcome news for our community.

Suburban Rail Loop

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Sport and Major Events) (09:50): I would like to recognise the support of the Albanese Labor government for the Suburban Rail Loop, with an additional $3.8 billion in funding, taking their total commitment to $6 billion. It has six new underground stations, including at Clayton – finally a station at Monash University after so many years, the largest university in Australia. This is a transformational project for Melbourne, but despite tunnelling due to begin this year, the Liberals have announced they intend to pause the SRL, leaving thousands out of work and our community without this much-needed train line. Only Labor supports the SRL and only Labor will deliver it.

Community safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:50): Just this gone weekend an off-duty police officer was walking through Southbank on his way home from work after protecting the community and finishing work at 11 pm. On his way home he was set upon by three offenders, which is becoming quite common here in Victoria, and he was viciously assaulted. The question has to be: how? How does this continue to happen? How does an off-duty officer on his way home from protecting the community get assaulted by offenders, with one of them being the person who allegedly set the fire at the 80 Proof factory, causing $4.6 million of damage? It is a great question. Why was he back on the street? It is not even bail. The sentencing he got was effectively giving him a 12-month supervision order so he could go back out and commit further crimes, and those that put him away are the ones that are paying the price.

Add this to Clyde North shopping centre. We had a violent attack where people attacked each other in there with machetes and baseball bats, and people genuinely feel unsafe going in there to shop. We have got a crisis here in Victoria. Car thefts are up, assaults are up and aggravated burglaries are up, but police numbers are down. We have got over 1500 vacancies; more than 500 full-time equivalent positions have not been filled under this government. This is a simple question during this crime crisis to the Premier: where the bloody hell are you?

The SPEAKER: Order! Unparliamentary language, member for Berwick.

Mithrani De Abrew Mahadeva

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Violence Reduction, Minister for Finance) (09:52): Today I rise to acknowledge a remarkable member of our Carrum community, Mithrani De Abrew Mahadeva. I first met Mithrani in 2014, when they joined my very first campaign for the seat of Carrum. Since then they have been a constant source of support, encouragement and friendship. Through every campaign, challenge and milestone, Mithrani has been there with warmth, kindness and quiet determination. Mithrani was born in Sri Lanka and is a proud member of our multicultural community. In their 70s, they live with mixed dementia, including Lewy body disease and Alzheimer's disease. They also carry the impacts of a deeply difficult life, including PTSD and experiences of family violence, and they are an ovarian cancer survivor. Mithrani is also a proud member of the LGBTQI+ community and is connected with the Victorian Pride Centre. They have made an extraordinary contribution not only to their local community but to how we understand dementia across culture, identity and lived experience. Dementia is now the leading cause of death for Australian women and the leading cause of death overall, yet it remains widely misunderstood. Research also shows that older LGBTQI+ people are more likely to experience social isolation and barriers in care. Mithrani is helping to change that. They have chosen to share their story so that others feel less alone and so that our community better understands what it means to live with dementia. Thank you, Mithrani. You have made a profound difference to so many lives, including mine.

Malcolm Browning

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:54): At the recent Nationals conference in Ballarat, Yarrawonga's Malcolm Browning was awarded life membership of the National Party. Malcolm and Wendy Browning are absolutely salt of the earth people who put their community first every time. Malcolm has been an advocate for me and every other National Party MP who preceded me in the north-east – a man who will drop everything and help out when the community needs support. This is not Malcolm's first life membership in our community, and it will not be his last. His commitment to the church, Scouts, Yarrawonga netball, Yarrawonga football, the CFA and of course the National Party is simply outstanding. Congratulations, Malcolm and Wendy. You are outstanding community achievers.

Yarrawonga multisport stadium

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:54): Yesterday I was delighted to be part of the turning of the sod at the Yarrawonga multisport stadium, primarily a basketball stadium that, as the name suggests, will have multiple uses. Twelve years ago Amanda Wheaton approached me to get some traction as to how to move this project forward. To see this project finally begin is a credit to Amanda and her team, which includes Sue Bigger, who has been on the journey for three decades. Congratulations on your vision, your persistence and your determination to keep fighting for this project. I also recognise Moira shire administrators Graham Emonson and Susan Benedyka for honouring this longstanding project which will be an absolute game changer for the Yarrawonga community and surrounding district. I have no doubt a future champion will be born as a result of this investment.

Bevan Tremellan

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:55): Congratulations to Bevan Tremellan, whose handprint was carved into the Marmungun Rock in Wangaratta and unveiled last weekend. Bevan's acknowledgement as Wangaratta's Citizen of the Year being permanently marked in the stone was a very proud moment for him. The late Wally Cooper, an Aboriginal elder of Wangaratta, was determined to inspire through reconciliation.

Aerynn Guerrero

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:55): I wish to congratulate Aerynn Guerrero, a

young constituent of Mill Park, on her outstanding success at the 2026 national youth archery championships in Launceston this April. Representing Victoria in the state team, Aerynn returned home a multimedallist and was named best all-round female archer in the barebow division. This is a remarkable achievement for an athlete competing at a national level. Her results are a credit to her dedication, her discipline and the countless hours of training behind every arrow. Achievements like hers reflect years of commitment and the support of a family that has backed her every step of the way. I want our young people to know that their community sees them and celebrates them. The talent and determination of local youth like Aerynn make our community proud. I congratulate her on this achievement and wish her every success as she pursues her sport.

Mill Park electorate public transport

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:56): I am also proud to speak to the better public transport services coming to my electorate. The Allan Labor government is boosting services on the Mernda line, with trains approximately every 20 minutes to Mernda across the weekend. It is a major improvement on the current timetable of every 30 minutes on weekend evenings and every 40 minutes on Sunday mornings only. I am equally focused on our local bus services, including the 386 and 387 routes linking Mill Park and South Morang residents to key destinations such as South Morang station and RMIT Bundoora, which will also see more evening services soon. There will be more to be said to residents in Epping North and Wollert about the final bus route maps being prepared.

Motor neurone disease

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:57): Victoria lost a legend in Neale Daniher, who lost the ultimate battle in fighting MND – fighting the beast. We are all with him, and that is certainly part of why I and a number of colleagues will be fighting MND as part of the Big Freeze in Parliament in the next sitting week. I want to also pay my respects to the member for Pakenham. We will be out there, donning the beanie, putting the challenge out and ensuring we advocate for everybody to fight MND. Chris 'Rossy' Ross was a former high-performance manager.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield will remove the prop.

David SOUTHWICK: Speaker, everybody was wearing the beanie yesterday.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield will remove the prop.

David SOUTHWICK: Double standards. Chris Ross lost his battle in 2023 at the age of 31, and I will be doing this for him and his family. They will be wearing the beanie, and they will be there with us in Parliament to ensure that people understand what this horrible disease does. Chris lost his voice before anything. He could not speak, and that is why we are here today, along with everybody else, to speak for Chris, to wear the beanie and to ensure that people understand what this horrible disease does to everybody.

Vehicle registration rebate

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:58): Twenty per cent off your car rego – the applications are open. Can I say there have already been some 210,000 applications received and $35 million has been returned to Victorian families. A million applications have been submitted. But to complete that many so far just shows what a great initiative this is. Twenty per cent off your car rego means some $186 in savings per vehicle in a family home. That is a lot of money. Make sure you apply. You can go to the Service Victoria app. Come into my electorate office at 149 Burgundy Street. We are happy to help you get this done. I have also made sure we have mailed to everybody across the Ivanhoe electorate the details so that you know what to do. Get on board, save that money and get your applications in. Go to the Service Victoria app; you have got until 31 July to get that done. Record numbers have been applying, and a record amount of funding has been returned to Victorians, so get

on board and do that, because it is about making sure that we make it easier, safer and more affordable for Victorians.

Ruthven Street, Macleod, level crossing removal

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:59): I would also like to add that the Ruthven Street, Macleod, level crossing is going to go, and early works are underway. There will be a rail bridge over the road there at Ruthven Street. The early works will start in Macleod very soon. In the morning peak those boom gates are down for half an hour as 28 trains roll through that intersection. It needs to go – it is dangerous, it holds up the traffic – and the new connections for cycling and active transport are going to be great across Macleod.

Country Fire Authority Lilydale brigade

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:00): It was fantastic to join Lilydale CFA fire brigade for their annual awards dinner recently, celebrating the achievements of volunteer firefighters and the auxiliary. I want to pay tribute to a few Lilydale CFA volunteer firefighters in particular. Congratulations to Michael Sartori for being bestowed CFA life membership. Michael Sartori is an exceptional firefighter, and for more than four decades he has demonstrated his dedication to our community and Victoria in his work and as a volunteer with the Gruyere and Lilydale fire brigades.

Congratulations to Frank Whelan OAM, who truly epitomises the volunteer spirit and is an outstanding person who has given so much to the Lilydale community and the state of Victoria with an inspirational 65 years of service to the CFA. Congratulations to Lilydale fire brigade's captain Warren Davis and to Kevin Cameron for their amazing 50 years of service to the CFA. Frank, Warren, Kevin and Michael are legends and true heroes, and I am privileged to call them friends. Our community owes a debt of gratitude for the service of these amazing volunteers.

Betty Crittenden

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:01): Congratulations to Mount Evelyn RSL member and stalwart Betty Crittenden on being named an Anzac of the Year for 2026. This is a tremendous achievement, and I am so pleased for Betty to be duly recognised for her 45 years of exceptional service to the veteran community and Mount Evelyn RSL. Betty founded and ran the women's auxiliary for 22 years, with a strong focus on veterans' social welfare, and worked tirelessly to fundraise. Thank you, Betty, for your service. Congratulations.

Vesak

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Employment, Minister for Tourism) (10:01): I rise to extend my warm wishes to everyone who recently celebrated Vesak day. It was a great honour to join the celebrations at Quang Minh temple, together with the Venerable Thich Phuoc Tan, and at the Chùa Bồ Đề Temple in St Albans.

St Albans Football Club

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Employment, Minister for Tourism) (10:01): On another matter, I would like to congratulate Laura Kretiuk, the club's first woman president in 79 years at St Albans Football Club. Laura also volunteers at the Loaves and Fishes foodbank in St Albans. Volunteers like Laura are so important to ensure that services continue delivering food packs but also supporting local sporting clubs in our community.

I would also like to make a special mention of club legend Marion Hewitt, who I met the other day at the ladies event. She met her late husband Tommy at the club some 60 years ago. It was a real love affair. She is a proud St Albans local and a strong supporter of St Albans Football Club. Thank you to the St Albans Football Club ladies committee for a fantastic day and to the committee, the volunteers

and everybody that makes St Albans Football Club great and for providing sport and activity for our young people. Go the Saints.

Youth crime

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:03): I rise today to speak about a significant issue in my community, following a number of recent incidents involving young people in Shepparton. Recent physical, serious acts of violence have left victims traumatised, families distressed and many members of the community deeply concerned about the safety of their children. Victoria Police are currently investigating these incidents. My thoughts are with those who have been affected, and no child or family should have to deal with this. Every member of our community has the right to feel safe at school, on our streets and in their daily lives. We must ensure that the police, schools, youth services and the broader community work together to do all that we can to stop this unacceptable, criminal and alarming behaviour. But we cannot do it alone. The government must ensure these agencies and all involved have the resources, funding and support they need to intervene early, engage with vulnerable young people and respond when problems arise.

When young people find themselves heading down the wrong path, we need strong intervention, meaningful support and clear accountability to help turn lives around before more harm is done. Clearly what is being done is not working and these are not isolated incidents. The rise in youth crime and youth violence has increased, but what is incredibly alarming is the young age of many of these offenders. If this is what some of our young people are capable of, we have to stand together to stop this disgusting, criminal and unacceptable behaviour. The father of one of the victims said, 'It is time for change, and enough is enough.'

Zonta Club of Melbourne's West

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (10:04): Over the weekend I had the pleasure of attending Zonta's annual fashion parade and charity auction at Kindred Studios in Yarraville, which raises funds to support their important work across Melbourne's west. I really want to thank Maria Maikousis for having me there. Zonta is a leading global organisation that is dedicated to building a better world for women and girls through advocacy, service and community action. Locally, Zonta members generously volunteer their time, skills and expertise to deliver programs that support women and girls while raising funds for projects and awards that make a real difference in our community.

Queen Street, Altona, bridge, Altona

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (10:05): I am also pleased to announce that finally construction has commenced on the Queen Street bridge project in Altona, which will deliver safe and more accessible connections for pedestrians and cyclists. With more than 1600 vehicles crossing the bridge each day, the new shared user path will provide a dedicated and secure route for those walking and riding throughout the area.

Altona Swimming Club

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (10:05): Finally, I would like to thank Mark Gowans, the president of Altona Swimming Club, for hosting me at Bayfit Leisure Centre to learn more about the club's volunteer-run Sunday club program. The Sunday club provides local families and school-aged children with the opportunity to improve their fitness, develop their swimming skills and learn to race and compete in a supportive and welcoming environment. They meet twice a month, and the program helps young people to build confidence, develop friendships and connect with others who share their interests right across our community.

Neale Daniher AO

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (10:06): Today I rise to acknowledge an extraordinary Australian in Neale Daniher. Most Victorians know Neale as a footballer, a coach and the driving force behind FightMND. But what has always struck me most about him is not what he achieved before his diagnosis but what he chose to do afterwards. After receiving the devastating confirmation that he had MND, Neale was flying home to Perth. By his own account, he spent part of that flight feeling sorry for himself, wondering why this had happened to him. Then he had a moment of clarity. He later recalled saying to himself, 'Okay, Neale, you've dropped your head for the last few hours. You've been carrying on and dropped your bottom lip. How's that working out for you, then?' And with that, he made a decision. Rather than asking, 'Why me?' he asked, 'What can I do?' He allowed himself just a couple of hours of introspection in those circumstances – just extraordinary.

Neale often used the football expression 'Play on'. For him it became more than a sporting phrase. It became a philosophy for life: keep chasing the ball, keep doing what we have to do. Most of us will never face the challenges that Neale confronted, yet his response to adversity contains a lesson for all of us. When life becomes difficult, when circumstances are unfair, when things do not go to plan, we can choose whether to be defined by what happens to us or defined by how we respond. Neale Daniher chose to respond with courage, optimism and purpose. In doing so, he has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for research, has inspired countless Australians and has given hope to families affected by MND. For that, all Australians owe him a debt of gratitude.

Jagajaga Community Volunteer Awards

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry, Minister for Skills and TAFE) (10:07): It was a pleasure recently to attend the 2026 Jagajaga Community Volunteer Awards, hosted by my hardworking federal colleague the member for Jagajaga Kate Thwaites MP along with the member for Eltham and the member for Ivanhoe. It was such an honour to recognise so many hardworking local people who make our community such a terrific place to be – people like Nancy Gheno, who founded Inspirational Quilts over 20 years ago, turning a kind gesture for a sick child into thousands of donated quilts. Also recognised were John and Katherine Gibson, who were foundation members of the Greensborough Historical Society and foster carers for Guide Dogs Victoria.

I would also like to recognise Stephen Kelly for his contributions to the Darebin Creek Sweepers and Bundoora Rotary Club; Nola MacDonald for her incredible commitment to the Living Faith Church and their partnership with Prison Fellowship Australia; Ana Monge Simmons for spending the past 12 years volunteering with Starting Over Dog Rescue, preventing dogs from being returned to shelters; Jeanette Nash for being a long-term dedicated volunteer at the Greensborough Historical Society; Jackie Arbuckle for her significant commitment to Rosanna Primary School; and Bread Hub Victoria volunteers Leora Creak and Nabil Salem. Congratulations to all the recipients who received an award, and a huge thankyou to every volunteer who contributes so much to our community. It would not be the place it is without all of your hard work and dedication.

Budget 2026–27

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:08): I rise today to give voice to the angry and frustrated residents of my electorate of Rowville, who have been utterly abandoned by this tired and arrogant state Labor government in the recent 2026–27 state budget. This is a financially reckless state budget defined by soaring taxes, an outrageous net state debt of $200 billion and an astonishing $1.35 million an hour interest bill, if you can believe it. We are seeing a government that has completely run out of money and is now coming after the hip pockets of hardworking Victorians, leaving our children and grandchildren to inherit such a scandalous net state debt burden. While my constituents are forced to pay for Labor's relentless corruption, waste and Big Build project blowouts, the community of Rowville has been completely ignored. Apart from the continuation of a previously announced facility upgrade at Carrington Primary School, there was absolutely nothing of substance for the Rowville

electorate in the actual budget papers. Rowville electorate residents just want a fair go. They are sick of being treated like second-class citizens and deserve real investment for our roads, schools, police and emergency services and community infrastructure. Rowville electorate has once again been short-changed by an arrogantly out of touch and financially reckless Allan Labor government.

Anzac Day

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:10): It was a privilege to be out in my community on Anzac Day joining local services to honour the courage and sacrifice of those who have served our nation. Across the electorate commemorations brought people together in reflection and remembrance. I thank the Montmorency Eltham RSL, including president Ash Graham; Diamond Creek RSL, including president Kerryn Cruickshank; Friends of Kangaroo Ground; and Greensborough RSL for hosting such meaningful services across our community on Anzac Day. I thank the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and the wonderful Robert Winther, and Eltham High and Eltham College, who also held services leading up to the day. I also want to thank the many volunteers who made the day so special. This includes our local schools and community groups, Rotary Eltham, Eltham Football Club, Diamond Creek Football Netball Club, Catholic Ladies College, Eltham High School, Montmorency Secondary College, Eltham College, Eltham Primary School, Diamond Creek East Primary School, St Francis Xavier Primary School, Diamond Creek Bowling Club and Eltham and Diamond Creek men's sheds. A special mention to the students who performed the last post, Lucas Shen and Ijsbrand Shepherd from Eltham College.

Montmorency Junior Football & Netball Club

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:11): Go n-éirí libh – good luck – to the strong, talented and brave girls from Montmorency junior football club who are off on the journey of a lifetime to Ireland. Five under-15 girl players – Bianca, Darcie, Ava, Edie and Avi – will be the backbone of the Australian team at the LGFA Féile tournament. They are awesome, and I know our community is as proud of them as I am. Arriving in Dublin, they will make their way to Derry, where they will demonstrate how they have adapted their strong AFL skills to Gaelic football, taking on international teams from Ireland, England, Europe and the United States. Have the best time, girls, and show the world how good you are.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College Bentleigh

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (10:11): Recently I had the best night at OLSH College watching *Seussical the Musical*, which they held with De La Salle College. I want to acknowledge the lead cast, Niki, Noah, Sophia, Michael, Tilda, Anthi, Arriane, Nicholas, Campbell and Gia; also the supporting cast, Ruby, Tianna, Emerson, Chloe, Joshua, Maxwell, Noah, Charli, Zoe, Adrian, Taylor and Angelina; the speciality dancers and singers, some of whom were in the cast, so they will be acknowledged twice, Chloe, Sarina, Milla, Tianna, Therese, Charlotte, Zara, Annabel, Mia, Anthi, Campbell, Zara, Zoe, Eden, Ella, Asha, Grace, Ellie and Annaliese; the ensemble, Phoebe, Annaliese, Cielo, Zara, Ellie, Zachary, Milla, Oliver, Eden, Ruth, Ella, Asha, Therese, Grace, Katrina, Lola, Ruby, Milana, Charlotte, Madeleine, Kelaai, Amelia, Paul, Ellie, Matilda, Poppy, Zara, Adam, Annabelle, Jade and Zoe; the orchestra, Quinlan, Thomas, Dylan, Nicholas, Andrew, Domenic, Kristian, Violet, Abigail, Arthur, Ethan, EJ, William, Ryen, Max, Christopher, Owen, Jasmine, Max and Larry; and the crew, Lachlan, Sophie, Nicholas, Mabel, Sylvie, Kasey, Hector, Valentina, Alice, Jamie, Harry, Oliver and Will.

Small Business Bus

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:13): It was vantastic to welcome the Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister Suleyman, to Vanscope recently in North Coburg at 104 Bakers Road to see their incredible work underway fitting out Victoria's new small business bus. For almost 16 years the Small Business Bus has travelled across Melbourne and regional Victoria as an office on

wheels delivering free one-on-one expert advice and support to thousands of small business operators and people looking to start their own business. With Victoria home to more than 735,000 small businesses employing over 1.3 million Victorians, this next-generation bus will have an important job to do helping established and emerging business owners access the advice, tools, workshops, webinars and learning opportunities they need to grow and succeed. Thank you to the local team at Vanscope Fitouts, including the owner Tim, a local bloke for a long time, for the fantastic workmanship and bringing this important project to life.

Teeth On Wheels

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:14): I would like to congratulate Teeth On Wheels and Teeth On O'Hea for recently being recognised at the Victorian Small Business Awards by Minister Suleyman, receiving the Youth in Business Award. I commend brothers Joseph and Rami Zeid as the Youth in Business Award recipients, who established Teeth On Wheels in 2015, which has continued to deliver accessible, affordable and high-quality dental care to young people at their schools across the state.

Pascoe Vale Girls College

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:14): I recently welcomed the chance to talk with classes from Pascoe Vale Girls College on the workings of state Parliament, state government and how they can influence change, as part of their civic studies, on 25 May here at Parliament House in this chamber and on 26 May at the Sussex Neighbourhood House as well.

Christian communities

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:14): On 20 May I was honoured to join faith leaders and community members at the second annual Victorian government's Christian communities dinner. I commend Reverend Mark Dunn – *(Time expired)*

Country Fire Authority Werribee brigade

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:14): On Saturday I was joined by my colleague Ryan Batchelor in the other place for the Werribee fire brigade annual dinner, an event I refer to as Werribee's night off, because we are the busiest volunteer brigade in all of Victoria. The dedication to community safety shown by my fellow firefighters was recognised, and I would like to congratulate Cameron Ward, Alannah Inglis, Jason Inglis, Rohan Ford, Rohan Rizzoli, Scott Green, Daniel May, Phil Trifilo, Shaun Britton and life members Malcolm Faldon and Josie Trifilo. From a previous firefighter of the year to our newest, congratulations Cameron Ward, and thank you to Pengelly Award winner John Aidone.

While Saturday night was our celebration, Monday morning was a reminder of the harsh reality of the job. This is our community. This is our grief. To the family of the young boy who passed away near Kookaburra Avenue, we share your pain. Volunteers are disappointed with the response offered by those who seek to politicise this tragedy. We need to show decency towards a grieving community and not politicise a tragedy like the one we saw in Newbury Street. The proper reviews must and will happen. On so many occasions I have been part of that first on scene at a house fire, with Hoppers and station 57 right behind us. The member for Tarneit and I stand by the Hoppers Crossing fire brigade and all the firefighters, volunteer and paid, who attended that fire.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, yesterday you gave a ruling that a member could not wear an MND beanie in the house. When the issue was raised at the end of members statements, you advised the house that you believed the Speaker gave a ruling the prior day that only on that day could someone wear a MND beanie. I have reviewed *Hansard*, and there was no ruling given to this chamber by the Speaker. Perhaps she engaged with the Labor Party – I cannot speak to that – but outside the chamber. But my very strong view is there was no ruling, and I cannot understand why again today a member who was speaking from the heart about the issue was told to remove the beanie. It is frankly a rank decision, and we will be dissenting from the ruling. You cannot have

decisions based, in my view, on rank politics, and it is an outrageous decision. There was no ruling given to this chamber, respectfully. I would ask you to refer the matter to the Speaker. As I asked yesterday and was denied, I would ask you to refer it to the Speaker today.

Will Fowles: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, just on this matter, clearly there was a coordinated campaign. The first thing I would say is it is a very great shame that this has been politicised in this way. But the fault for this does not lie with the opposition, perhaps unusually. There was clearly a coordinated campaign. When the motion about Neale Daniher was put to the chamber, all Labor members put on their beanies, including the Speaker, so the Speaker was part of that decision.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage the member to be careful about reflections on the Chair.

Will Fowles: It is merely a statement of fact that all Labor members, including the Chair, put on their beanies.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Without assistance, or people will leave the chamber. The member for Ringwood to continue.

Will Fowles: I did not quite hear that. That was fine, except that opportunity was not extended to other members of the chamber. They did not know that –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Narre Warren North, please leave for half an hour.

Member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

Will Fowles: Oo-roo.

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Will Fowles: On a separate point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would ask that the member who has been ejected and is continuing to interject whilst leaving ought to now have an extension of her –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I did not quite hear what happened, because I believe you were making a comment at the same time.

Will Fowles: No, I was not.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: 'Tuvalu' or something was what I heard.

Will Fowles: I said 'oo-roo'.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am happy to hear your point of order, member for Ringwood. Can we please continue.

Will Fowles: I will continue my first point of order, and then I will make a subsequent point of order. My first point of order is clearly that opportunity was not extended to non-government members. The first opportunity for a non-government member to similarly show solidarity with the FightMND movement, I believe, was the member for Warrandyte, who was told to remove her beanie when giving her speech. That decision – my submission on this point of order – was a partisan decision. That is a very great shame, and I would ask that you refer the matter to the Speaker. My view is that there ought to be carte blanche, an exemption for this week, for members giving speeches on or about FightMND or Neale Daniher to, if they so choose, display solidarity whilst wearing a beanie. On my second point of order –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will do your second point of order after we deal with this one.

Tim Richardson: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I distinctly recall the Speaker articulating at the time when the condolence motion commenced that this would be an exception.

Members interjecting.

Tim Richardson: The video footage has beanies being on at that time and the Speaker putting a beanie on.

James Newbury: *Hansard* is *Hansard.*

Tim Richardson: We can have a look at the footage there, because I recall people putting the beanies on. On the point of order –

James Newbury interjected.

Tim Richardson: I am just trying to speak, member for Brighton. I know you have had your turn.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair. Member for Brighton, calm down.

Tim Richardson: It is okay. You do not have to jump the dispatch box. Just take a drink.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, through the Chair.

Tim Richardson: There have been countless occasions – I am thinking in the prevention of family violence space, Respect Victoria's work – where over a decade we have had exceptions in the moment. There is consistent practice here where exceptions in the moment happen. There is precedent and consistent precedent for in the moment.

Kim Wells: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, with respect, the role of the Speaker is to ensure that the rules that have been agreed to in the house are interpreted correctly. I have to say I am one that had no problems whatsoever with anyone wearing an MND beanie during the Neale Daniher debate. But for consistency, if someone after that – like the member for Warrandyte or, as we just saw, the member for Caulfield – is speaking specifically about someone who is suffering from MND and wears the hat, to me that is a consistent flow of what has happened this week. I would also ask that that message goes back to the Speaker to say that for this week, for goodness sake, if people are speaking specifically about this dreadful, dreadful disease, there should be some tolerance to allow the wearing of the hat. If the member for Caulfield had been speaking about something else and wearing the beanie, then I would say that is wrong, but he was not. He was speaking specifically about MND, and I think that is the message that should go back to the Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, as I relayed yesterday, the point of order that has been raised is not actually a point of order. The Speaker made a ruling. As I encouraged the member for Brighton and the member for Warrandyte yesterday, I encourage all members who have spoken or who have thoughts on this matter to discuss that ruling with the Speaker in her office outside the chamber, because the ruling has been made. More than that, there are times when exceptions are made in the house that go outside the prop rule that has been decided upon by the Chair. It is my personal understanding that that exception and its limitations were relayed in the whips meeting on Monday. I was not at the whips meeting – I could not make it – but it is my understanding that that happened. If there are issues with the communications, I would again encourage anyone in this chamber to discuss these matters with the Speaker. It is not a point of order.

James Newbury: A further point of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Ringwood is still waiting for a second one if you do not mind, member for Brighton.

James Newbury: It is on this matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The problem, member for Brighton, is the rule –

James Newbury: Could I try it before you make a judgement on it?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have ruled on the point of order that it is not actually a point of order.

James Newbury: I understand that, so can I raise a separate point of order on a similar topic?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You can raise a separate point of order on a similar topic. I am happy to hear it. I will go to the member for Ringwood on his point of order first, and then we will come to you, member for Brighton.

Will Fowles: The earlier point of order I will come back to. This one is on the communication. You just referred, Deputy Chair, to the whips meeting. The crossbench and I suspect the Greens are not party to the communications that are made in the whips meeting. You have said 'if there are problems with the communication'; I just want to raise in the chamber there is a massive problem with communications. I was not told that there was going to be an all-in beaniefest. It is clearly incumbent upon whoever determines that it is okay to communicate it to all members of the chamber, and I would ask you to relay that thought to the Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I reiterate my previous ruling.

James Newbury: Before I raise a separate point of order, can I note there is no formal status of this meeting the Speaker may or may not have had with any member of this place. There is no formal status that I am aware of that this house has agreed upon. I am also not aware of whether or not the Speaker having cups of tea with anyone has any formal status in this place, because it does not. Every member has the right to have every matter they want dealt with in this house, and it cannot be referred to something that does not exist. I think that doing that is simply a mechanism to try and downplay the issues that are raised.

On my separate point of order, Deputy Speaker, today I raised a matter that relates to the member for Caulfield, and I raised my concern after the Speaker had left this chamber, in the only time available to me. It is not possible, respectfully, to conclude that what I raised after the Speaker had left today in any way is covered by your views or decisions of yesterday. I raised a new matter today relating to the member for Caulfield after the Speaker had left the chamber, and I am asking for the instance today to be referred to the Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: As I tried to explain before, the ruling, as it is not a point of order, is the same in its context as of yesterday. It is similar; I am sure it is not word for word the same, but it is a similar issue.

James Newbury interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a different member, but it is the same issue that a ruling of the Speaker is a ruling of the Speaker. I encourage you, if you have questions about that ruling, to take it up with the Speaker in her office.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Deputy Speaker, can you refer me to the ruling? Which ruling are you referring to? *Hansard* of Tuesday has no ruling. You have just said that the Speaker provided a ruling in some kind of meeting that I am not aware of. What ruling?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The ruling that I am referring to is the ruling that was made yesterday by the Speaker, which is the one that you are questioning. Again, you are questioning the one today. It is common practice if you have questions or want to have conversations about rulings to refer them to the Speaker's office. I think we move on.

Tim Richardson: Further to the point of order, Deputy Speaker, there was a ruling. The member for Warrandyte was wearing a beanie and was asked to remove the beanie.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, that is exactly what I said. I do not need assistance with the matter. Member for Ringwood, is this a separate point of order?

Will Fowles: It is a separate point of order, Deputy Speaker. Consistent with past practice, when members are ejected from this chamber, if they have engaged in further interjections they have typically had their suspensions lengthened. I said, 'Oo-roo,' and the member, as she walked out of the chamber, said, 'Oo-roo to you too.' But the important point here is that she was out of her seat. She was defying the Chair and was in the process of leaving the chamber. Entirely consistent with past practice, I ask you to extend her suspension because of that unruly conduct.

Paul Edbrooke: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think you have given sufficient avenues to solve these problems. I would also note that the member who was walking out was not reflecting on any other members, and her sentiments were actually quite happy and welcoming.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order, member for Ringwood. The matter was dealt with at the time.

Bills

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (10:31): Under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill).

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

Overview

The purpose of the Bill is to:

a) acquit the Victorian Government's commitments to strengthen protections for Victorian consumers in the housing market, by:

- improving the information available prior to property sales and prohibiting estate agents from benefiting from early release of deposits;
- strengthening renter protections and outcomes for renters through reforms to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*;
- providing for a process by which owners of owners corporation lots can request payment plans for the payment of certain fees and charges; and
- authorising the Business Licensing Authority (BLA) to suspend licenses of estate agents and conveyancers in certain cases of non-compliance.

b) strengthen consumer supports and modernise ways of doing business under the *Motor Car traders Act 1986*.

c) strengthen regulatory compliance and enforcement in relation to consumer goods and enhance consumer protection by:

- providing for the forfeiture of seized documents or things to the Crown if they remain uncollected after notice had been given to the person or owner from whom the document or thing had been seized and for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to authorise the disposal of a thing seized subject to an information or safety standard, an interim or a permanent ban;
- clarifying certain circumstances in which a person will be prohibited from engaging in debt collection; and
- combatting the sale of illicit tobacco.

d) make miscellaneous amendments to a number of other Acts to ensure the consumer protections provided by these Acts are effective and operate as intended.

The Bill amends laws across Consumer Affairs and other portfolios, including amendments to:

- the **Estate Agents Act 1980** (EA Act) and the **Sale of Land Act 1962** (SL Act) to:
    - expand the comparable property disclosure requirements for a sale of land to include key features of the selected comparable properties;
    - require real estate agents to publish a reserve price agreed with the vendor at least 7 days before any auction or fixed-date sale;
    - increase the prominence of the Property Price Statement and property price information in property advertisements;
    - require vendors to make the section 32 statement available at least 14 days before an auction or fixed date sale, or 14 days before a contract is signed; and
    - prevent estate agents from taking commissions prior to settlement or until a contract is rescinded.
- the **Residential Tenancies Act 1997** (RT Act) to:
    - strengthen renter protections by prohibiting unreasonable refusal for extra keys and fobs for rental properties, capping the cost of breaking a fixed-term residential rental agreement of less than five years, enabling renters to make bond payments directly to the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (RTBA); and,
    - support the administration of the TBS by requiring bond debt repayments received by the Secretary to be paid into the Residential Bonds Investment Interest Account (RBIIA) and to clarify that provisions in Division 3A of Part 10 also apply to former renters to enable recovery of an outstanding debt to the State; and
    - improve outcomes for residents of Part 4A parks (commonly known as residential parks) by establishing a register of Part 4A Parks, removing the ability to issue a 'without cause' notice to vacate to site tenants, introduce annual site agreement checks, clarify how deferred management charges and rent increases may be imposed, and inserting power to prescribe an industry Code of Practice; and
    - strengthen existing protections for renters who are victim survivors of family violence in applications for bond and prohibit rental providers and their agents from discriminating against victim survivors unless an exemption is applicable; and
    - make statue law revision amendments.
- the **Owners Corporations Act 2006** (OC Act) to:
    - facilitate the use of payment plans for lot owners experiencing financial hardship;
    - clarify the authorisation requirements for an owners corporation to commence a legal proceeding.
- the **Subdivision Act 1988** (Subdivision Act) to clarify the authorisation required for an owners corporation to make an application to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for orders relating to plans of subdivision.
- the EA Act and **Conveyancers Act 2006** (Conveyancers Act) to enable the BLA to suspend an estate agent or conveyancer's licence if they do not meet specified trust account audit requirements.
- the **Motor Car Traders Act 1986** (MCT Act) to:
    - streamline and support access to remedies for consumers;
    - strengthen consumer protections; and
    - better regulate use of new technologies and contemporary business practice.
- the **Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012** (ACLFT Act) to:
    - clarify certain circumstances in which a person will be prohibited from engaging in debt collection; and
    - provide for the forfeiture of certain documents or things to the Crown if they remain uncollected after their seizure and for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to authorise the disposal of things seized that are subject of an information standard, safety standard or an interim or a permanent ban.

- the **Tobacco Act 1987** (Tobacco Act) to strengthen Victoria's enforcement approach to combatting the sale of illicit tobacco, through the introduction of:
    - closure powers, to enable relevant Victorian agencies to close illicit tobacco traders;
    - landlord penalties, to create consequences for those who knowingly permit the sale of illicit tobacco at premises they own;
    - landlord powers, including allowing a landlord to terminate a lease following a closure order by providing written notice; and
    - provisions relating to pre-trial destruction of illicit tobacco, to introduce the ability to destroy large quantities of illicit tobacco, as soon as practicable.
- other Acts to make minor and technical amendments.

Human Rights Issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- Recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- Freedom of movement (section 12)
- Privacy and reputation (section 13)
- Freedom of expression (section 15)
- Protection of families and children (section 17)
- Cultural Rights (section 19)
- Property rights (section 20)
- Right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)
- Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)

Recognition and equality before the law (Section 8)

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination, is equal before the law, is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. This section also clarifies that measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination.

Discrimination under the Charter means discrimination within the meaning of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (EO Act) on the basis of an attribute set out in section 6 of that Act (including, for example, age, sex or disability). Discrimination can either be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs where a person imposes a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute, but only where that requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable.

Section 9(3) of the EO Act sets out a number of factors to be considered in deciding reasonableness, which can be summarised as follows:

- the nature and the extent of the disadvantage caused;
- whether the outcome is proportionate to what the respondent sought to achieve by imposing the requirement, condition or practice;
- the costs of any alternative measures;
- the respondent's financial circumstances; and
- whether reasonable adjustments or accommodation could be made to reduce the disadvantage caused.

Family violence reforms to the RT Act

Clauses 52–55 of the Bill inserts sections 30AB, 94FA and 145BA into the RT Act to prohibit rental providers from discriminating against victim survivors by not letting a rented premises on the basis of a prospective renter being a victim survivor of family violence. This engages and promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law because women and other population segments, such as First Peoples and LGBTIQA+ people, are statistically more likely to be a victim survivor of family violence and these new provisions seek to address discrimination that is experienced disproportionately by those cohorts. Renters who are victim

survivors of family violence will therefore be better able to apply for rental properties on an equal playing field in practice.

Clauses 52–55 of the Bill may also limit the right to recognition and equality before the law as proposed new sections 30AB(3) and 94FA(3) will exempt specified entities, such as social and affordable housing providers, from the new requirement that will prohibit rental providers and rooming house operators from refusing to let a rented premises to someone due to being a victim survivor of family violence. Women and First Peoples are over-represented in social housing and are statistically more likely to be a victim survivor of family violence. While this creates a distinction with renters in the private rental market, I consider that this limitation on the right created by the Bill is reasonably justified as a measure required to ensure that social and affordable housing providers can continue to allocate appropriate housing based on a wholistic assessment of priority of need, including having regard to whether a renter is a victim survivor of family violence.

Clauses 101–102 of the Bill may also limit the right to recognition and equality before the law by amending the RT Act to clarify that perpetrators of family violence can be held liable for loss or damage in excess of the value of the bond, subject to VCAT's discretion. While this amendment does not contain reference to gender, it is likely to impact men disproportionately as they are statistically more likely to be the perpetrators of family violence. However, I consider that any limitation on the right created by the Bill is reasonably justified to give effect to the objectives of the bill, which is to provide renters who are victim survivors of family violence protections from liability for loss or damage in circumstances of family violence. I further note that determinations around liabilities are subject to proceedings through VCAT and its' review processes, ensuring that renters have recourse to impartial consideration of their matters by the Tribunal.

Amendment of the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 (DBC Act) – New section 38A inserted

Clause 15 of the Bill engages and may limit the right to recognition and equality before the law because clause 15 inserts a new requirement into the DBC Act that certain agreements to vary a domestic building contract must be in writing that is in English and readily legible. This reflects requirements that apply to a domestic building contract when entered into, consistent with section 31 of the DBC Act.

To the extent that the Bill may limit the right to recognition and equality before the law, any limitation or restriction is reasonable and demonstrably justified as English is the de facto national language, acting as the primary language for government, education, and commerce, and is spoken by between 73–90% of the population as their main language. Requiring variations to contracts to be written in English and readily legible ensures that the terms of the contracts, which are often high value and complex for a consumer to understand, are clearly identifiable and that contractual disputes can be resolved understanding the full intended context and meaning of the contract.

The requirement for a contract variation to be written in English does not remove the ability for a translation of a contract to be prepared where required to ensure accessibility for the parties involved in the contract. Negotiations can also occur in a language other than English.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to recognition and equality before the law under section 8 of the Charter.

Freedom of movement (Section 12)

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria, to enter and leave it, and has the freedom to choose where to live. This right extends to accessing public spaces, such as the ability of individuals to move through, remain in, enter or depart from public spaces, including freedom from physical barriers and procedural impediments.

The right extends, generally, to freedom to move throughout the State without impediment or restrictions (both physical and procedural) and a right to access public places and services. This right is, however, not an absolute right under the Charter and may be subject to such reasonable limitations as are demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society, including the property rights of others.

Family violence reforms to the RT Act

Clauses 52–55 of the Bill engage and promote the right to freedom of movement by prohibiting rental providers refusing to let a rented premises to someone because they are a victim survivor of family violence. This supports victim survivors' ability to move between rental premises and secure housing without discrimination. Clauses 100–102 of the Bill also engages and promotes the right to freedom of movement by strengthening protections to prevent victim survivors from being attributed with liability for loss or damage caused by family violence. This supports victim survivors to remain in housing instead of being forced to vacate rental premises due to inadequate protection from liability in circumstances involving family violence.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act

Clause 120 of the Bill limits this right by introducing new Part 3B to the Tobacco Act, which enables the making of short-term closure notices (up to 90 days) and long-term closure orders. The Bill provides authorisation for the Regulator (Secretary to the Department of Justice and Community Safety), the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria, as appropriate, to close premises.

Closure notices and orders will enable the forced closure of Victorian premises selling or supplying illicit tobacco, including selling tobacco without a licence, and when a tobacco supply business is in possession of illicit tobacco. It will be an offence to enter, remain on or sell things from closed premises without reasonable excuse. The effect of the amendment is that owners, occupiers, employees and customers will be prevented from entering premises subject to a notice or an order without reasonable excuse or an exemption notice. New section 36Z of the Tobacco Act makes it an offence for a person to enter, remain or sell anything from premises that the person knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, are closed premises, without reasonable excuse.

Accordingly, the right to freedom of movement is limited by the Bill. The right to freedom of movement may be subject to reasonable limitations under section 7(2) of the Charter.

Closure powers are necessary for the protection of public health from the harmful effects of illicit tobacco by ensuring premises that are not compliant with the law are closed. The closure powers are expected to disrupt the trade in illicit tobacco and will supplement the existing regulatory tools that Tobacco Licensing Victoria has as part of the tobacco licensing scheme (including immediate suspension of a licence) and Victoria Police powers, to provide a greater ability to disrupt the illicit tobacco trade and associated organised crime supply chains. There is no less restrictive means to achieve these purposes, as retaining the status quo (not having closure powers) means that businesses will continue to trade in illicit tobacco and the community will continue to access illicit tobacco.

The amendments strengthen Victoria's approach to combatting the sale of illicit tobacco to reduce harm to the community.

The amendments are accompanied by important safeguards:

- A closure order can only be made if the statutory criteria are satisfied. A short-term closure notice can only be made if the decision-maker: (i) reasonably suspects that any illicit tobacco is being sold or otherwise supplied at the premises (new section 36V); or (ii) reasonably suspects there is illicit tobacco at the premises in the possession or under the control of a person who carries on a tobacco supply business; or (iii) believes on reasonable grounds that a tobacco supply business is being carried on at the premises without a licence. A long-term closure order can only be made if the Magistrates' Court is satisfied that: (i) illicit tobacco is being, or is likely to be, sold or otherwise supplied at the premises (new section 36X); (ii) there is any illicit tobacco at the premises in the possession or under the control of a person who carries on a tobacco supply business; or (iii) a tobacco supply business is being carried on at the premises without a licence.
- New sections 36V and 36X provide that, when issuing a short-term closure notice or long-term closure order respectively, the decision-maker may have regard to whether the notice or order will impact the ability of the community to access essential goods and services and any other matter the decision maker considers appropriate.
- Exemptions can be granted for persons to enter or remain in a closed premises.
- The new section 36Z offence contains exceptions, including a "without reasonable excuse" defence.
- Short-term closure notices are limited to 90 days duration and must be cancelled if the notice is no longer required.
- Long-term closure orders may only be made by the Magistrates' Court (new section 36X(3)).
- The owner or occupier of premises subject to a long-term closure order may apply to the Magistrates' Cout for cancellation of the order (new section 36Y).

I consider that any limitation on the right to freedom of movement created by clause 120 is necessary given the purpose of the Bill to disrupt the sale of illicit tobacco and the harms caused by the illicit trade on the community. I therefore consider the limitation is reasonably justified and proportionate to achieve that purpose.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to freedom of movement before the law under section 12 of the Charter.

Privacy and reputation (section 13)

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully and arbitrarily interfered with and not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Require estate agents to disclose property sale information to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria

Clause 19 of the Bill engages and may limit the right to privacy and reputation by inserting new section 47AN into the EA Act, which provides that an estate agent must disclose property sale information in relation to the sale of residential property to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria, unless an exemption is granted. While some vendors may consider sale price information to be private, this information is already subject to mandatory disclosure to the Valuer-General. Furthermore, property addresses and sale prices are ultimately made publicly available with the Valuer-General, albeit for a fee and after a delay of several weeks following settlement. The reforms seek to accelerate the transparency of information generated in an open market.

Given that property price information can already be accessed by the public, and serves a significant consumer protection purpose, any interference with the right to privacy and reputation is considered proportionate and lawful, and not arbitrary. In my view this requirement is lawful as the information and process for disclosure is precisely defined, and not arbitrary as its disclosure will improve the provision of information to better facilitate a well-functioning housing market. Disclosure of property sale information may be considered arbitrary where disclosure of this information may put a person at risk of harm (for example in circumstances of family or personal violence), which would be a disproportionate harm compared to the intended benefit achieved by information disclosure. There will be an exemption from the requirement to disclose information in such instances, to ensure that private information is not required to be disclosed arbitrarily.

Require estate agents to request disclosure of a vendor's reserve price and publication of that reserve price in the Property Price Statement 7 days before an auction or fixed date sale

Clause 26 of the Bill engages and may limit the right to privacy and reputation by inserting new sections 47AG to 47AM into the EA Act. New section 47AG provides that an estate agent must request a seller's reserve price in writing before an auction or fixed date sale and, under new section 47AH, the estate agent must then publish the seller's reserve price for a property at least 7 days before an auction or fixed date sale.

The seller's reserve price may be considered information of a private nature as it is information that sellers have historically withheld, with few electing to disclose it prior to sale unless compelled to do so. Sellers may avoid revealing their reserve price because they consider it weakens their negotiating position by signaling the minimum price they will accept, reducing competitive bidding and the chance of achieving a higher sale price.

Currently the seller's reserve price will become known at the end of the sale process by prospective purchasers who attend the auction, as offers are rejected if they do not meet that reserve, and accepted if they do. Therefore, a sellers' reserve price is only considered private information before the sale has occurred.

To the extent that clause 26 of the Bill may limit the right to privacy by requiring the disclosure and publication of information that may be of a private nature, I consider that any limitation of the right to privacy will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. In my view this requirement is lawful as the information and process for disclosure is precisely defined, and it is not arbitrary as it is required to ensure estate agents inform prospective purchasers of important pricing information regarding a property, they are considering purchasing.

Additionally, sellers will not be compelled to sell if they receive a bid at or above their disclosed reserve price, limiting any impact the disclosure of this private information may have on their negotiating position. This information disclosure will improve the provision of information to better facilitate a well-functioning housing market.

Require estate agents to publish the sold price of a property in the Property Price Statement 7 days after the sale becomes unconditional

Clause 26 of the Bill may limit the right to privacy by inserting new section 47AJ into the EA Act, which requires an estate agent to amend the property price statement to include the sold price of a property within 7 days of the sale becoming unconditional, unless an exemption is granted. The price for which a property is sold may be considered to be information of a private nature, as evidenced by the fact that some vendors and sellers currently choose not to openly disclose the sold price following a sale and instead choose to keep the information private. This information can currently be accessed for a fee from the Valuer-General but is not available until settlement of a property sale. The extent to which the reforms limit the right to privacy is mitigated by the fact that they primarily remove cost barriers to access the information and make the information publicly available at an earlier point in time.

To the extent that clause 26 of the Bill may limit the right to privacy by requiring the disclosure of information that may be of a private nature, I consider that any limitation will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. In my view this requirement is lawful as the information and process for disclosure is precisely defined, and not arbitrary as its disclosure will improve the provision of information to better facilitate a well-functioning housing market. Disclosure of sold price information may be considered arbitrary where disclosure of this information may put a person at risk of harm (for example in circumstances of family or personal violence), which would outweigh the aim of a well-functioning housing market. There will be an exemption from the requirement to disclose sold price information available in such instances, to ensure that private information is not required to be disclosed arbitrarily.

Power for the BLA to suspend a licence under the Conveyancers Act and the EA Act

Clause 12 may engage the right not to have a person's reputation unlawfully attacked by inserting section 32A into the Conveyancers Act, which provides that if a licensee fails to comply with the requirements of section 84(1) or 85(1A) of the Conveyancers Act (which require trust records to be audited and the subsequent audit report to be lodged with the Director within 10 business days), the BLA may suspend the conveyancer's licence for a period of up to 12 months. A similar power is reflected in clause 23, which inserts new section 24E of the EA Act which provides that if an estate agent fails to comply with the requirements of section 64(1), 64(1A), or 64(2A) of the EA Act (which require trust accounts to be audited, that they must be audited by a qualified person, and the subsequent report must be lodged with the Director within 10 business days) the BLA may suspend a licence for a period of up to 12 months. In both cases the purpose of suspending a licence is to address non-compliance with trust account audit requirements and reduce consumer harm. This may engage the right not to have a reputation unlawfully attacked through restricting a person's ability to practice in their chosen profession.

To the extent this could engage the right not to have a person's reputation unlawfully attacked, the engagement does not limit the right. Suspension must be undertaken within the legislative framework of the Bill, and therefore any resulting damage to a person's reputation would not be unlawful.

Prohibiting unreasonable refusal for request for additional keys and fobs for rental premises

Clause 58 of the Bill engages, but does not limit, the right to privacy by prohibiting rental providers from unreasonably refusing a request from a renter for an additional key or security device. Rental providers are also prohibited from disabling a key or security device unless permitted under the RT Act. Rental providers are able to refuse a renter's request if there is a reasonable justification.

Clause 58 of the Bill engages and promotes the right to not have a person's family or home interfered with and is consistent with a renters' right to exclusive possession of the rented premises during the term of their residential rental agreement. However the provision of additional keys or security devices to a renter may limit the right to privacy of co-renters within a rental premises or other residents within a building where the rental premises is located, by providing access to common areas of the building for people who may not be listed on the residential rental agreement. This clause may create an arbitrary interference of the right to privacy for co-renters in rental premises where a renter requests additional keys or security devices for the rental premises or for residents within a building where the rental premises is located.

To the extent that this could limit co-renter or other residents right to privacy, the limitation is reasonable and can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. The new clause builds in a threshold requiring requests for additional security devices or keys to be provided only when the request is reasonable and enables the rental provider to refuse the request for additional keys and fobs where the request is unreasonable. The Bill also sets out the circumstances in which a security device or key can be disabled by a rental provider to mitigate against the misuse of security devices or keys which may also impact the privacy of other residents in an apartment building. As such I believe the new clause is consistent with the right to privacy in the Charter.

Bond paid directly to the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (Authority)

Clause 79 of the Bill creates an offence at section 405B of the RT Act for a rental provider or their agent to refuse to enter into a rental agreement with a renter because they have elected to pay their bond directly to the Authority. Without this prohibition a rental provider may arbitrarily and unreasonably refuse to enter into a residential rental agreement with a renter who chooses to pay bond directly to the Authority. This engages and promotes the right to family and home by ensuring that a renter's right to occupy a home is not unlawfully and arbitrarily interfered with because of their choice to pay a bond directly to the Authority.

Reforms to Part 4A of the RT Act (residential parks)

Clause 67 of the Bill engages the right to privacy and reputation by inserting new section 206ZZCA into the RT Act which requires the Director to keep and maintain a register of Part 4A parks. Proposed section 206ZZCA(3) of the RT Act provides for the information that is to be included in the register.

Clause 67 of the Bill also engages the right to privacy in proposed section 206ZZCB of the RT Act that requires the operator of a Part 4A park (commonly known as a residential park) to give notice to the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria (Director) including the particulars required to enable the Director to record in the register the matters specified in section 206ZZCA(3) of the RT Act. Those particulars include personal information including the name, business telephone number and email address of any person located at the park who is a representative of the operator, if they are a different person to the operator.

The operator must register the Part 4A park with the Director prior to permitting a site tenant to occupy a Part 4A site and subsequently give the Director an annual update on information included in the register. For existing Part 4A parks, registration will be required within 3 months of the commencement of the proposed amendments. The Director must publish specified information on a public register, provided it is not personal information protected by the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

Although clause 67 engages the right to privacy, I consider that this provision is compatible with the Charter as it does not unlawfully or arbitrarily interfere with that right. The new provision clearly articulates that the information that must be submitted to the Director is limited only to that needed to identify operators of Part 4A parks for regulatory purposes. The scope of information published on the public register will be narrower and limited to the information required to support prospective site tenants to make informed decisions about entering into and living in a Part 4A park, such as park location, the website details of the park, park size and the nature of the park.

Clause 70 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by repealing section 207ZG of the RT Act which removes the option for a site owner to issue a 'without cause' notice to a site tenant to vacate the site at the end of the term of a fixed term site agreement. By protecting site tenants from no fault eviction, this amendment engages and promotes the right to privacy in the Charter and promotes a site tenants' right not to have their home unlawfully and arbitrarily interfered with.

Family violence reforms

Clauses 52–55 of the Bill engage and promote the right to privacy by ensuring that providers of rental premises cannot discriminate against a person because a prospective renter has been subjected to family violence. By protecting the prospective renter in this way, victims of family violence are not at a greater risk of being refused a tenancy simply due to their circumstances. As such, prohibition has the effect of having their right not to have their family and home or correspondence unlawfully and arbitrarily interfered with.

Authorising a review of a motor car trader's licence following the making of a specified VCAT order

Clause 162 of the Bill engages the right to privacy and reputation by amending the MCT Act to provide for the BLA to conduct a review of a licence of a licensed motor car trader where VCAT has made a 'specified tribunal order' against them. A 'specified tribunal order' is defined as an order requiring a licensed motor car trader to pay an amount to a purchaser of a motor car in relation to a transaction involving the buying, selling or exchanging of a motor car or the offering to buy, sell or exchange a motor car. This includes an order requiring a refund, compensation or payment in relation to a breach of contract of sale of a motor car.

The BLA will only review orders made by the Tribunal and, where available, reasons for decision for those orders. Orders and reasons for decision are publicly available and are exempt from the privacy protections in the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* under section 34(6)(b) of that Act.

To the extent that the right to privacy is engaged, I consider that the requirements of new Division 2A of Part 2 of the MCT Act to be inserted by clause 162 of the Bill are precise and appropriately prescribed, not arbitrary and are permitted by law through the Bill.

The power for the BLA to suspend a motor car trader's licence following a licence review engages the right to not have a person's reputation unlawfully attacked because this restricts a person's ability to practise in their chosen profession. In my view, any interference with a person's reputation will not be unlawful as a decision to suspend will be undertaken within the defined legislative framework to be inserted by clause 162.

These amendments are reasonable to give effect to the licence review process, which will benefit consumers by increasing compliance with the MCT Act and by providing an incentive for licensed motor car traders to engage in early and effective resolution of disputes with consumers.

Requiring owners or operators of internet sites or digital platforms to produce information

Clause 175 of the Bill engages the right to privacy by amending section 82AD to give the Director and inspectors appointed under the ACFLT Act the power to require specified persons to provide information orally or in writing about a person's licensed or unlicensed motor car trading business. Clause 175 also expands the list of specified persons in section 82AD(3) to include owners or operators of internet sites or digital platforms. The purpose of these amendments is to support the Director in taking compliance and

enforcement action for contraventions of the MCT Act, particularly in relation to car sales conducted through auction houses by unlicensed traders.

To the extent that the right to privacy is engaged, I consider that the amendments made by clause 175 of the Bill are precise and appropriately prescribed, not arbitrary and in accordance with the law. The information that can be requested is clearly described in legislation and is appropriately limited to information relating to a licensed motor car trader's business as a motor car trader or an unlicensed person's trading in motor cars. It is appropriate and proportionate for this information to be accessible to the Director and inspectors for the purposes of addressing unlawful activity in the motor car trading industry.

Reforms to the OC Act

Clause 40 of the Bill inserts new sections 32A to 32J into the OC Act which provides for payment plans for payment of fees by lot owners to their OC. Clause 40 engages and may limit the right to privacy and reputation by providing that –

- an application for a payment plan must be in the approved form. It is anticipated that the approved form will require inclusion of some personal information by a lot owner (new section 32A(2)); and
- under new section 32C(2) evidence may be prescribed for the purposes of an owner occupier lot owner demonstrating hardship to support their application for a payment plan and such evidence may include personal information which an owners corporation (or person delegated by the owners corporation) may temporarily retain to assess whether the request is supported by relevant evidence.

Clause 48 of the Bill inserts a range of provisions dealing with information use and disclosure of personal information collected for the purposes of administering payment plan requests under the OC Act, including providing for the protection of a lot owner's information provided for this purpose from misuse, interference or loss, return and destruction of lot owners' information and disclosure of lot owners' information. The new provisions include penalties for non-compliance.

I consider the privacy protections included in the Bill in clause 48 to safeguard any prescribed personal information are sufficient to ensure that any limitation of the right to privacy flowing from clause 40 of the Bill are neither unlawful nor arbitrary.

Forfeiture of certain documents and things to the Crown and subsequent destruction of seized things if uncollected

Amendments to be made to the ACLFT Act by clauses 5 and 6 of the Bill may limit the right to privacy and reputation by permitting the forfeiture of certain documents containing personal information belonging to a person. These clauses will amend the ACLFT Act to provide that any document or thing seized under Part 6.4 of the ACLFT Act by an inspector within Consumer Affairs Victoria may be forfeited to the Crown, if the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria has sought to return the item where obliged to do so but the item remains uncollected after the lapse of a notice of collection. Once a document or thing is forfeited, the former owner will have no surviving right to apply for its return or right of compensation.

To the extent that clauses 5 and 6 provide for the forfeiture of a document containing personal information to the State, I am of the view that the provisions are precise, properly prescribed by law, and do not operate arbitrarily. As a practical matter, seized documents often remain uncollected, as they are generally copies of original documents and are of limited utility to their owner. In the absence of appropriate management processes, such documents may accumulate over-time, resulting in unnecessary storage costs and administrative burden for the State.

However, clauses 5 and 6 establish clear processes for the retrieval of documents by the owner prior to forfeiture and for their management following forfeiture, given personal information may be involved.

Clause 5 establishes requirements by which the person from whom an item was seized, or the owner of the item, must be notified before the item is forfeited to the Crown. A notice of collection must be issued in writing to the relevant person, specifying how the document or thing may be collected and the consequences of the item not being collected. If the relevant person is unable to be identified or located, the notice may be published in the Government Gazette, to ensure that any deprivation of property only occurs after information on the collection of an item is provided in a manner accessible to the public.

Clause 6 provides that any document forfeited to the Crown must, following forfeiture, be managed in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973*. This means that, under the proposed amendments, forfeited documents will remain subject to the statutory framework governing the storage, access, retention and disposal of public records. In this way, the transfer of control over private information is regulated by law and confined to what is reasonably necessary.

Accordingly, I consider that this clause under the Bill is compatible with the right privacy and reputation under section 13 of the Charter.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act

Clause 120 of the Bill introduces:

- new section 36V, which allows Tobacco Licensing Victoria or the Chief Commissioner of Police to issue a short-term closure notice; and
- new section 36X, which allows the Magistrates' Court to make a long-term closure order; and
- new section 36ZD(2), which requires Tobacco Licensing Victoria to give written notice to the Chief Commissioner of Police of an intent to issue a short-term closure notice or apply for a long-term closure order; and
- new section 36ZD(4), which requires the Chief Commissioner of Police to give written notice to Tobacco Licensing Victoria of an intent to issue a short-term closure notice or apply for a long-term closure order; and
- new section 36ZE, which allows a landlord to terminate a commercial lease, with respect to a premises subject to a long-term closure order; and
- new sections 36V(5)(b), 36W(3)(b) and 36X(6)(b) and 36ZC, which contain public notice requirements. These provisions require the notice or order to be posted at the front of the premises or another place at or near the premises where it is likely to come to public attention and enable the Regulator to make information about the notice or order publicly available on the Department of Justice and Community Safety website.

The making of a short-term closure notice or long-term closure order and the ability to terminate a lease may engage the right to privacy and the right not to have one's home interfered with. While there is doubt as to whether the term "home" in section 13(a) captures a person's workplace, the definition of home provided by the United Nations Human Rights Council includes a person's workplace. As these measures may exclude a tenant from being able to enter and conduct their business at the premises this interferes with their territorial privacy.

In so far as these amendments capture information about a natural person affected by the closure notice or order, it will engage the right to privacy and reputation.

Section 13(a) of the Charter contains internal limitations that permit lawful and non-arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy. Interference with privacy will be arbitrary if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable (*Minogue v Thompson* [2021] VSCA 358, [55]). Therefore, where an interference with privacy is lawful and not arbitrary, it does not come within the scope of section 13 of the Charter.

The closure of premises occurs according to the law and is not arbitrary because it follows the criteria specified in the legislation. Exemptions can also be granted for persons to enter, or remain in, a closed premises.

The disclosure of information between the Chief Commissioner of Police and Tobacco Licensing Victoria and the notice requirements will be required by law and is not arbitrary as it occurs in circumstances specifically outlined in the legislation where a closure notice or order has been made. While new section 36ZC provides discretion to Tobacco Licensing Victoria, it is limited to circumstances where a closure notice or order has been made and serves an important public notice function.

These provisions provide notice to the public where closure notices or orders have been made. The intention of this is to provide notification to the community about the closure and prevent inadvertent contravention of the short-term closure notice or long-term closure order.

Further, the information sharing provisions between Tobacco Licensing Victoria and Victoria Police will strengthen the monitoring and enforcement of closure powers. In assisting the regulation of tobacco licensing, the amendments will have significant community benefit. I do not consider the right to privacy and reputation is limited by clause 120 of the Bill as any interference with privacy will fall within the internal limitation in section 13(a) of the Charter.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy and reputation under section 13 of the Charter.

Freedom of expression (section 15)

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression. This includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds; whether orally, in writing, in print or by way of art or other medium chosen by that person. The right to freedom of expression is generally considered to also include a right to not impart information. Section 15(3) of the Charter provides that special duties and responsibilities are attached to the right to freedom of expression and that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights of other persons and for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Require estate agents to disclose property sale information to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria

Clause 19 of the Bill engages and may limit the right to freedom of expression by inserting new section 47AN into the EA Act, which provides that an estate agent must disclose property sale information in relation to the sale of residential property to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria, unless an exemption is granted. Requiring this information to be disclosed may engage and limit the estate agent's (or agent's representative's) right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to not impart information. To the extent that clause 19 of the Bill may engage or limit the right to freedom of expression by requiring that particular information be imparted, I consider any engagement of this right is balanced by the requirement to protect the rights of other estate agents and the public, specifically prospective purchasers and vendors in the housing market.

These amendments are required to ensure that estate agents and the public have access to pricing information of sold properties to enable them to better understand current market prices. In some cases, requiring this information to be imparted may put a person at risk of harm (for example in family or personal violence situations), and in these cases their safety may be prioritised over the right of the public to access this information to facilitate an effective housing market. There will be an exemption in such instances, to ensure that the benefit from requiring that information to be provided is balanced with any risk of harm.

Amendments to the EA Act to require an estate agent to request and publish the vendor's reserve price in the Property Price Statement seven days before an auction or fixed date sale

Clause 26 of the Bill inserting new sections 47AG and 47AH into the EA Act which engage and may limit the right to freedom of expression by requiring that an estate agent must request a seller's reserve price in writing and publish that reserve price at least 7 days before an auction or fixed date sale can be held.

However, I consider that this limitation is reasonable as these requirements are necessary to promote the right to freedom of expression insofar as they enhance a prospective purchasers' right to receive information, by improving access to pricing information about the property they are considering purchasing. Any limitation on the right to freedom of expression is therefore justified to ensure that consumers have the necessary information to make fully informed decisions when considering purchasing residential property, with more accurate knowledge of likely costs.

Amendments to the EA Act to require the publication of the sold price of a property in the property price statement within 7 days after the sale becomes unconditional and make the property price statement available for 18 months after the sale becomes unconditional

Clause 26 of the Bill may engage and limit the right to privacy by inserting new section 47AJ into the EA Act, which requires an estate agent or agent's representative to update the property price statement to include the sold price of a property within 7 days of the sale becoming unconditional, as defined in the Act, unless an exemption is granted. New section 47AM then provides the property price statement must be made available without fee or charge for at least 18 months after the sale becomes unconditional. Requiring this information to be published may engage and limit the right of freedom of expression of the estate agent (or agent's representative), as well as the seller and the purchaser, which includes the right to not impart information.

To the extent that clause 26 of the Bill may engage or limit the right to freedom of expression by requiring particular information to be imparted, I consider that any limitation of this right is balanced by the requirement to protect the rights of other estate agents and the public, specifically prospective purchasers and vendors in the housing market. These amendments are required to ensure that estate agents and the public have access to pricing information of properties sold to enable them to better understand current market prices. In some cases, requiring this information to be imparted may put a person at risk of harm (for example in family or personal violence situations), and in these cases their safety may be prioritised over the right of the public to access this information to facilitate an effective housing market. There will be an exception in such instances, to ensure that the benefit from requiring that information to be provided is balanced with any risk of harm.

Clause 26 of the Bill also engages and promotes the right to freedom of expression by (inter alia) inserting new section 47AJ and 47AM into the EA Act. Publishing this information promotes the right to freedom of expression as it positively impacts estate agents' and prospective purchasers' ability to receive information about the actual price at which properties in Victoria have been sold. This will be useful for prospective purchasers looking to understand what comparative properties in the area have historically sold for, or for estate agents looking for properties on which to base their estimated selling price (which must take into account the sale of comparative properties as provided by section 47AC of the EA Act).

Amendments to the EA Act require an estate agent to publish a link or QR code to an internet site containing the property price statement in a physical advertisement

Clause 25 of the Bill engages or may limit the right to freedom of expression by amending section 47AF of the EA Act to require estate agents or agents' representatives to ensure that physical advertisements of residential property that specify information about the property also refer to an Internet site that contains a

property price statement, by including either an internet address or QR code link to the Internet site. Requiring the estate agent or agent's representative to publish this information may engage or limit the estate agent or representative's right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to not impart information.

However, I consider that this limitation is reasonable as these requirements are necessary to promote the right to freedom of expression insofar as they enhance a prospective purchasers' right to receive information, by improving access to pricing information about the property they are considering purchasing. Any limitation on the right to freedom of expression is therefore justified to ensure that consumers have the necessary information to make fully informed decisions when considering purchasing residential property, with more accurate knowledge of likely costs.

Amendments to the EA Act require an estate agent to amend or remove advertisements with a selling price or estimated selling price lower than the reserve price

Clause 27 of the Bill engages or may limit the right to freedom of expression by inserting new sections 47C(2EA) and 47C(2EB) into the EA Act to require estate agents or agents' representatives to take all reasonable steps to:

- remove or amend any advertisement on an Internet site that includes a selling price or likely selling price lower than the seller reserve price within one business day of being notified of the sellers' reserve price, and
- remove or amend any advertisement not published on an internet site that includes a selling price or likely selling price lower than the seller reserve as soon as practicable being notified of the sellers' reserve price.

Requiring the estate agent or agent's representative to remove or amend information may limit their freedom of expression and may also limit freedom of commercial expression.

However, I consider that these requirements also promote the right to freedom of expression, insofar as they enhance a prospective purchaser's right to receive information, by improving access to pricing information about the property they are considering purchasing. These amendments are therefore justifiable measures to ensure that consumers have the necessary information to make fully informed decisions when considering purchasing residential property, with more accurate knowledge of likely costs.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to freedom of expression under section 15 of the Charter.

Protection of families and children (Section 17)

Section 17(1) of the Charter recognises that families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to protection by society and the State. Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child.

Family violence reforms to the RT Act

Clauses 52–55 of the Bill engage and promote the protection of families and children by prohibiting rental providers, rooming house operators and caravan park owners from refusing to let rented premises to someone due to their being a victim survivor of family violence.

Clauses 52–55 of the Bill may also limit the right of families and children to be protected as proposed new sections 30AB(3) and 94FA(3) will exempt specified entities, such as social and affordable housing providers, from a new requirement that will prohibit rental providers and rooming house operators from refusing to let a rented premises to someone due to their being a victim survivor of family violence. In addition, I note that women and First Peoples are statistically more likely to be a victim survivor of family violence and that single mother families are statistically the largest demographic groups in social housing. While this creates a distinction with renters in the private rental market, I consider that this limitation on the right created by the Bill is reasonably justified as a measure required to ensure that social and affordable housing providers can continue to allocate appropriate housing based on priority of need, including having regard to whether a renter is a victim survivor of family violence.

Clauses 100–102 of the Bill are intended to ensure that VCAT has discretion to make orders that a victim survivor is not held liable for loss or damage in circumstances of family violence. In doing so, these clauses engage and promote the rights of families and children to be protected by strengthening protections under the RT Act to support victim survivors and their children to secure safe rental housing and be protected from perpetrators of family violence.

Clauses 101–102 of the Bill may also limit the right of families and children to be protected by amending the RT Act to clarify that perpetrators of family violence can be held liable for loss or damage in excess of the value of the bond, subject to VCAT's discretion.

Children or one parent families may be indirectly impacted where VCAT makes orders against the parent who is a perpetrator, including making a parent liable for up to all loss or damage suffered by the rental provider. However, I consider that the limitation on the right created by the Bill is reasonably justified to give effect to its objectives, which include to provide renters who are victim survivors of family violence protections from liability for loss or damage in circumstances of family violence. I further note that determinations around liabilities are subject to legal proceedings through VCAT and its' review processes, ensuring that renters have recourse to impartial consideration of their matters by the Tribunal.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with the right to protection of families and children under section 17 of the Charter.

Cultural rights (section 19)

Section 19 of the Charter protects the cultural rights of all persons with a particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background, and acknowledges that Aboriginal persons hold distinct cultural rights that should be protected.

Amendment of the DBC Act

Clause 15 of the Bill may engage with cultural rights by inserting new section 38A into the DBC Act which restricts a builder from entering into certain variations to a domestic building contract unless the contract conforms to a number of requirements listed in clause 15, including that the contract is written in English and readily legible.

To the extent that the Bill may limit cultural rights, the limitation is reasonable and justifiable. The Bill ensures that parties to a domestic building contract are afforded greater consumer protections by promoting greater understanding for parties of the variations being made, including the works and costs under the variation. Requiring variations to contracts to be written in English and readily legible ensures that the terms of the contract are clearly identifiable.

For these reasons, I am of the opinion that the provisions in the Bill are compatible with the cultural rights in section 19 of the Charter.

Property rights (Section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

Prohibiting an auction of a residential property occurring if the sellers reserve price was not published 7 days prior

Clause 26 of the Bill will engage and likely limits the property rights of vendors by inserting new section 47AI into the EA Act to provide that it is an offence for an estate agent or agent's representative to conduct an auction or fixed date sale of a residential property if the seller's reserve price for the property was not published 7 days prior, in accordance with new section 47AH(1). This reform may interfere with a vendor's property rights by limiting their ability to transfer their property in a manner and at a time of their choosing. In my view any limitation on property rights would be lawful, as the provision that authorises the limitation is clearly set out in section 47AI. The limitation would not be arbitrary, as any limitation of property rights resulting from this reform is necessary to ensure the requirements regarding disclosure of a seller's reserve price are complied with, which is necessary to achieve the policy intent of improving property purchasers' access to price information in the public market.

Amendment of EA Act to provide for estate agent or agents representative to forfeit commission in cases where they are found to have breached prescribed sections

Clause 29 engages the property rights of an estate agent or agent's representative who is found to have committed an offence against new sections 47AH, 47AC(2EA) and 47AC (2EB) of the EA Act, by amending section 94A(1) of that Act to include reference to these sections. Section 94A provides that the Court may order the person (found to have committed a relevant offence) to pay to the Victorian Property Fund any commission in relation to that offence.

Under section 94A(1) of the EA Act, forfeiture of commission is to be treated as a fine in the amount of the commission and not a confiscation of property. While this engages property rights as it is a 'deprivation of property', in my view it would be lawful and not arbitrary, as the commission was calculated and invoiced as a result of an estate agent or agent's representative "having" committed an offence and the confiscation of that commission is necessary to ensure that a person does not benefit from property obtained through unlawful conduct. Additionally, the language in the Bill is clear as to which offences it relates.

Prohibiting estate agents from accessing commission or other amounts they may be entitled to prior to settlement

Clause 107 of the Bill may engage the property rights of an estate agent by inserting new sections 26A and 26B into the SL Act, which provide that an estate agent must not access their commission or any other amounts to which they are entitled before settlement. This reform may delay an estate agent's ability to access their property (being their commission or any other amounts to which they are entitled). Prior to the amendment, if a deposit was released prior to settlement in accordance with section 27 of the SL Act, estate agents could claim their commission and other amounts to which they were entitled from that deposit. This created risk for purchasers, who may face difficulties if issues arise prior to settlement (for example, if the settlement fails due to the vendor or purchaser failing to meet the conditions of contract or deliver vacant possession and they need to retrieve monies taken by the estate agent.

Any engagement with the right to property is moderated by the fact this amendment would not deny the estate agent their legal entitlement to their commission but only defer the ability to access that entitlement until after settlement. Additionally, I am of the view that the clause is precise and appropriately described, is in accordance with the law and is not arbitrary as it is necessary to better protect the purchaser's deposit, in the case that a contract may fall through prior to settlement and the purchaser needs to retrieve the deposit.

Cap the cost of breaking a rental agreement

Clause 60 of the Bill may limit the right to property by inserting new section 211A(3A) into the RT Act to limit the amount of compensation that may be awarded to a rental provider for loss of rent where a fixed-term rental agreement of less than 5 years is terminated early by the renter. New section 211A(3A) will limit the amount of compensation to a maximum of one week's rent where there is 25 per cent or less of the term of the agreement remaining when the agreement is terminated; 2 week's rent when there is 50 per cent or less but more than 25 per cent of the term of the agreement remaining when it was terminated; 3 week's rent when there is 75 per cent or less but more than 50 per cent of the term of the agreement remaining when the agreement is terminated; and 4 week's rent when there is more than 75 per cent of the term of the agreement remaining when the agreement is terminated.

To the extent that the right to property is limited, I am of the opinion that the formula for calculating compensation provides a reasonable amount of compensation to rental providers who may have suffered from loss of rent and is in accordance with the law. The capped amount provides certainty for renters and rental providers as to the maximum amount that can be awarded by VCAT for loss of rent. The reform does not prevent rental providers from seeking compensation under section 210 of the RT Act for other losses incurred including re-advertising and re-letting costs for the property and does not prevent VCAT from considering the matters provided under section 211 of the RT Act.

Accordingly, I consider that any such deprivations will be compatible with the right to property under the Charter.

Prohibiting unreasonable refusal for extra keys and fobs for rental properties in the RT Act

Clauses 58 and 59 of the Bill engages the right to property by ensuring that rental providers cannot unreasonably refuse requests from renters for additional keys or security devices and cannot disable a key or security device except under specified exceptions. Refusing to give an additional key or security device to a renter without a reasonable justification for the refusal could constitute an arbitrary interference in the renter's right to property. Amending the RT Act to create an offence for a rental provider to disable a key or security device except in specified circumstances ensures renters cannot be arbitrarily denied access to the rented premises. This reform is consistent with the right to property in the Charter and promotes the right not to have one's home arbitrarily interfered with.

Reforms to Part 4A of the RT Act (residential parks)

Clause 70 of the Bill engages the right to property by repealing section 207ZG of the RT Act, which removes the ability of a site owner in a Part 4A park to issue a 'without cause' notice to a site tenant to vacate a site at the end of a fixed term agreement. While this reform may limit the property rights of site owners, the site owner (or landowner or mortgagee, in certain circumstances) will still be authorised under the RT Act to regain possession by issuing a notice to vacate for a range of reasons specified in the Act, such as causing damage to a Part 4A site (section 207W), for dangerous, disruptive or threatening behaviour (sections 207X–207Z), use of the Part 4A site for an illegal purpose (section 207ZC) or subletting or assigning the Part 4A site without the site owner's consent (section 207ZD). Any limitation of the right created by the reform is reasonable and demonstrably justified. This reform is also consistent with a key element of the right to privacy and reputation under section 13 of the Charter – the right not to have one's home arbitrarily interfered with.

Family violence reforms to the RT Act

Clause 55 of the Bill may limit the right to property by amending the RT Act to give VCAT the discretion to make orders requiring a rental provider to compensate a prospective renter for loss caused by the rental provider having discriminated against the prospective renter. This amendment is reasonably justified to ensure that there is legal recourse for renters in response to alleged discrimination, in addition to providing specific and general deterrence for rental providers to not discriminate against victim survivors when determining to let rented premises. I further note that determinations by VCAT that discrimination occurred are subject to safeguards afforded through the legal proceedings and the subsequent appeals processes by providing that parties have the opportunity to be heard regarding an allegation.

Clauses 101–102 of the Bill may limit a family violence perpetrator's right to property by amending section 420A of the RT Act to explicitly clarify that VCAT has discretion to order that a person who has perpetrated family violence against their co-renter may be liable for all loss or damage incurred by their rental provider, irrespective of the value of the bond. This amendment is reasonably justified to give effect to the purposes of the bill which include to further protect the rights of victim survivor renters. Any limitation of the right to property of the perpetrator will also be made by a Tribunal in accordance with law and not in an arbitrary manner.

Strengthening odometer tampering offences

Clause 166 of the Bill may engage the right to property by amending the offence against odometer tampering in section 38(1) of the MCT Act to clarify the types of actions that constitute odometer tampering. The amended odometer tampering offence will prohibit a person from altering an odometer, removing an odometer, substituting an odometer or disabling an odometer. This may limit a person's control over their property by restricting what they are able to do with their odometer.

Clause 167 of the Bill may also engage the right to property by inserting new section 38B into the MCT Act which creates an offence for a motor car trader to offer a used motor car for sale or exchange unless they take reasonable steps to verify the accuracy of the odometer reading. This may limit a motor car trader's control over their property by prohibiting them from selling a used motor car if they have failed to take these reasonable steps.

To the extent that clauses 166 and 167 may engage the right to property, I consider that the clauses are precise and appropriately prescribed, not arbitrary and in accordance with the law. The prohibited conduct relating to odometer tampering is clearly outlined and the limitations are balanced by the existing defence in section 38(3) of the MCT Act, enabling genuinely faulty odometers to be repaired or replaced when necessary. The requirement for motor car traders to take steps to verify the accuracy of an odometer reading reflects best business practice and recognises that motor car traders have a higher capability and responsibility compared with private sellers. The new offence contains a non-exhaustive list of reasonable steps to assist motor car traders in understanding their obligations. These reforms will benefit consumers who face significant financial loss if they purchase a car with an artificially inflated value due to a tampered odometer. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the right to property is not limited by these amendments.

Forfeiture of certain documents and things to the Crown and subsequent destruction of seized things if uncollected

Amendments to be made to the ACLFT Act by clauses 5 and 6 of the Bill may limit the right to property by providing for the forfeiture of certain documents or things belonging to a person in certain circumstances. These clauses will amend the ACLFT Act to provide that any document or thing seized under Part 6.4 of the ACLFT Act by an inspector within Consumer Affairs Victoria may be forfeited to the Crown, if the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria has sought to return the item where obliged to do so but the item remains uncollected after the lapse of a notice of collection. Once a document or thing is forfeited, the former owner will have no surviving right to apply for its return or right of compensation.

To the extent that clauses 5 and 6 allow for the loss and disposal of a person's property, I am of the view that the clause is precise and appropriately prescribed, is not arbitrary and is in accordance with the law.

Clause 5 establishes clear requirements by which the person from whom an item was seized, or the owner of the item, must be notified before the item is forfeited to the Crown. A notice of collection must be issued in writing to the relevant person, specifying how the document or thing may be collected and the consequences of the item not being collected. If the relevant person is unable to be identified or located, the notice may be published in the Government Gazette, to ensure that any deprivation of property only occurs after information on the collection of an item is provided in a manner accessible to the public. A notice of collection must be issued within 3 months of the relevant item being seized unless this period is extended by court order, in which case the notice will be published within 30 days after the end of the extended period and must give the

relevant person a period of 28 days within which to collect the document or thing. If a person is unable to collect the document or thing within 28 days, they may authorise another person to collect it on their behalf.

The process established under clauses 5 and 6 operates alongside existing provisions in Part 6.4 of the ACLFT Act to ensure items are only seized where necessary and justified, and without undue deprivation of a person's property; for example, section 166 of the ACLFT Act requires an inspector to provide a copy of a retained document to the person from whom it was seized as soon as practicable after its seizure.

Clause 6 of the Bill enables the Minister under the ACLFT Act to direct the disposal, including destruction, of a class of objects forfeited to the Crown, being only those objects seized subject to an information or safety standard or an interim or permanent ban made under the ACL (Victoria). This power may only be exercised with clear and justifiable limits. Before making such a direction, the Minister must have regard to various relevant matters, for example whether the item is, or is likely to be, subject to legal proceedings.

For these reasons I am of the opinion that, to the extent that clauses 5 and 6 may constitute a deprivation of property or limitation of the right to property, any such deprivation or limitation is reasonable, justifiable and will be in accordance with law and therefore compatible with the right to property.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act

The following reforms in Part 11 of the Bill engage the right to property:

- the power to issue short-term closure notices (new section 36V) and long-term closure orders (new section 36X) interfere with the rights of owners of the premises, landlords and tenants who are no longer able to enjoy the property, noting there are offence (new section 36Z) to enter or remain on or sell anything from a closed premises. The owner and occupier will not be able to enter or remain on the property or carry on a business. Landlords' ability to use or lease their property is also interfered with. There will be no compensation payable by the State in respect of anything done under or arising out of the issuing of a closure notice or order; and
- the offence for a landlord knowingly allowing another person to use the premises to sell or otherwise supply illicit tobacco; and
- the power of landlords to terminate leases by giving written notice to the tenant where a long-term closure order is in place. This will interfere with the rights of the occupier as their lease can be terminated which means they are required to vacate the property and no longer enjoy their rights as a tenant over the property; and
- the forfeiture and disposal of illicit tobacco, as the authorities will be able to dispose of a person's illicit tobacco.

In each of the circumstances identified above, there is likely to be a deprivation of property. This deprivation is in accordance with the law as these powers are conferred by legislation, confined and precise and accessible to the public.

Existing case law (*PJB v Melbourne Health*) also requires that it be shown that the Bill does not operate arbitrarily. The Court of Appeal, in *WMB v Chief Commissioner of Police* (2012) 43 VR 446 in the context of discussing the meaning of 'arbitrary' in section 13(a) of the Charter, has stated that a law is arbitrary where it is capricious, unjust, unpredictable or unreasonable in the sense of not being proportionate to a legitimate purpose.

I consider that none of the reforms operate arbitrarily for the reasons discussed below.

The purpose of the short-term closure notices and long-term closure orders is to further disincentivise and disrupt the illicit tobacco trade and unlicensed trading. It is also to reduce access to illicit tobacco products, which will have a positive health impact on the community. The introduction of closure powers is intended to impose a significant economic deterrent and disrupt the organised crime supply chains, which will have a positive impact on the community.

There are features in the framework that make the reforms just, reasonable and proportionate, including:

- a closure notice or order can only be made if the statutory criteria is satisfied;
- short-term closure notices are limited to up to 90 days duration and must be cancelled if the notice is no longer required;
- long-term closure orders may only be made by the Magistrates' Court (new section 36X(3)). Providing the Magistrates' Court with the discretion to determine the maximum length of closure order is also necessary to support the objective of interrupting organised crime supply chains. It will also ensure the duration of the order is based on the severity of the offending behaviour;

- further, when issuing a short-term closure notice or making a long-term closure order, the decision-maker may have regard to whether the notice or order will impact the ability of the community to access essential goods and services (new sections 36V(2) and 36X(4), respectively). This would allow a business who provides essential services in, for example, a regional area, to be partially closed, with the essential services still being able to be provided to the community; and
- the Bill also provides that short-term closure notices may be varied or cancelled by Tobacco Licensing Victoria or the Chief Commissioner of Police (new section 36W), and that the owner or occupier of premises that are subject to a long-term closure order can apply to the Magistrates' Court of Victoria for cancellation or revocation of the long-term closure order (new section 36Y).

The Bill provides that if a long-term closure order is made and the premises are subject to a lease, a landlord can terminate the lease by providing written notice to the tenant. If the tenant has not removed their property from the premises after the notice period has ended, the landlord can deal with the tenant's property as appropriate, including by disposing of the property. Providing these powers to landlords complements the closure powers scheme by making it harder for illicit tobacco traders to resume trading at the same location.

It is my view that these powers are not arbitrary, as the power for landlords to terminate a lease, and later deal with the tenant's property (if it is not removed from the premises during the notice period) can only be exercised once the Magistrates' Court has assessed the evidence and determined that a long-term closure order should be made. That is, the Magistrates' Court must be satisfied that illicit tobacco is being, or is likely to be, sold or otherwise supplied at the premises, there is illicit tobacco in the possession or under the control of a person carrying on a tobacco supply business (whether the business is carried on at the premises or elsewhere), or a tobacco supply business is being carried on at the premises without a licence.

In these circumstances, where a Court has found that illicit activity is occurring (or is likely to occur), it is just, reasonable and proportionate for landlords to terminate a lease. This will not only disrupt the illicit tobacco trade from premises in Victoria but also protects the property rights of landlords. It will ensure that landlords who have not been involved in illegal activity are not financially penalised because of the illegal conduct of their tenants. Without this mechanism, a landlord may suffer financial and other loss due to not being able to end the lease and re-lease the premises to a different tenant. Providing landlords with an ability to dispose of a tenant's property left at the premises after the notice period has ended, will also facilitate the ability of landlords to rent the premises to a new tenant.

With respect to the amendments that introduce a new process for the disposal of illicit tobacco (new section 37D), the process is tightly confined and all requirements for managing illicit tobacco to the point of destruction or disposal are clearly articulated. There is also an opportunity for a person to apply to the Magistrates' Court to seek the return of the seized item where they can demonstrate it is not illicit tobacco. The reforms serve an important purpose of reducing the significant safety hazards, costs and burden with the storage of the illicit tobacco while still maintaining evidentiary standards for court proceedings. There is significant public interest in protecting the community from the illicit tobacco trade, reducing the burden and cost of storing illicit things for extended periods of time and minimising security and safety concerns associated with that storage.

To the extent the rights of natural persons are engaged, I do not consider the right to property is limited. This is because any interference falls within the internal limitation of section 20. If the right to property is limited, having regard to the harmful effects of the illicit tobacco trade on the Victorian community, I consider any limitation to be reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter for the reasons discussed above.

Accordingly, I consider that these clauses under the Bill are compatible with property rights before the law under section 20 of the Charter.

Fair hearing (Section 24)

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or, who is a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

The term 'civil proceeding' in section 24(1) of the Charter has been interpreted as encompassing proceedings that are determinative of private rights and interests in a broad sense, including some administrative proceedings. It is well recognised that judicial determination of a person's civil rights and liabilities is a crucial element of the fair hearing right. This right will be engaged where a person is prevented from having their civil rights or liabilities in a proceeding considered by a court. However, this right does not prevent the State from amending the substantive law to alter the content of those civil rights.

Family violence reforms to the RT Act

Clause 55 of the Bill engages and promotes the right to a fair hearing by providing parties with the opportunity to be heard before VCAT regarding an allegation of discrimination by a rental provider on the basis of a prospective renter being a victim survivor of family violence.

Reforms to the OC Act

Clause 32 of the Bill engages and promotes the right to a fair hearing by amending section 18 of the OC Act to clarify the resolution requirements required to authorise an owners corporation to commence a legal proceeding. Clause 32 will amend section 18 of the OC Act to clarify that an ordinary resolution (more than 50% of lot owners), rather than a special resolution (at least 75% of lot owners) is required to commence a non-monetary claim in VCAT or the Magistrates' Court (and in corresponding interstate equivalents to the Magistrates' Court). I consider that clarifying that only an ordinary resolution of the owners corporation is required for non-monetary claims to be made in these Courts and Tribunals promotes the right to a fair hearing by removing ambiguity that a higher resolution is required, thereby increasing the likelihood of lot owners resolving to commence proceedings.

Reforms to the Subdivision Act

Clause 114 of the Bill engages and promotes the right to a fair hearing by amending section 34D of the Subdivision Act. Section 34D(1)(b) provides that a member of an owners corporation, an owners corporation itself, an administrator of an owners corporation or a person with an interest in the land affected by the owners corporation may apply to VCAT for 'an order consenting on behalf of a member or group of members of an owners corporation to the doing by the owners corporation of any of the things set out in section 32 or 33 of the Subdivision Act, including altering a subdivision.

The amendments carried by clause 114 will restore VCAT's ability to make an order in response to an application under section 34D(1)(b) where more than half of the membership of the owners corporation previously consented to the action in question. The Bill inserts this ground for permitting an order as an addition to the existing ground which applies when a member or group of members who previously refused consent to the action in question owns more than half of the lot liability of the owners corporation. I consider that permitting VCAT to make an order under either circumstance increases lot owner access to VCAT and promotes the right to a fair hearing.

Authorising a review of a motor car trader's licence following the making of a specified VCAT order

Clause 162 of the Bill may engage the right to a fair hearing by establishing a process where the BLA may undertake a review of a motor car trader's licence following a VCAT order. As noted above, a 'civil proceeding' under s 24(1) of the Charter is not limited to a proceeding decided by judicial decision-makers and may encompass some administrative proceedings. While the right to a fair hearing may be engaged by the licence review process, in my view, the administrative decisions provided for in clause 162 of the Bill are compatible with section 24(1) of the Charter because of the key procedural fairness safeguards established in the Bill and existing safeguards in the MCT Act.

Following the review of a licence, the BLA may impose conditions or restrictions on a licence. I note the Bill does not provide an opportunity for a licensee to provide reasons to the BLA as to why conditions or restrictions should not be imposed, however clause 162 provides that the BLA must provide written notice to the licensee of its intention to impose conditions or restrictions on a licence. The purpose of imposing conditions or restrictions on a licence is to address non-compliance and reduce consumer harm. In my view any limit to procedural fairness and therefore the right to a fair hearing caused by the absence of opportunity for an affected person to provide reasons is justifiable as a person whose interests are affected by a decision of the BLA to impose conditions or restrictions on a licence may apply to VCAT for review of the decision under section 32 of the MCT Act.

If the BLA intends to suspend a licence, the BLA must provide written notice of its intention to suspend the licence to the licensee as soon as practicable after reviewing the licence: new section 29H. The notice is required to set out key details including the grounds on which the BLA intends to suspend the licence, the period within which the licensee may respond to the notice (the 'show cause period') and the consequences if the licensee does not respond to the notice. The show cause period must not be less than 30 days after a notice of intention to suspend the licence is served: new section 29H. The licensee may make written submissions to the BLA in relation to any matter contained in the notice: new section 29I. The BLA must notify the licensee of its decision on suspension: new section 29J. In addition to these safeguards, clause 162 provides that a person whose interests are affected by a decision of the BLA to suspend the licence under new Division 2A may apply to VCAT for a review of the decision. This affords individuals affected by suspension a hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal and satisfies the requirements in section 24(1) of the Charter.

Power for the Business Licensing Authority to suspend a license under the Conveyancers Act and the EA Act

Clause 12 may engage the right to a fair hearing by inserting new section 32A which provides that if a licensee fails to comply with the requirements of section 84(1) or 85(1A) of the Conveyancers Act (which require trust records to be audited and the subsequent audit report to be lodged with the Director within 10 business days), the BLA may suspend a conveyancer's licence for a period of up to 12 months. A similar power is reflected in clause 23 which inserts new section 25E of the EA Act, which provides that if an estate agent fails to comply with the requirements of section 64(1), 64(1A), or 64(2A) of the EA Act (which require trust accounts to be audited, that they must be audited by a qualified person, and the subsequent report must be lodged with the Director within 10 business days) the BLA may suspended a license for a period of up to 12 months. In both cases the purpose of suspending a licence is to address non-compliance with trust audit requirements and reduce consumer harm. While the right to a fair hearing may be engaged, in my view, the administrative decisions provided for in clause 12 and clause 23 of the Bill are compatible with section 24(1) of the Charter because of the existing safeguards in the Conveyancers Act and EA Act which allow an impacted person to apply to VCAT for a hearing if desired.

I note the Bill does not provide an opportunity for a licensee to provide reasons to the BLA as to why the licence should not be suspended, however proposed new section 32A(1) and new section 25E(1) provide that if the BLA decides to suspend a license under the Conveyancers Act or EA Act respectively the BLA must give prior written notice that the licence will be suspended if reporting requirements are not complied with, giving the licensee time to comply with reporting requirements and avoid the licence suspension.

In my view any limit to procedural fairness and therefore the right to a fair hearing caused by the absence of opportunity for an affected person to provide reasons is justifiable as a person whose interests are affected by a decision of the BLA to suspend a licence may apply to VCAT under section 187 of the Conveyancers Act for a review of any decision made by the BLA under the Conveyancers Act, and under section 32 of the EA Act for a review of any decision made by the BLA under the EA Act . This affords individuals affected by suspension a hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal and satisfies the requirements in section 24(1) of the Charter.

Forfeiture of certain documents and things to the Crown and subsequent destruction of seized things if uncollected

Clause 8 of the Bill may limit the right to a fair hearing by repealing section 174 of the ACLFT Act to remove the requirement that the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria apply to the Magistrates' Court for an order permitting the destruction of goods subject to a safety standard and interim or permanent ban seized by an inspector. New section 167AA, inserted by clause 6, provides that the Minister under the ACLFT Act may direct the disposal of things seized subject to a safety standard or an interim or permanent ban that have been forfeited to the Crown. In addition, under the Bill, the Minister's power to direct disposal will extend to things seized for non-compliance with a product information standard made under the Australian Consumer Law, as defined in the ACLFT Act. The Minister may, before ordering the disposal, have regard to matters including whether the thing is or will likely be used as evidence in a proceeding or if the thing is subject to a search warrant and likely to be brought before the Magistrates' Court under the warrant.

To the extent the Bill may limit the right to fair hearing, the limitation is reasonable and justifiable. Goods subject to an information or safety standard or an interim or permanent ban are generally not appropriate to be available for purchase as consumer goods. As these goods are generally no longer usable by their owner or lack important information for the consumer, they go uncollected, resulting in unnecessary costs to the State of storing and handling items and to initiate and run court applications to seek an order for their destruction. Importantly, the power to direct the disposal of an item seized subject to an information or safety standard or an interim or permanent ban can only be exercised where the item has been forfeited to the Crown after unsuccessfully issuing a notice of collection under clause 5 of the Bill. As detailed above, clause 5 of the Bill contains various requirements to support the collection of a seized item by the person from whom it was seized.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act

Clause 124 of the Bill engages this right by introducing new sections 37D and 37E, which enables the pre-trial disposal of illicit tobacco. This could reduce the availability of tobacco for evidentiary purposes and affect the ability of an accused to prepare their defense.

In my view, these amendments will not limit the fair trial of an accused. The Bill will only permit the pre-trial destruction of illicit tobacco in tightly circumscribed circumstances.

These include:

- a sample of the illicit tobacco that is sufficient to be analysed is retained;

- other evidence regarding the appearance and quantity of the illicit tobacco is retained (such as photographs);
- an analyst or botanist must analyse the sample and provide a certificate of their analysis; and
- the sample of the illicit tobacco must be retained until the proceedings are finally determined.

I consider these processes will ensure fairness to the accused is maintained, while reducing the safety hazards, burden and cost of storing large amounts of illicit tobacco.

If the contrary view is taken and the right to a fair hearing is limited by these amendments, I consider it is a justified and reasonable limit pursuant to section 7(2) of the Charter. As discussed above, these reforms have an important purpose of reducing the significant safety hazards, costs and burden with the storage of illicit tobacco while still maintaining evidentiary standards for court proceedings. The safety risks and burden are avoidable and not in the public interest to maintain.

Any impact on fair hearing is confined and subject to safeguards, including the retention of samples and other evidence. The circumstances in which illicit tobacco may be destroyed pre-trial are appropriately and narrowly tailored to achieving the purposes of the amendments while maintaining fair hearing rights. There are no less restrictive means available to achieve these purposes of reducing the cost and burden of storage, ensuring safety of staff and alleviating security concerns. While I consider the right to a fair hearing is not limited, to the extent it is, I consider any limitation to be justifiable under section 7(2) of the Charter.

Accordingly, I consider that this clause under the Bill is compatible with the right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law. The High Court has described this right as incorporating the fundamental requirement that 'the prosecution in a criminal case has the burden of proving guilt', that is, that a conviction can follow only where every element of an offence has been proved by the prosecution beyond reasonable doubt.

Strengthening odometer tampering offences

Clause 166 of the Bill limits rights in criminal proceedings by amending section 38(2) of the MCT Act to align with the definition of "tamper" inserted to section 38(4). This existing provision reverses the onus of proof in circumstances where a motor car was on the premises of a motor car trader or in the possession, custody or control of a motor car trader when odometer tampering occurred. This clause will limit the section 25(1) right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty as it shifts the burden of proof onto an accused motor car trader in a criminal proceeding, so that a motor car trader is required to prove the odometer tampering was not done by or on behalf of the motor car trader.

I am satisfied that, to the extent that clause 166 limits the right to be presumed innocent, the limitation is compatible with the Charter because it is a reasonable, justified and proportionate to the legitimate purpose of the offence which aims to protect consumers from the consequences of purchasing a car with a tampered odometer.

Unlike motor car traders, consumers generally have limited ability to determine whether the reading on an odometer is likely to be inaccurate. Consumers who unknowingly purchase a car with high mileage may suffer significant consequential harm, including the disruption of their transport and associated costs should the car break down and be unable to drive. Courts in other jurisdictions have held that the presumption of innocence may be subject to reasonable limits in the context of regulatory compliance, particularly where regulatory offences may cause harm to the public.

The purpose of the reverse onus is to address the fact that in this circumstance, the facts are usually solely within the knowledge of the defendant. It is extremely difficult to prove the offence of odometer tampering against a motor car trader because of the number of people such as repairers or salespersons who may have had possession of the car even though it is still under the general control of the trader. However, it is the motor car trader who ultimately stands to profit most from selling a car with inflated value due to odometer tampering. The limitation is reasonable and proportionate because the prosecution is still required to prove beyond reasonable doubt that odometer tampering took place. A motor car trader charged with odometer tampering may rely on the existing defence in section 38(3) of the MCT Act, which provides that it is a defence to a prosecution for odometer tampering if the person proves that the tampering was not done with intent to deceive by or on behalf of the person charged.

Motor car traders have chosen to engage in the regulated activity of trading in motor cars, which involves assuming the responsibilities and duties that apply to this activity. The reverse onus provision in clause 166 amends the existing reverse onus provision in section 38(2) of the MCT Act, which has existed in largely the

same form since the MCT Act's commencement in 1986. Motor car traders should have the necessary processes in place to ensure that odometer tampering does not occur while a car is on their premises or in their possession, custody or control.

In my view, there is no less restrictive way of ensuring accountability for motor car traders when the odometer of a motor car they are selling has been tampered with, accordingly, I consider that this provision is compatible with the Charter.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act

Part 11 of the Bill introduces a number of offences:

- clause 116 of the Bill inserts new offences (new section 11B) for commercial landlords who, without reasonable excuse, knowingly allow a person to sell illicit tobacco or allow a tobacco supply business to possess illicit tobacco on the premises;
- clause 120 of the Bill inserts a new offence (new section 36Z(1)) for a person who, without reasonable excuse, enters or remains on premises that the person knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, were closed premises;
- clause 120 of the Bill inserts new offences (new sections 36Z(2)–(4)) for a person who, without reasonable excuse, sells anything (that is not a tobacco product), sells a tobacco product or sells a commercial amount of illicit tobacco from premises that the person knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, were closed premises;
- clause 120 of the Bill inserts a new offence (new section 36ZA) for a person who removes or interferes with a closure notice or order; and
- clause 120 of the Bill inserts a new offence (new section 36ZF(2)) for a person who fails to comply with a requirement to give notice that a commercial lease subject to closure order has ended.

The more serious offences include a defence where a person has a reasonable excuse.

These offences engage the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty in section 25 of the Charter, as they impose an evidential onus on the accused when seeking to rely on the defence. Case law has held that an evidential onus imposed on establishing an excuse or exception does not limit the Charter's right to a presumption of innocence, as such an evidential onus falls short of imposing any burden of persuasion on an accused. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the elements of the offence.

Accordingly, I do not consider the above 'reasonable excuse' offence provisions in the Bill limit the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter.

The Bill also introduces provisions that regulate evidentiary matters:

- new section 37D(6) provides that a written certificate of an analysis conducted by an analyst or botanist of a sample is evidence of the matters stated in it;
- new section 37E(7) provides that a disposal notice or disposal certificate is evidence of the matters contained in it, including the description of the illicit tobacco and quantity; and
- new section 39B provides evidence that a thing is labelled as a tobacco product or labelled in a way a reasonable person would take to be labelled as a tobacco product, is evidence the thing is or contains tobacco product.

These provisions may limit the right of an accused to be presumed innocent of offences where the facts contained in the certificate or new section 39B are relied on in court proceedings to show that fact. This is because the accused will be required to counter those matters.

To the extent this right is limited by the previously mentioned provisions, I consider the limitation to be reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the Charter. The provisions do not impede the accused from challenging any evidence presented in the proceeding and presenting contrary evidence. The amendments are justified for the purposes outlined above of reducing the significant safety hazards, costs and burden with the storage of the illicit tobacco while still maintaining evidentiary standards for court proceedings. I consider there are also no less restrictive and reasonably available means to achieve the purpose of these reforms.

Accordingly, I consider that this clause under the Bill is compatible with rights in criminal proceedings under section 25 of the Charter.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once (section 26)

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law.

Authorising a review of a motor car trader's licence following the making of a specified VCAT order

The licence review process to be established by clause 162 of the Bill may engage a person's right not to be punished more than once, as they will authorise the BLA to undertake a licence review process following the making of a specified tribunal order made against a licensed motor car trader. A 'specified tribunal order' is defined as an order requiring a licensed motor car trader to pay an amount to a purchaser of a motor car in relation to a transaction involving the buying, selling or exchanging of a motor car or the offering to buy, sell or exchange a motor car. This includes an order requiring a refund, compensation or payment in relation to a breach of contract of sale of a motor car. There will also be the power to prescribe further types of orders. Accordingly, a person may have a civil award made against them by VCAT and subsequently be subject to a licence review process flowing from the same conduct.

I note that, it has been found that disciplinary proceedings and resulting consequences that limit a person's ability to work in a particular field are aimed at protecting the public and are not punitive actions, so that section 26 was not engaged (Psychology Board of Australia v Ildiri). In my view a decision by the BLA, following a licence review, to impose conditions or restrictions on a motor car trader's licence or to suspend the licence are similarly aimed at protection of the public against impugned behaviour of a trader, and should not be characterised as an (additional) punishment for the motor car trader. For this reason, I am of the opinion that these provisions are compatible with the right not to be tried or punished more than once in section 26 of the Charter.

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter as it does not unreasonably or unjustifiably limit any rights under the Charter.

The Hon. Paul Edbrooke MP
Minister for Consumer Affairs
Minister for Cost of Living
Minister for Renters
Minister for Men and Boys

Statement of treaty compatibility

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (10:32): Under the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I table a statement of treaty compatibility:

1. I note that due to the recent establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl, it was not possible to give the First Peoples' Assembly the opportunity to advise on the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 (the Bill) or for them to otherwise make representations about the effect of the Bill on First Peoples.
2. In my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the objects set out in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

3. The purpose of the Bill is to:
   - 3.1 acquit the Victorian Government's commitment to strengthen protections for Victorian consumers in the housing market through reforms to the *Conveyancers Act 2006*, *Estate Agents Act 1980*, *Owners Corporation Act 2006*, *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (RT Act), *Sale of Land Act 1962* and the *Subdivision Act 1988* by:
     - (a) improving the disclosure of key information in property sales by ensuring accurate and timely access to key property information, including price information, and reduce risks to consumers as a result of pressure from real estate agents seeking to gain early access to sales commissions from deposit moneys;
     - (b) streamlining government enforcement of non-compliance by estate agents and conveyancers with trust account audit obligations, including empowering the Business Licensing Authority to suspend the licence of a non-compliant estate agent or conveyancer;
     - (c) strengthening renter protections and outcomes for renters;
     - (d) providing for a process by which lot owners lots can request payment plans from an owners corporation for the payment of certain fees and charges and increasing access to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for owners corporations in relation to orders relating to plans of subdivision; and

3.2 strengthen regulatory compliance and enforcement in relation to consumer goods and enhancing consumer protection through reforms to the *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012* (ACLFTA), *Motor Car Traders Act 1986* and the *Tobacco Act 1987* by:

(a) providing for the forfeiture of certain documents or things to the Crown if they go uncollected after their seizure pursuant to an information or safety standard or an interim or permanent ban made under the Australian Consumer Law and for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to authorise the disposal of those seized documents or things;

(b) clarifying circumstances in which a person will be prohibited from engaging in debt collection;

(c) strengthening consumer protections for purchasers of motor cars and updating governance procedures for determination of claims by consumers against the Motor Car Traders Guarantee Fund; and

(d) combatting the sale of illicit tobacco by introducing powers to close premises, introducing penalties for commercial landlords and address the forfeiture and destruction of seized illicit tobacco.

3.3 make miscellaneous amendments to a number of other Consumer Acts, including the Domestic *Building Contracts Act 1995* and the *Retirement Villages Act 1986* to ensure the consumer protections provided by those Acts are effective and operate as intended.

Consultation with the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl

4. I note that due to the recent establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly of Gellung Warl, it was not possible to give the First Peoples' Assembly the opportunity to advise on the Bill or for them to otherwise make representations about the effect of the Bill on First Peoples.

Compatibility of the Bill with each of the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*

5. I have considered whether the Bill is compatible with the objects at section 66(3)(d)(i)–(iii) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*:

5.1 advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples;

5.2 addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation; and

5.3 ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.

6. In relation to provisions of the Bill which will:

6.1 improve outcomes for Victorian renters through reforms to the RT Act to:

6.2 strengthen regulatory oversight and consumer protections for site tenants of Part 4A Parks;

6.3 cap the cost of breaking rental agreements and require rental providers to provide additional keys or fobs, and enable renters to pay bonds directly to the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority;

6.4 strengthen protections for Victorian consumers through reforms to the *Conveyancers Act 2006*, *Estate Agents Act 1980*, *Owners Corporation Act 2006*, *Sale of Land Act 1962* and *Subdivision Act 1988* to:

6.5 improve the accuracy and timeliness of key information in property sales ensuring accurate and timely access to key property information, including price information, and reduce risks to consumers as a result of pressure from real estate agents seeking to gain early access to deposits;

6.6 streamline government enforcement of non-compliance with property professionals' trust account audit obligations;

6.7 provide for a process by which owners of owners corporation lots can request payment plans with statutory protections for the payment of certain fees and charges;

6.8 increase access to VCAT for owners corporations in relation to orders relating to plans of subdivision;

6.9 strengthen compliance and enforcement activity with regard to consumer goods and services through reforms to the ACLFTA, *Motor Car Traders Act 1986* and *Tabacco Act 1987* to

6.10 provide for the forfeiture and disposal of certain documents or things seized under Part 6.4 of the ACLFTA;

6.11 improve consumer protections and to modernise the regulatory framework for the motor car trading industry;

6.12 combat the sale of illicit tobacco;

6.13 make minor and technical amendments to the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* and the *Retirement Villages Act 1986* to ensure the consumer protections provided by these Acts operate as intended.

7. In my opinion these provisions of the Bill do not affect any of the objects specified in section 66(3)(d)(i)–(iii) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025* and is therefore compatible with each of those objects.

8. In relation to provisions of the Bill which will amend the RT Act to strengthen protections for victim survivor renters, including protecting victim survivor renters from liability for loss and damage caused by a perpetrator and introducing a prohibition on discrimination against victim survivor renters in the context of rental applications.

9. I note that First Peoples have been found to be disproportionately affected by family violence.

10. The final report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence observed at page 7 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially women and children, are disproportionately affected by family violence and face unique barriers to obtaining assistance.

11. Given the disproportionate impact of family violence on First Peoples, this reform will benefit First Peoples by advancing the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples relating to housing needs and safety.

12. As such, in my opinion the proposed amendments are compatible with the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples at section 66(3)(d)(i) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*, and do not limit addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation at section 66(3)(d)(ii).

13. The Bill will also insert sections 30AB(3), 94FA(3) and 145BA(3) into the RT Act which exempts specified entities, such as social, community and affordable housing providers, from the new requirement that prohibits rental providers from refusing to let a rented premises to someone due to being a victim survivor of family violence.

14. First Peoples are over-represented in social housing and, as previously noted, may be disproportionately affected by family violence. As such, these First Peoples may not enjoy the same benefit from these reforms as other renter cohorts.

15. However, I consider that any limitation of enjoyment of the rights conferred by these reforms is not incompatible with the object at section 66(3)(d)(iii) of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025* as amendments are to strengthen protections for victim survivors of family violence, including First Peoples and will ensure First Peoples will have equal enjoyment of the protections provided by these reforms. The exemption of specified entities under new sections 30AB(3), 94FA(3) and 145BA(3) does not prevent social, community and affordable housing providers, as part of their application processes, from positively discriminating in favour of victim survivor rental applicants (including First Peoples) and in doing so, prioritise their housing needs and safety.

The Hon. Paul Edbrooke MP
Minister for Consumer Affairs
Minister for Cost of Living
Minister for Renters
Minister for Men and Boys

Second reading

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (10:32): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill gives Victorian consumers stronger protections in areas that matter most for households such as housing, renting, and other essential goods and services, including purchase of motor cars. The reforms respond to growing cost of living pressures facing Victorian households by improving transparency and ensuring consumers have access to clearer and more reliable information when making important decisions.

The Bill also strengthens compliance and enforcement arrangements to deter misconduct and ensure businesses and individuals who fail to comply with the law are held accountable. Importantly, the Bill also introduces reforms to ensure Victorian law enforcement agencies have the powers available to disrupt organised crime around illicit tobacco in line with other jurisdictions across Australia.

The Bill will further improve outcomes for renters through amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997

Reforms will strengthen protections for residents of residential parks and improve oversight and professional standards in the industry

The Victorian Government is committed to enhancing protections for site tenants living in Part 4A parks (also known as residential parks) and supporting them to make informed choices about their housing. Residential parks are a fast-growing industry, commonly marketed as a lower cost or alternative accommodation option for older Victorians. However, complex products and fee structures have left residents unable to easily compare offerings and make informed decisions about their rights and obligations, putting them at greater risk of making decisions that do not adequately meet their needs or financial circumstances.

This government has already legislated to mandate standard form agreements and improve pre-contractual disclosure requirements for site tenants in residential parks. The Bill will build on these important reforms by responding to further recommendations from the 'Life in Residential Parks' report published by the Commissioner for Residential Tenancies in 2025. The Bill will regulate how deferred management charges (DMC) – a type of exit fee – are to be calculated, and how rent increases can be made, so that residents can make better informed decisions and forecast future expenses with confidence.

DMC are common in the residential park industry and enable site tenants to enter a park at a lower upfront price, in exchange for deferring payment of a contribution towards the costs of managing, maintaining and improving the park over the course of their occupancy. Some site tenants may be charged a DMC based on the sale price of the Part 4A dwelling at the time they exit from the park. As this amount cannot be known at the time of entry into the site agreement, site tenants cannot determine the extent of their liability to pay a DMC until they leave a park, at which time they may face unexpectedly high exit costs. This Bill will require DMC to be calculated by reference to the purchase price of the tenant's Part 4A dwelling on the Part 4A site at the time they enter the park, together with the duration of the tenant's occupancy, and in accordance with any further requirements that may be prescribed by regulations.

The Bill will provide that rent may only be increased under a Part 4A site agreement by reference to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) or at a fixed rate set in regulations, whichever is higher. All other types of rent increases, including rent increases based on unpredictable market rent reviews, will be banned. If a site owner wishes to raise rent above that level for exceptional reasons, they will require substantial support from at least 75% of those site tenants subject to the increase. Should the 75% threshold not be met, site owners may only increase rent above the fixed rate by applying to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). To ensure arrangements between existing site tenants and owners remain predictable and fair, these changes will only apply to new agreements entered into after the commencement of these provisions.

As a further measure to improve transparency for those living in residential parks, site tenants will have the right to request an annual site agreement check from the site owner. Site owners with a DMC in their site agreements will, however, also be required to provide an annual DMC statement to site tenants. This Bill will also improve security of tenure for site tenants on fixed term tenancies by removing the ability to evict a site tenant at the end of their fixed term site agreement without cause. These changes will apply to both existing and new site tenants, regardless of when they started living in a residential park.

The Bill will also improve transparency and oversight of the sector by creating a public register of residential park operators. The register will be maintained by the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria, and will benefit both the regulator and prospective residents by providing information related to park location, size and other relevant consumer information. The Bill will also introduce a new regulation making power authorising the development of a mandatory code of practice that residential park operators must follow. The code of practice may cover agreed standards relating to park operations, dispute resolution processes, repairs and maintenance and other related matters.

Together, these changes are an important step forward in ensuring those living in residential parks have fair and transparent renting arrangements.

This Bill also provides strengthened protections for renters

Limit on break-lease fees that renters need to pay

Renters may need to break their lease for a variety of reasons, and they should have the ability to do so without the fear of having to pay an excessive amount. The Bill sets clear, tiered caps on the amount a rental provider can claim for lost rent when a renter needs to end a fixed-term lease early. The amendment will apply to fixed-

term agreements of less than 5 years. The Bill sets a maximum amount of compensation for lost rent that a renter will have to pay based on how much of the rental agreement remains. Other costs associated with breaking a lease early, such as advertising and reletting costs, can still be negotiated between a renter and their rental provider or determined by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) when agreement is not reached.

Prohibiting rental providers from unreasonably refusing request for additional keys and fobs

This Bill also strengthens renters' rights by ensuring renters can request an additional key or fob to access their home. A request by a renter cannot be unreasonably refused by their rental provider or agent and cannot charge excessive fees for providing an additional key or fob. Renters will only need to pay for the key or fob itself, and the cost of procuring and activating it.

This Bill will also protect renters from being denied access to their properties by making it an offence for rental providers or their agents to disable a key or fob for reasons other than those permitted under the Residential Tenancies Act. This reform addresses growing instances of renters being denied access to their home as 'punishment' for paying rent late or breaking building rules.

Renters paying bond directly to the Residential Tenancies Bond Authority (Authority) and streamlined bond payments

The new bond management system is already delivering benefits to renters, and the Bill will make the process even easier by providing renters the option to pay their bond directly to the Authority rather than having to pay it via a rental provider or agent. Streamlining the bond payment system ensures greater flexibility while reducing risk for renters.

The Bill will also clarify that payments from renters repaying debts owed to the State under the Portable Rental Bond Scheme (Scheme) are paid into the Residential Bonds Investment Account, rather than the Consolidated Fund. Further, amendments in the Bill will support administration of the Scheme by clarifying that certain provisions also apply to former renters, enabling the Authority to recover an outstanding debt to the State, including where the relevant rental agreement is no longer in effect.

Further reforms strengthening protections for victims of family or personal violence

The Bill makes amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act to strengthen the operation of existing protections for renters who are victim survivors of family and personal violence. The Bill will ensure that victim survivor renters can be fully protected from liability where there has been family violence, and that VCAT can hold a perpetrator co-renter solely liable in both applications for the repayment of bond and compensation.

To strengthen existing protections for victim survivors who are renters, the Bill will introduce a prohibition on discrimination to explicitly prohibit rental providers or their agents from discriminating against victim survivors by refusing to let a premises on the basis that the rental applicant or renter has been or is subject to family or personal violence. Victim survivor renters may apply to VCAT for compensation orders in respect of any loss suffered as a consequence of discrimination by a rental provider or their agent. The Bill also extends this prohibition to rooming house operators and caravan or caravan park owners, recognising that victim survivors rely on a broad range of tenancy types to meet their housing needs.

The Bill includes an exemption from the new prohibition, but only for entities who provide social, community or affordable housing to ensure that those providers can continue to prioritise victim survivor applicants when allocating housing in accordance with the specific eligibility requirements for those housing programs.

The Bill will improve outcomes in the property market by making amendments to the *Estate Agents Act 1980* and *Sale of Land Act 1962*

Buying a property is the largest purchase most Victorians will make in their lifetime. We know that underquoting is a critical issue for those wishing to purchase a property. Too many Victorians are spending time and money chasing the dream of owning a home only to have a property sell for far more than the advertised price.

We also know that buying a home is a complex process, with homebuyers needing to consider a lot of detailed information before making an informed decision about a property. This is why this government is introducing reforms to increase and simplify access to property price information and promote fairness, transparency and efficiency in Victoria's property market.

First, the Bill introduces a requirement for real estate agents to publish a property seller's reserve price at least 7 days prior to an auction or fixed date sale. This change will give homebuyers confidence that the advertised price will match the actual reserve price on auction day and avoid buyers spending time and money attending auctions and commissioning inspections for properties they never had a chance of purchasing.

Secondly, the Bill introduces a requirement for real estate agents to publish a property's final sold price, as part of its property price statement, once a sale becomes unconditional. Agents will also be required to provide key information about a property, including its sold price and key features, to the Director, Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) after the sale becomes unconditional. The Director CAV will then be able to publish that information in a central location. These disclosure reforms will give buyers, sellers and real estate agents a clearer understanding of what comparable homes in their area are selling for in real time.

The Bill will also make a number of other changes that will increase access to property information, including:

- requiring a property seller's section 32 statement to be made available 14 days before an auction or fixed date sale or 14 days before a contract is signed
- requiring the indicative sale price and property price statement to be easily found in online advertising, and
- expanding comparable property requirements to require estate agents to list key features of the comparable property.

We know that the early release of deposits presents a significant financial risk for consumers in situations where settlement may fail. We also know that the legislative process for an early release of deposit is confusing, which may lead to sellers and homebuyers agreeing to an early release without properly understanding the risks. Despite the risks involved, it is in the real estate agent's interest to secure an early release of the deposit so that they can access their commission earlier.

This Bill will reduce these risks to homebuyers and sellers by repealing section 27 in the Sale of Land Act, which provides a process for securing an early release of deposit, and prohibiting real estate agents from taking their commission from a deposit if it is released prior to settlement. Homebuyers and sellers will still be able to agree an early release of deposit, but it will need to be done via a term in the contract of sale.

The Bill will streamline suspension processes for real estate agents and conveyancers who breach trust account requirements

This government recognises that trust account audit requirements are essential for ensuring transparency and consumer confidence in the handling of deposits. The Bill strengthens these requirements by amending the *Conveyancers Act 2006* and the Estate Agents Act to allow the Business Licensing Authority to suspend a real estate agent or conveyancer's licence if they fail to comply with trust account audit requirements. These amendments will better protect consumers from the risk of losing trust money by strengthening CAV's enforcement powers so that it can more quickly address non-compliance with trust account obligations.

Reforms to the OC Act will protect owners corporations lot owners from the harms of first-resort debt recovery action

Payment plans with statutory protections, accepted by default for owner-occupiers

Owners of apartments within a plan of subdivision, like all homeowners, are experiencing intense cost of living pressures. An increasing number of lot owners are falling behind on their owners corporations (OC) fees and are being pursued by their OCs with costly and heavy-handed debt recovery action. We know that this can lead to financial hardship escalating quickly, causing needless financial and psychological distress. That's why this Bill introduces a framework in the *Owners Corporations Act 2006* (OC Act) where lot owners in OCs can access payment plans to spread payment of their OC fees over a longer period and be covered by statutory protections from debt recovery action while a payment plan is in place and being complied with.

The government understands that owner-occupiers of apartments are most at risk from mounting OC debt: in some cases, losing their homes to bankruptcy proceedings. To protect those most at risk, this Bill requires that when owner occupier lot owners request a payment plan, it will be accepted by default. OCs with more than two lots will only be able to refuse a request for a payment plan from an owner occupier lot owner if the lot owner has not provided prescribed evidence of hardship, or the OC does not have funds to support the requested payment plan. Regulations will be made prior to commencement of these reforms to assist OCs to make careful decisions about whether to refuse a payment plan.

Clarifying and improving access to VCAT for OCs and lot owners

The government is also aware of issues under the OC Act and Subdivision Act limiting access to VCAT. The Bill will amend section 18 the OC Act to clarify that an OC may bring a non-monetary claim in VCAT with approval of an ordinary resolution by the OC, not a special resolution. This will give OCs certainty that they can enforce rules and resolve procedural matters as intended. Section 34D of the Subdivision Act will also be amended by this Bill to ensure that lot owner applicants to VCAT for review of decisions under the Subdivision Act can apply regardless of whether the applicants were in the majority or minority of the decision in question.

The Bill will modernise and improve the regulatory framework for motor car traders through amendments to the *Motor Car Traders Act 1986* (MCT Act)

The government recognises that buying a motor car can be one of the most expensive and important purchases many Victorians make. Owning a motor car supports Victorians to get employment, transport family members to care and education, and to maintain independence.

Consumers should be confident that when they buy a motor car, they get what they pay for and their rights will be protected. That is why the Bill will introduce reforms to support consumers to access remedies, strengthen consumer protections and modernise the regulatory framework.

Streamlining and supporting access to remedies for consumers

The Bill will make it easier for consumers to access remedies when something goes wrong after they buy a motor car. Many consumers are either are not aware of the options available to them or find the processes difficult to navigate.

The Bill will create a single, more accessible point of contact for consumers by abolishing the Motor Car Traders Claims Committee and transferring its functions to the Director CAV. This will leverage the expertise of CAV to assist with claims against the Motor Car Traders' Guarantee Fund (the Fund). The Bill also enables the Fund to be used for consumer education, advocacy and assistance services, and education programs for motor car traders about their obligations. This will strengthen consumer understanding of their rights and avenues for redress.

The Bill includes a regulation-making power to enable additional grounds for claims against the Fund to be prescribed so that the claims process is more responsive over time. The new regulation-making power can also be used modernise the methods for calculating warranty periods in respect of second-hand vehicles to ensure the law keeps pace with improving quality of modern motor cars. Any changes made by regulations will be subject to consultation and a Regulatory Impact Statement process.

Strengthening consumer protections

The Bill will strengthen key consumer protections, provide for more robust monitoring of compliance with licensing requirements by licensed motor car traders (LMCTs), and strengthen CAV's compliance and enforcement powers.

The MCT Act will be amended to enable the Business Licensing Authority (BLA) to review an LMCT's licence whenever VCAT makes a monetary order against them in favour of a consumer. In these cases, the BLA will have the option to suspend or impose conditions on a licence, ensuring alignment of consequences when a claim is admitted against an LMCT.

LMCTs will be required to take reasonable steps to identify odometer tampering

The government takes odometer tampering very seriously. When a motor car is sold with a tampered odometer, consumers are at risk at paying a higher price for a motor car and are also at risk of serious faults occurring sooner than they expect. The Bill will better define odometer tampering, making offences easier to investigate and enforce. LMCTs will also be required to take reasonable steps to verify the accuracy of the odometers of used motor cars before offering them for sale or exchange, and to advise prospective buyers in writing where there are reasonable grounds to doubt the odometer's accuracy. Penalties will apply for non-compliance.

To strengthen record keeping and reporting requirements, the Bill will require auction houses to keep additional information about those buying and selling motor cars, and to notify the Director CAV when a single party is involved in four or more sales in a year. This will allow CAV to investigate and better respond to unlicensed motor car trading. Again, penalties will apply non-compliance with these requirements.

Modernising the regulatory framework

The Bill will also modernise the MCT Act and support modern business practices, by:

- requiring the operators of digital platforms advertising cars to produce information and documents requested by a CAV inspector
- ensuring motor car traders provide required documents to consumers prior to the sale of a used motor car
- requiring motor car traders to display a prescribed notice containing their licence number on their website, as well as their physical place of business
- enabling dealings books to be kept electronically, with no paper back-up.

Together, these reforms will deliver a more contemporary fairer framework for motor car trading in Victoria.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act 1987

The purpose of the amendments to the Tobacco Act 1987 (Tobacco Act) are to address the urgent need to combat the illicit tobacco industry and its links to serious and organised crime networks, which are continuing to have wide-ranging negative impacts on the Victorian community.

The amendments proposed in this Bill will strengthen Victoria's tobacco legislative framework by supplementing the existing enforcement approaches available under the Tobacco Act.

The Bill will introduce:

- closure powers, to allow Tobacco Licensing Victoria and Victoria Police to close premises that are trading illicit tobacco
- landlord penalties, to create consequences for those who knowingly permit the sale of illicit tobacco at their premises
- landlord powers, allowing a landlord to terminate a lease because of a long-term closure order by providing written notice
- provisions relating to pre-trial destruction of illicit tobacco, to introduce the ability to destroy large quantities of illicit tobacco, as soon as possible.

Closure powers

Closure powers will be broader than existing regulatory tools and will affect the premises themselves, shutting down all illegal operators, whether or not a licence to sell tobacco is held.

The Bill introduces short-term closure notices (of up to 90 days), able to be issued in writing by Tobacco Licensing Victoria or Victoria Police. It also introduces long-term closure orders, made by the Magistrates' Court on application by Tobacco Licensing Victoria or Victoria Police.

Closure powers will be used when there is a need to shut down a trader quickly. They will be able to be used on licensed and unlicensed premises caught selling, possessing or trading in illicit tobacco.

The Bill will require relevant thresholds to be met prior to using the closure powers, and for the decision-maker to consider whether closure of a premises would impact the ability of the community to access essential goods and services. This will ensure regional communities are not unnecessarily disadvantaged by a premises' closure.

Once closed via a short-term closure notice or long-term closure order, no one will be able to access the premises, unless an exemption has been issued.

The Bill requires a public notice to be displayed at the entrance of the closed premises. Tobacco Licensing Victoria will also be able to post information about the closure on their website. These provisions are important to ensure the public is aware of premises that have been closed.

The Bill introduces significant penalties for breach of a short-term closure notice and a long-term closure order. It will be an offence to enter or remain on closed premises that the person knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, are closed premises, without a reasonable excuse. It will also be an offence to sell or otherwise supply non-tobacco products, tobacco products or commercial qualities of illicit tobacco from closed premises that the person knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, are closed premises and to remove or interfere with the closure notice or order displayed at a closed premises.

Landlord powers and penalties

The Government recognises that landlords should not be unfairly disadvantaged due to their tenant acting illegally. While leases generally include provisions that allow a landlord to terminate a lease if their tenant has engaged in illegal activity, the Bill will ensure landlords can take action to terminate a lease if a long-term closure order is in place over the premises.

The Bill also places an obligation on landlords to notify Tobacco Licensing Victoria when a lease related to a premises subject to a long-term closure order ends.

The Bill introduces an offence for owners of premises who know their tenants are trading in illicit tobacco, therefore enabling criminal activity. This will provide a clear legal and financial disincentive to deter landlords from permitting illicit tobacco supply from their stores and encourage them to support lawful businesses instead.

Changes to facilitate destruction of illicit tobacco

The Bill includes amendments that streamline the destruction of illicit tobacco while maintaining fair trial rights. This includes through a forfeiture notice process where the accused can apply to the Magistrates' Court for a finding that the thing seized is not illicit tobacco. Samples of illicit tobacco will be taken and retained so

the accused may seek independent analysis. The Bill requires certain evidentiary requirements to be met prior to the destruction, and for the Secretary or Chief Commissioner of Police to issue a disposal notice authorising the destruction. The person who conducts the destruction must issue a disposal certificate confirming the details of the destruction.

The reforms will allow for the significant reduction of stockpiles of illicit tobacco and will reduce the health and safety risks, reduce storage space, costs and risks, including addressing security concerns with potential stockpiles.

The amendments to the Tobacco Act made by the Bill are directly aimed at targeting the illicit tobacco trade in Victoria. They will bring Victoria into line with other jurisdictions which have introduced closure schemes and are reflective of the Government's commitment to address these issues as effectively and efficiently as possible, in line with community expectations.

Amendments to the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012

Forfeiture of certain documents and things to the Crown and subsequent destruction of seized things if uncollected

The Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 (ACLFT Act) establishes a framework for the retention and return of anything seized under Part 6.4, including goods subject to a safety standard or an interim or permanent ban. In practice, many seized consumer goods are not suitable for purchase because they are either unsafe for use or do not contain information necessary for consumers. As a result, these seized goods often go uncollected by their owner, creating unnecessary costs for the State associated with their storage and handling and the need to commence court proceedings to obtain orders for their destruction.

This Bill addresses this issue by streamlining and modernising the administrative processes relating to the collection, forfeiture and disposal of documents and things seized under Part 6.4 of the ACLFT Act. Specifically, the Bill replaces the current requirement for an application to the Magistrates' Court for an order authorising the destruction of certain things, with a new process under which the Minister for Consumer Affairs may authorise the disposal of a thing seized subject to an information or safety standard, or an interim or permanent ban under the Australian Consumer Law.

Importantly, only certain things that have been forfeited to the Crown may be disposed of under this framework. Forfeiture will occur only after the Director CAV has taken the required steps to issue a notice to collect the seized document or thing, where there is an obligation to do so, and it remains uncollected at the expiry of a 28-day notice period. In instances where the person is not identifiable or is uncontactable, the Director CAV must publish a notice in the Government Gazette to assist with the collection of the seized document or thing.

This reform is expected to support more efficient administration and reduce unnecessary storage costs and enable CAV to direct its resources away from unnecessary administrative processes and towards its core compliance and enforcement functions.

Clarifying persons prohibited from engaging in debt collection

The ACLFT Act restricts who may engage in debt collection in Victoria. To further protect consumers from the risk of egregious debt collection practices, the Bill clarifies that a corporation will be prohibited from engaging in debt collection where, within the previous five years, they have been found by a court to have breached Commonwealth or state and territory consumer protection laws by using physical force, undue harassment or coercion in the course of their business activities.

The substantive reforms will be complemented by minor amendments to ensure consumer protections in existing Acts work as intended

Alongside the major reforms I have outlined today, the Bill will also make a number of minor amendments to ensure existing consumer protections and recent amendments work as intended.

The Bill will amend the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* to ensure that contract variations that impact the new First Resort Home Warranty Scheme for residential building work up to three storeys are evidenced in writing to avoid confusion about what has been agreed and that additional building work undertaken will be covered by the First Resort Home Warranty Scheme. The Bill will also make minor and technical amendments to ensure the *Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Act 2025* operates as intended, including to: transfer responsibility for approving the form of a contract warning to the Victorian Building Authority, to require the form to be published in the Government Gazette, and to amend the definition of 'domestic building work' to reflect that the preparation of plans and specifications will be removed from the definition.

The Bill will also make a minor and technical amendment to the *Retirement Villages Act 1986* to clarify that, for the purpose of releasing an entry payment made by a new resident of a retirement village to the village operator or owner, an agent holding the entry payment is only required to be satisfied that an occupancy

permit has been issued under the *Building Act 1993* where the relevant building or part of a building that the resident is to occupy was, at the time the residence contract was entered into, not yet constructed, or was under construction, instead of in all cases.

Together the reforms in the Bill respond to the real pressures facing Victorian households and help ensure Victorian consumers are better informed, protected and supported. This Bill strengthens consumer protections by improving market transparency and supporting fairer outcomes through stronger regulatory oversight in housing, property sales, motor trading and other consumer goods and services. The Bill also provides Victorian law enforcement agencies with the tools they need to combat illegal tobacco sales and its links to serious and organised crimes networks.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:32): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 18 June.

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Nick Staikos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (10:32): Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:33): I rise to contribute to the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. Although we have a few issues with this bill, one of the key reasons why we will not be opposing this bill is because we have seen a massive backflip when it comes to the MFR, the minimum financial requirement, on building and construction in Victoria. We have been told, certainly by the industry – Master Builders Victoria (MBV) and the Housing Industry Association (HIA) – that the additional costs of the minimum financial requirement would add up to 30 per cent to construction costs on building. We know in a housing crisis and from the fact that we cannot get homes built in Victoria that to add that additional cost is something that none of us can afford, because we desperately need more homes in Victoria. This backflip was really important in the changes that are proposed in this legislation, and that is why we are not going to oppose it.

But I have to say at the outset that this government is shambolic. It is chaotic. I have not seen anything in my 16 years quite like what I have seen this morning, because literally minutes before debating this bill I was handed a change an amendment to the legislation. There was no briefing, no discussion, just an amendment dealing with – I just have to read it – dutiable property adjustments for off the plan, so a financial change.

I appreciate that the Minister for Housing and Building is not the minister responsible for Treasury, and this is a building bill and a Treasury bill. But when I asked the minister, the member for Bentleigh, about this change a couple of minutes ago, he responded to me by saying he also had no idea about this and was also told this morning. How on earth can this government be trusted with anything when they are dealing with some complex sets of legislation and their own minister does not even know about the changes they are about to propose? This is an end-of-days government that is scrambling around trying to fix and amend important, crucial legislation that deals with the cost of construction and affordable homes. How are we going to build affordable homes when the actual minister for homes has no idea about what we are about to debate? That is a joke.

I will not be opposing it, but when we get to the upper house we will give this more scrutiny. I put on notice the fact that this amendment that has just been put in front of my nose, literally a few minutes ago, will have more scrutiny from us on 'Part 10A – Amendment of Duties Act 2000'. It is about financial responsibility. It deals with off the plan, and hopefully it is consistent and not another tax. But who knows, because 34 per cent of building a home is tax related. We have got 67 new taxes under this government – 30 of them are dealing with housing. No wonder you cannot build in Victoria and everybody is going anywhere but Victoria, because the cost of construction is too expensive. The minimum financial requirements are being changed today because of the government's backflip, because finally they have been listening to the housing industry, to Master Builders Victoria and certainly to the opposition, who have said this is too expensive and it is too much risk in terms of housing supply. Finally, that backflip is evident.

I will touch on some other elements of the bill, and then I do want to get to the POPE changes – the places of public entertainment – the POPE permit. I foreshadow that I will have some amendments to put forward on the POPE. That particular part of this bill deals with the events industry, and it does not just deal with the events industry in terms of major events but it deals with every single person's event – a community event, a school fete, an RSL event. We need to ensure that, again, the costs of these smaller events are not impinged upon by more bureaucracy, more red tape, and I will get to POPE shortly.

The framework of this bill today deals with, firstly, looking at some of the insurance changes for residential apartment buildings as an alternative to the developer bond scheme established by the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 – a voluntary change and an important change that industry have raised with us. We think moving away from just the developer bond to an alternative insurance product is fair and reasonable. I mentioned amending the minimum financial requirement, which is essential – absolutely essential. I also want to commend the member for Narracan, himself a builder, who has also been a champion on this in ensuring we push back on cost additions to the building industry. I mentioned POPE, which I will come back to shortly.

There is also in this bill the expanding of emergency order powers for building surveyors to enable intervention – on conditions – and entry to land before structural harm occurs, in response to the McCrae landslip inquiry. And there are some changes conferring on the housing and building minister powers to designate flood-prone areas, mirroring the existing powers to declare bushfire-prone areas. I will raise some hesitation around that, and I flag that we may have more to say on that in the other chamber, again to ensure that there is consistency, not further cost and not the locking up of a whole lot of land from more building, because again, this bill that we talk about today should be about building more homes. We need to protect consumers – I get that. We need to ensure that we are mindful of flood-prone areas, but also we do not want to lock up a whole lot of land arbitrarily without having the proper process to ensure we can build those homes. We have seen lots of examples of that where you have got whole areas of land on which there could be development but there is not because of water boards and the like and also other issues like infrastructure that has not been made available to those areas – drainage areas, again, from infill and what have you – and there are issues around that.

The bill extends civil liability immunity for authorised nominating authorities under the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002, and that will ensure that it is brought in line with other jurisdictions. There are some changes in terms of cladding, which we have already seen. There is amendment to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund to provide a levy, exemptions and offsets for Homes Victoria, community housing organisations and eligible volunteers, to allow ministerial declarations about the timing and changes of residential fixed charge for place of residence concession. This is dealing with the emergency services tax, as you have all heard us talk about – another tax – and there are exemptions for this tax when it comes to Homes Victoria and some of the community housing, social housing and public housing organisations that are all linked to it. Again, we do not have issue with that, but what we would say is while the government is at it they should be, with a stroke of a pen, getting rid of the emergency services tax altogether. It is another impost, it is

another cost, and we have seen what that has done, again, to many of those hardworking landowners. We are seeing the issues right through regional Victoria and what the cost of that would be to our firefighters especially, who are fighting fires and also have to pay that huge tax on the very places that they are protecting and the public land that they are protecting as well.

The final piece is to amend the Land Tax Act 2005 to extend and clarify principal-place-of-residence land tax relief for owners constructing or renovating homes, including joint owners, affecting the timing anomalies in existing exemptions for deferral rules. So if you are building in one place and you are living in another, this ensures that you are not paying land tax in both instances. Again, we have no issue with that.

I want to also make very clear that under a Liberal–National government you will always pay lower taxes and you will always pay lower property taxes, because we know in order to build more homes you need lower taxes. This deals with land tax in this bill. It does not go far enough. We need to reduce land tax. The Liberal–Nationals have released a policy about reducing land tax, stamp duty and also payroll tax – three big imposts. Reducing those taxes will allow us to build more homes. This is a Treasury bill. It deals with taxation, so in line with this bill there was a great opportunity to reduce taxes to build more homes. Forty-three per cent of building a home is tax and regulation related. To build more homes you lower tax – simple. We are the highest taxing state in the nation when it comes to property taxes, and that is why we are not building homes. It is a missed opportunity in this bill – and that is why we are not building – to reduce land tax, to reduce stamp duty, to abolish emergency services tax and also payroll tax that a lot of builders also pay, and that would certainly build more homes. None of that has actually been done, in a missed opportunity in this bill.

Let me come to a few important elements with this bill. We talk about the flooding changes in this bill, or the proposed flooding changes, and I alluded that the upper house will have more to say about this. This government has a one-size-fits-all approach to building homes, and we have seen that in their 60. Is it 60 or 200? I am not sure what the number is at the moment, because according to the *Age* we have gone from 60 to another 120 – I think it just continues to rise – activity centres the government is planning for. We know these activity centres are going from 60 to 210, in terms of what Treasury secretly had worked out for them – 210 activity centres. We know there are 60; there could be 210. That means that every one of the electorates that does not have an activity centre may have a high-rise activity centre coming to them, so just be prepared for that.

When we talk about flooding, part of flooding is infrastructure – it is drainage. We know in the recent report that was released by the Urban Development Institute of Australia, the 70–30 plan – in which the government has got 70 per cent of building and construction in infill, in established suburbs, and 30 per cent in growth corridors, on greenfield sites – is not happening. They are failing when it comes to infill; the only places where homes are being built is in greenfield. But regardless of this, you need infrastructure. One of the reasons the 70–30 report that was done by UDIA found holes in the government's plans was the fact that they do not look at infrastructure and the cost of infrastructure. The recent report by Infrastructure Victoria said when you are building into new areas, the cost of infrastructure is about four times; when you are building infill, it is a lot cheaper to build infrastructure. That does not take into consideration retrofitting and it does not take into consideration when a lot of infrastructure is already exhausted. If you have not got enough schools, not enough drainage capacity, not enough other services that you need to build more of in these infill sites, it makes it far more expensive.

Drainage is one of those big areas. I know in my area of Glen Eira we have huge flooding issues – huge. It was seen as swampland; that is what it was. The old Caulfield Racecourse was called the swamp. It has a flooding history. I know the member for Bentleigh – they have tried a huge amount of rectification in terms of some of those flooding issues over recent years. But if you want to jam in another five activity centres in the City of Glen Eira alone, then you have to be prepared to provide the infrastructure and the drainage; otherwise you are going to have more issues, more flooding. The bill does not deal with that. I am certainly mindful, because are we going to declare the infill, are we

going to declare the 60 activity centres flood zones and not build any of the high-rises? Does this bill allow for that change to do that? That needs to be taken into consideration as well.

Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated. We will do that now, so I will make that happen. A bit of magic is what I did, you know – not 5 minutes ago, like you lot did. I actually had these well and truly prepared, member for Mordialloc, well and truly ahead of schedule. We are organised on this side of the house. We know a thing or two about building on this side of the house. We know about planning on this side of the house. I am not so sure about the Allan Labor government.

This change of POPE, place of public entertainment, is a key element, because Victoria is the only jurisdiction in Australia – surprise, surprise – that has a POPE, that has a place-of-public-entertainment permit for events, not just for major events but for any event. You have heard me say this before, and I will say it again. When we have the likes of Taylor Swift doing a Swifty concert and travelling around the world and bringing the installation in, in every other country and every other state she has her experts to construct the staging and get everything ready to go. They travel with her and they provide all the staging. When it comes to Victoria, we need a whole lot of different regulations. We are meant to be the events capital of the world, but I am told by the likes of the event suppliers that we are absolutely the red tape capital of the world.

Tim McCurdy interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Very good. We are the red tape capital of the world, the member for Ovens Valley quite rightly points out. Why is that? Because everything is another bit of regulation. It is not good enough for councils to have their permits and planning to have their permits, but we need another entertainment permit as well. That might be okay for these major performances, but we all pay for that, by the way. I am told when you talk about major concerts – the big concerts – it was Melbourne and Sydney. If these big shows were booking concerts, they would say, 'We'll go to Melbourne, then we'll go to Sydney, and then if we want to do other tours, we'll look at Brisbane and other states.' Well, guess where they start now. They do not start in Melbourne; they start in Sydney, because in Sydney it is easier to do business. They run their concerts there first, and then they come to Melbourne. What is even more alarming is now Brisbane is up and about, and now we have the Olympic Games with infrastructure up and about, they are now saying, 'Well, maybe we do Sydney and Brisbane and we leave Melbourne to a lousy third.' That is what the major game events and the major concert performances are looking at under this shambolic, hopeless government. Melbourne is the events capital, and this government have taken their eye off the ball – completely off the ball.

We know that the Minister for Sport and Major Events was the Minister for Major Events and Tourism. He has carved off tourism because he wants to focus on getting his knees under the Australian Open and the grand prix and every other free feed that he can find, but the minister for major events actually has to do a little bit of work – not just turn up to these events but actually do a bit of work so we can secure them, not lose them like the MotoGP, not lose them like we have seen with the golf tournament, not lose them like we have seen with rugby and other things as well, not lose them like we have seen with Land Forces. Do not just turn up for the free feed; do the work.

This is why the POPE permit is really important, because the government have been told by the industry 'Reform it.' Well, actually they have said 'Get rid of it.' The government has not got rid of it. Maybe they should really listen and get rid of the POPE permit, because it is another burden, another lot of regulation red tape, that is costing Victorians and costing small businesses. Instead, they have had a crack at reforming it. Our amendments deal with some of this. The previous set of laws would say, 'You need a POPE permit when it comes to having events indoors, but outdoors under 5000 people you don't need a POPE permit.' What this government have done in a sneaky little way is they have said, 'We're going to amend that. We're going to take that out of legislation, and that will be up to regulation as to whether you need a POPE permit outdoors or not.' So our question is: what happens with an Anzac Day service? What happens with a school fete? What happens with a farmers

market? Do the local school running their fete, the parents association, need a permit to put a trestle table out? Have we got to that in Victoria where you need a permit for a trestle table and a marquee? Have we got to that level and extent of ridiculous bureaucracy and red tape? That is the red flag that we have here, and that is why we have a change in the amendments proposed in this legislation that is so important.

This government loves red tape, because it creates the kind of jobs that none of us need, the ones that people have a clipboard for and run around and tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. Off we go, 'There's your bill and there's your cost' or 'You can't do this and you can't do that,' with no explanation why. We are all about safety – do not get me wrong – but you can get to a point where you are being ridiculous. If every other state is not doing that, why is Victoria?

John Lister interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Well, other states seem to be able to do them okay, member for Werribee.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Caulfield. Without interruptions, member for Werribee.

David SOUTHWICK: Through the Chair, the member for Werribee says, 'Well, people die.' Absolutely people die, and they die in other states as well, and we have got to do everything to protect them. But why is there a different set of rules in other states that happen to do events really well but in Victoria there is another level of bureaucracy? That is the question that we have, and that is why we have got to get consistency, and if other states are doing it better, then so be it. I would hope that the member for Werribee does not want to turn up to his local parents club and say, 'Well, I'm sorry, but there's another 120 bucks for a permit for your trestle table,' or to his local RSL club and say, 'I know you have an Anzac Day service every year, but there's another 500 bucks or a thousand bucks for your Anzac Day service.'

I hope the member for Werribee does not have to go and explain this to all of his volunteer and community organisations and schools and fetes and everybody, the lifeblood of volunteering in Werribee. I hope the member for Werribee does not have to go and explain himself to all of those hardworking community organisations that now have to pay more because of a government that is focused on red tape and does not give a continental about people. I hope that the member for Werribee does not have to do that.

John Lister interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Werribee says, 'It's all about reducing it.' If it is all about reducing it, I would hope the member for Werribee supports our amendments. The amendments also deal with a finding to say that an event cannot go ahead. I am talking about the bigger events and bigger concerts and bigger festivals that are the lifeblood of our economy, so key to our economy. Let us just say we get a big Taylor Swift concert that cannot go ahead – there is an urgent appeal process so we can get a finding really quickly so the show can go on. That is what we would hope.

At the moment we have the same VCAT process and the same appeals process for construction of a house as we do for a concert – the same thing. I know that we want to get on with building homes, but you could have a timeline that the show is meant to happen this Saturday and it is booked into VCAT in three months time. I tell you what, Taylor Swift will not be waiting for three months. The show will move on. Business is moving out of Melbourne because this government does not give a continental about ensuring we have an economic focus and attract the kinds of events and the kinds of industry that we want. People love events. People love going out with their families and being able to enjoy these things. We should not have to add another cost to it, like this government is trying to do.

I would absolutely hope that the government does support our amendments that deal with all of this, with the fact that we are able to get some consistency in the industry and that – let me just make sure that these are well and truly covered – limit the POPE regime to buildings and prescribed temporary

structures, and restore community events, with exemptions equivalent to the existing $5000 per person threshold. This is about community events. If the Allan Labor government support the community, they will get on board with our amendments. If they support community organisations, they will get on board. If they support their RSLs, their schools, their not-for-profits, they will get on board.

The second part inserts a definition of 'prescribed temporary structure' to mean tents, marquees or booths with a floor area greater than 100 square metres; a stand with seating for more than 20 persons; stages or platforms, including with sky borders or stage wings, exceeding 150 square metres in floor area; and prefabricated buildings exceeding 100 square metres other than those directly on ground surfaces. Again, this is a very specific industry. It is not a one size fits all. Do not treat it like a home. Treat it like the events industry that it is. That is why we need those changes. Also, amend the bill to require the Building and Plumbing Commission to establish regulations for emergency appeal processes under which the POPE permit decisions may be reviewed within one week. Events cannot wait. The show needs to go on. That is why we need an immediate appeals process so the show can go on and we do not see cancellations of major events in Victoria. It is absolutely key.

As I said at the beginning, and I want to conclude with this, it is absolutely crucial that the minimum financial requirements for builders are ripped up and abolished. On 12 May the member for Narracan and I went out and raised this issue. It was earlier than that that we raised the issue. We raised the issue with the HIA and MBV; both were very strong on this. We had a couple of builders come and join us at the press conference downstairs, and they said that this has to change because it was costed out at about a 30 per cent increase on every single build cost for every single home. Victorians cannot afford that, and that is why housing has come to a standstill.

You have heard me say this many times: you cannot live in a permit. You cannot ensure that just by issuing permits you are going to build more homes. The government said we were going to get 80,000 homes a year, and then they reverted to 800,000 homes. They are now nowhere near that, and we have seen that in two years they are about 50,000 short. The government are not meeting their targets, and they are not meeting their targets because it is just too costly to build homes in Victoria, and to change that you have got to amend this.

There is the National Construction Code, which is also part and parcel, which we should be amending here as well. With the National Construction Code we have got other major states that have said, 'Let's kick the can down the road because we can't afford to do that at this particular point in time' – everywhere but Victoria. Victoria said, 'No, let's introduce the National Construction Code immediately and ensure that builders pay, because builders can afford it.' Well, builders cannot afford it, and most importantly, home owners cannot afford it, and that is why we are not building homes. And it is not just about the home owner; it is the renter as well. You cannot get into a rental in Victoria because there is just not enough housing stock.

Even worse than that, we are not building social housing. We have seen in a decade only 36 new homes built – in a decade. What a disgrace – 36 homes built in a decade. We saw people being evicted from a caravan park only last week, which was exposed on *A Current Affair*, and they have got nowhere to go because there is not enough housing. It is all very well for this government to cut tape and to say 'Look at this', cut a ribbon and say how wonderful things are. We know things are not wonderful in Victoria. We know things are not wonderful here. The only way to do that will be to change the government in November.

I will finish where I started. What a disgrace today that the government would propose an amendment to this bill within 5 minutes of the bill being debated, not giving us the opportunity to consider it. And the minister responsible for the bill in this chamber had no clue about the amendment. The member for Bentleigh had no idea. The government has no idea. How can Victorians have any idea if the government has no idea? That is why this government is an end-of-days government. It is a failed, corrupt government. It has to change. Whether it is the big, rotten, dirty build – the $15 billion of corruption – or the rigging of elections that they are trying to do now by taking dirty money from the

CFMEU, this is a horrible, hopeless government. The only way to get rid of them is to send a message in November and boot them out and show them the door.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (11:03): I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow on from the member for Caulfield – 30 minutes we will not get back – and to make some reflections on what I think goes to the doom and gloom and, as we see time and time again, those opposite wanting to come into this place and talk the state down. There was quite a lot in the contribution from the lead speaker from the opposition. What I did want to pick up on was the line from the member for Caulfield that those on that side of the house know a thing or two about building things. I was making some reflections on the period between 2010 and 2014 in this state, when the place pretty much ground to a halt and there was no investment in schools, there was no investment in major transport projects, there was no investment in the services that matter to Victorians and the business community could not find their ministers. The business community could not meet with those opposite in that time. And what I think is astounding each and every day is to come into this place and to hear those reflections and those opposite lecture this side of the house about investment and building and making for better local communities through all of the work that is done, both through the Treasury portfolio and right across government, in each and every portfolio.

We know and understand that the measures and the initiatives contained within this bill go to providing for a more robust and stronger system for those within our community. They go to supporting local families and making sure they have the opportunities and the provisions that are important to them. What we see time and time again, unfortunately, are those stunts that we saw just a short time ago, which completely disregard the facts and completely disregard those circumstances which we find ourselves in.

Just to put a few things on record, over the last decade the economy in this state has grown faster than in any other state. Business investment is up 44 per cent since September 2020 – again, faster than the rest of the country – 123,000 more businesses in net terms than in June 2020, 4300 new businesses in the startup and scale-up space alone. And we know that that has been through a significant period of uncertainty, through both the pandemic and the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. Providing for those settings and providing for strong economic management is something that we know matters and something that makes for better and stronger local communities.

That is in stark contrast to what we hear from those opposite. The five-step fiscal strategy around creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth; returning to an operating cash surplus; returning to operating surpluses; stabilising net debt as a proportion of gross state product; and reducing net debt as a proportion of GSP is something that we remain committed to and remain focused on. We will continue to deliver that, making sure we are going forward and making those investments that make for a better, stronger state. What we unfortunately heard just a short time ago, and what we hear time and time again in this place, is a scenario that is not what we see borne out in those numbers, in those statistics, in the more than 123,000 businesses that have been created, and making for that work is something that we remain committed to and that is important.

The provisions contained within the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026 – the one before us today – go to providing for targeted amendments to modernise building legislation, providing better protections for consumers and providing for tax and levy relief. It modernises legislation to reflect building industry practices by improving the place-of-public-entertainment permit scheme; enabling greater flexibility under the Building Act 1993 to incorporate relevant documents, including international standards, by reference; and improving the operation of the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. Improvements to protections for consumers in Victoria's housing and building system include introducing a voluntary 10-year insurance scheme for new apartment buildings and supporting the effective operation of that statutory scheme, also known as the first-resort home warranty scheme, including by allowing regulations to be made to provide for limited exemptions; expanding powers to address land-related

safety risks; and improving the identification and designation of land in flood-prone areas. And it goes on to make a range of other amendments and other matters.

In short – and we will go back to some of those key guiding principles around that economic management and that support – it will make for a more robust and stronger system, a system that is designed more around certainty and flexibility, supporting opportunities to build and to be able to deliver on the government's plans around housing and those significant reforms that have been announced by the Premier and other ministers and the significant amount of work – the large volume of work – that has been done by the government to provide for a more certain, more structured and better approach.

We know of course, as we navigate that global uncertainty – as matters overseas and matters within this country change not just on a week-to-week but on a day-by-day basis – that we need to have the levers and the tools available to us to be able to respond, to be able to support local communities and to be able to give certainty and to provide for that work. That management is something that the government takes very, very seriously. I want to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge all of those partners, all of those within industry, who provide government great advice and good support in providing for pieces of legislation like this one that make a genuine and tangible difference on the ground to local communities. What we know and understand is that, when we have the opportunity to work with industry and to work with the experts in these areas, we have the opportunity to be able to craft legislation that is responsive to the needs of such communities. What is most important, whether you are looking through all of the different measures within this bill or others, is to be able to provide for that certainty. Uncertainty is born from so many of those events that I have mentioned, and of course just the day-to-day changes within industry go to providing for uncertainty that can arise, but making those provisions gives the government and its agencies better flexibility and better certainty.

We have seen of course the contribution that I mentioned earlier and the position that those opposite have taken. It is pleasing to see that they will not be opposing the bill, notwithstanding amendments that have been foreshadowed. But I will finish by making the observation that the continued attack on so many of the agencies that do outstanding work within the Victorian community, the continued running of scare and fear campaigns to talk the state down and the continued disregard for the amazing work that is done through industry and by so many people that work each and every day to make our state stronger and fairer and better is a huge disservice from those opposite and speaks I think very strongly for the values that those opposite bring to the table. What we remain focused on is providing for the best possible set of building regulations and a framework that we can deliver to make this state continue to be stronger and fairer and better. With those comments, I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:13): I rise this morning to talk on the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. It is a pleasure to be able to rise and talk about the building industry inside the chamber here and actually talk on the reasons why the building industry is so important to not only Victoria but Victorians as they try to manoeuvre and navigate their way into a home or a property that they can rent. As the member for Caulfield, who led us off, explained, we will not be opposing the bill, but we do have some amendments that he has forecast that we will be hoping the government take on board. It is interesting, as the member for Caulfield did mention when he stood just before to talk on the bill, that there was an amendment coming through from the minister and the government themselves.

With this particular bill I think on our side we are trying to make it a little bit stronger with the amendments, but I think the government are also seeing that maybe there are a few flaws in their bills that they do bring through, and there do need to be changes. I hope the government take on board what the coalition and this side of the chamber are trying to achieve, because when it is all said and done what we are trying to do is make sure that building and housing can march forward here in Victoria and not get caught up in red tape and bureaucracy. There are a lot of people in communities, whether they are living in the inner city or whether they are living in regional Victoria, that are waiting and

hoping that the reforms and the legislation that we do move here in the chamber actually flow through to them quickly and responsibly.

It seems that there were some issues, as the member for Narracan has spoken about regularly, in the building industry, such that when we put extra burden and cost onto builders through taxes that have to be paid and are mandated by the government, the builder is not going to stand there and say, 'I will pay this and that'll be the end of it.' What happens is it flows down and through, and the people that pay it are the mum and the dad that are engaging to try and build a home or set themselves up moving forward. So we need to make sure when we bring bills in here that they are correct and that we do not have to come back and make amendments and make changes. We should be doing our due diligence, talking to the people that matter most, our building industry, because they are the ones that know how the flow-on of being able to build a property and build a house in Victoria needs to go. They do not get the final say, but we should be listening to them and engaging with them to see what is going to be the easiest and most responsible path forward to building houses here in Victoria.

The purpose of this bill is to establish a legal framework for a voluntary decennial, which is 10-year structural defect insurance. We need to also amend the minimum financial requirement framework for builders entering the Victorian building industry, returning power to the Building and Plumbing Commission to set the industry standards. We have spoken previously here in the chamber about the impost on smaller builders that have a have a financial cap on how many homes and so forth they can build. We need to make sure that they can manoeuvre, so when a house is finished they can move on and it can free their cap, as such, to build the next home and the next home after that. They are sensible changes that we need to have in place, and I am sure the member for Narracan, to my right, will touch on all of this because he has been embedded in the industry for many, many years running his own business and knows what the pitfalls are and what the traps are, but more importantly, what the actual hold-ups are as we move forward.

Another part of the legislation is reform to the places of public entertainment. We heard the member for Caulfield talking about POPE, which is the permit regime. For our bigger events I know we need to have this in place, but it is also going to now impact on our farmers markets, our Scouts, our Girl Guides and our neighbourhood houses. If they are putting up marquees and so forth, they are all going to fall under it. I know that in the Latrobe Valley, in Traralgon and many other places around regional Victoria, when we do have our farmers markets, we may have several marquees set up – up to 50 or 60 marquees set up for the day – so we really need to make sure that we have something in place that suits them as well. Do they really need to fall under this banner of the POPE permit regime? Yes, we can see it needs to be done for our bigger concerts and so forth as we move around, but for the little guy we seem to be making it harder and harder to go about daily activities. They might set their marquee up once every week, so we need to make sure that we are doing some work in that space as well. So I hope some of the amendments that go through on this are taken under advisement and taken seriously by the government to make sure that this bill, when it is passed – and it will be passed; at the end of the day, we know that it will be passed – is making the right changes for the right reasons.

Another part of the building side of things, especially in and around the Latrobe Valley, is the availability of land. One of the big roadblocks for builders who want to build houses for people in regional Victoria is overlays, and the one that that bites the most in the Latrobe Valley is coal overlays. The coal overlays are there for a reason, to protect the power stations. But we have areas of coal overlays that have been there for 40 and 50 years and reside around some of our potential land for expansion in the Latrobe Valley. That is holding up building and that expansion of people coming to the Latrobe Valley, because of the coal overlays that are, as I said, 40 or 50 years old. They need to be removed. The Hazelwood power station is a perfect example. The power station no longer exists, but the coal overlays still sit there. They not only block the housing that can be built down in the Latrobe Valley, they also put a handbrake on the commercial aspect for people that want to open up the new businesses and manufacturing that do need to come to the Latrobe Valley as we transition out of our coal-fired power stations. In other parts of the state, there are flood overlays and fire-prone overlays

and heritage overlays. These are extra stresses on landowners and developers that need to be looked at as well.

We are doing bits and pieces here in this building legislation and the treasury legislation. We need to make sure that we are looking after our builders because they are the ones that are going to be providing our housing, whether it be on greenfield sites out in regional Victoria or if they are building on infill sites in and around our activity centres here in Melbourne itself. There is a lot of work that needs to be done. There needs to be consultation right across the board when we are sitting in here talking about building legislation that is affecting houses, that is affecting builders and that is going to put more costs on top of them. As I said at the start, we know where that cost is going to go. It is going to end up with the mum and dad trying to build their first home or build another home. We do not oppose the bill and we do wish it a speedy pass through here, but I would urge the government to look at the amendments that we are putting forward.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (11:23): I rise to speak in support of the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026, and I would like to acknowledge the member for Morwell and his considered contribution to this chamber. I am looking forward to the member for Narracan, who always gives a very intellectual version of things with regard to this industry. However, I digress. They always have the member for Caulfield as the lead speaker, who may know how to own houses, but he never knows how to build houses. Literally he has no idea about the building industry.

I would also like to just take him up on the fact that Victoria is the events capital of Australia, and I would argue the world. Not only did we have the Australian Open and the Formula One Grand Prix earlier in the year, but we have the AFL Grand Final, the Melbourne Cup, the Boxing Day test, the Rip Curl Pro at Bells Beach, the Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix, the Melbourne Marathon, the NFL this year, the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival, Always Live, Rising, the Melbourne International Film Festival, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, all of these great things. There are very few cities in the world that have that kind of line-up. Only in Victoria can you start a year with the grand slam, welcome the world to the Formula One, fill the MCG for the AFL Grand Final, stop the nation for the Melbourne Cup and still host some of the biggest comedy, film, food and music festivals in the Southern Hemisphere. That is why Victoria is not just Australia's events capital, it is one of the world's great event capitals.

I will go back to the bill. At its heart this bill is about fairness. It is about fairness for families making the biggest investment of their lives when they build or buy a home. It is about fairness for honest builders and tradies who do the right thing. Importantly, it is about fairness for subcontractors and workers, who deserve to be paid on time, in full, for the work that they have completed. I have gone on in this chamber many, many times about how that has impacted my family directly, and I acknowledge the member for Narracan and the conversations we have had with regard to the experiences that we have been through. Across Victoria, and particularly in growing communities like Glen Waverley, Vermont South, Wheelers Hill, Burwood East and Forest Hill, we know the building industry is not just an industry; it is livelihoods, it is small businesses, it is apprenticeships, it is mortgages and it is families sitting around the kitchen table trying to make ends meet.

In my electorate we have seen enormous growth in investment over recent years, whether it is townhouse developments, apartment constructions around the activity centres or the transformational Suburban Rail Loop – projects reshaping the future of Melbourne's east. Construction workers and subcontractors are helping build the future of our community every single day, and those workers deserve protection. They deserve a system where if they turn up, do the work, meet the deadlines and fulfil the contract, they get paid – not six months later, not after months of legal disputes, not after being dragged through bureaucratic loopholes and certainly not after having to choose between paying suppliers, paying wages or paying their own mortgage because somebody further up the chain has refused to do the right thing.

I remember working as a carpenter back in 2004 in my dad's construction business. We were on a project down in Lorne. It was a project run by Mirvac. We were building the Lorne Chalet at the time. It was two buildings, five to six storeys in each building, and we were doing the formwork for each suspended slab. It was a $750,000 contract. It was over 18 months. We employed five or six people over that period of time, and over that period of time it was all good. Mirvac was paying us on a regular basis. All was going well right up until we got to about the last 20 per cent of the contract. As soon as that came in, they got their legal departments, they got their surveyors and they just absolutely hounded us with letters saying that they were going to back-charge us for cleaning the site and for doing all these things that did not have to be done. Essentially all they were looking for was to create an extra profit, an extra 10 or 20 per cent, after we had delivered the contract as it should have been delivered. They wasted our time over three to six months of arguing back and forth about all these variations to the contract, and it put such stress on my dad and I in having to respond to this. We had done such a good job, we had done everything right, but they literally were using the strength of them being an ASX-listed company where they had departments that could waste our time and hope that we would give up – hope that we would just go, 'Okay. Well, we'll give you that one.' But my father, who keeps receipts, keeps everything written down and is a stubborn, stubborn man, would not give an inch, and so after 12 months or so we got our retention. I think out of the 10 per cent that they were trying to take off – it was about $75,000 – we lost maybe $15,000 or something, but that was just so that we could move on to the next job.

That was industry wide. That is what has been going on in this industry for decades. I have known it for 20 years, but I know it is probably longer than that. That is why the security of payment reforms contained within this legislation are so important. Too often in the construction industry subcontractors are the ones carrying the risk. The small plasterer, the family concreting business, the electrician employing two apprentices, the cabinetmaker, the tiler, the painter – these are not multinational corporations with teams of lawyers or endless cash reserves. These are local small businesses. They are people who rely on cash flow week to week to survive, and when payment is withheld, delayed or disputed unfairly, the consequences are devastating. I know this.

I would like to go back to an example that I have given twice before. Frank Nadinic from Maxstra has wrought absolute pain across Victoria and Australia. His MO was basically to get you to come and start a contract; you would get to 20 per cent, and he would then pay you that 20 per cent. You would go, 'Okay. It must be a good company to work for. We'll keep working.' You would keep working. You would get up to 60 or 70 per cent, and you would still be invoicing him, but there would be no payments coming. Then you would get to 80 per cent of the contract and you would walk offsite, because literally you are not going to work for free. You want to get paid, and you want to be able to pay your workers. When you walked offsite, though, he had a clause in his contract that would allow that contract to be null and void if you walked off site. He did this across hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of small business subcontractors across the building industry across Victoria and across Australia. He was making millions and millions of dollars off the backs of working people here in Victoria. That is the reason why we need these laws. That is the reason why we had the committee look into the payment of subcontractors. Security of payment is not an abstract legal concept. It is about whether the subcontractor can pay wages on a Friday. It is about whether the worker can keep the ute on the road. It is about whether the family can stay afloat during difficult economic times.

This bill continues the Allan Labor government's reforms to strengthen the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. This is the one that I am really happy about. Importantly, it introduces regular, three-year reviews into the effectiveness of the security of the payments framework. I think in my last contribution, when we did the security of payments, the last amendment bill, I said that we would have to be resolute and make sure that we continue to look into the industry, continue to look into how the security of payments is working, because as soon as we make changes to the law or the regulations, we are going to have companies, dodgy operators, literally try and find ways around them, ways to not pay people, ways to make it difficult for people, ways to push the risk down onto the people that cannot handle that risk, so having a three-year review into the security of

payments by the minister I think is absolutely excellent. Business practices evolve, and governments have a responsibility to ensure that the law continues to protect the workers and subcontractors effectively. Victoria will now be leading the country by embedding regular reviews into legislation so we can continually improve protections and learn from reforms occurring across Australia and internationally.

This bill also extends protections for authorised nominating authorities overseeing adjudication processes, ensuring they can carry out their functions in good faith without being exposed unfairly to civil liability. These systems matter enormously because adjudication is often the only avenue smaller subcontractors have to resolve payments disputes quickly and affordably. I go back to the Maxstra example, where the contract was about $80,000. We had to spend $25,000 on getting legal advice. It ended up that we got no money. He pretty much had this whole system set up to screw over the subcontractor. Anyway, that is my time. I commend the bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:33): I am pleased to rise on the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. Just to take up from where the member for Glen Waverley left off: that builder you were talking about should not be in the industry – simple. Get rid of him. Get him out. He is nothing but an absolute you-know-what – I cannot say that in here, but it is a unity ticket on that one, I can tell you that right now. Builders like that should not be in the industry. Subbies work hard, and they are the backbone of the industry. It is that simple. Without subbies, you do not get houses built, and a lot of times the subbie is the credit line for the builder, absolutely, every day of the week. They have to be looked after, and security of payment is extremely important because these subbies are going broke. We are not getting houses built. It is really that simple. So to the member for Glen Waverley, I am with you on that, 100 per cent.

But let me get into this bill. I am probably going to start off with the minimum financial requirements. It is a bit of a backflip bill at the end of the day. The industry, the Housing Industry Association (HIA) and Master Builders Victoria were very, very vocal about this last time this legislation came through. The MFR was actually a big part of the government's consumer protection bill or one of the bills they passed – I cannot remember when; there have been that many building bills – a few bills ago now. What astounded me at the time – I remember standing up in this chamber, and I was saying to those opposite, 'Talk to builders. This isn't good for the industry. It is bad for the industry.' I got shouted down by a few of those members opposite with, 'You're only looking after big business. You're only doing this. You're only doing that.' That was not the case.

On the MFR changes, it directly affected 70 per cent of the construction work that happens in this state, which is done by the mum-and-dad builders. It is the mum-and-dad builders that supply 70 per cent of the homes. On the MFR that got passed, so many builders rang me and said, 'That's it. I'm done. I'm out. This industry is stuffed. The government does not care.' That was the feedback that I got from a lot of builders within the industry. The HIA were beside themselves. Master Builders Victoria were beside themselves. They were actually saying, 'We don't know how this industry will survive.' But the one thing the government did not realise was that by introducing pretty well a turnover cap on the old MFR system, it would have dropped the supply of housing in this state by about 25 to 30 per cent. We are already sitting at about 55,000 homes now. That would have dropped supply to 40,000 homes – half of what the government wants to build a year.

I do not know what happened between the previous minister for housing and the new Minister for Housing and Building, but I suspect the new minister for housing reached out to stakeholders. I am hoping he went down to see Anna Cronin at the Building and Plumbing Commission. My assumption is he would have. If he was doing his job, he probably went there first. My assumption is he went and saw the HIA and my assumption is he went and saw Master Builders Victoria. I imagine after those three meetings his ears would have been bleeding about the MFR. They would have chewed his ears off about it because it was going to absolutely decimate the industry. We had a builder on the steps at the doors. We had a builder called Steve Bright, who told of his frustration with the government and the construction industry at the moment. We also had Keith Ryan of the HIA, who expressed his

frustration as well at the government. I suspect the new minister copped an absolute barrage in his stakeholder meetings about the MFR, and possibly he still does.

But on the changes to the MFR – and I thank the minister's staff for the bill briefing – I asked a very specific question in the briefing: is this going to go back to how it was? I was assured it is. That is where the MFR is going. It is absolutely going back to how it used to be before someone decided to really stuff it up. That is good for the industry. It is good, and it is a big reason why when the member for Caulfield talked to me about this bill I said, 'We have to support this bill. We should not oppose it, because of the changes to the MFR. I know what the industry wants.' But it is frustrating now because I know people on that side are going to get up and regurgitate the same thing, saying, 'This is so good for the industry,' which they did last time when the MFR was going to destroy the industry. I urge members opposite: stop taking the minister's notes for granted and do your own research, because then you will not look like fools.

Dylan Wight interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: If you do not like the yelling, member for Tarneit, you can go. I do not care. You can go. I am urging the members on the other side to stop taking things for granted, because they are not always what they seem. I am glad they have backflipped on the MFR, for the industry's sake. Not only that, it is for Victoria's sake, because the government's housing targets they cannot achieve now, and under the old MFR the government had no chance at all.

There are a few other things in this bill. Another point I want to come to are the changes around flooding and the mapping of flooding areas. This is a bit 'cart before the horse'. The minister will have the power to nominate areas of flooding. That is okay on the surface, but the problem we have is that every time we look at land that floods and areas get further and further out, we lose more land, whether that is developable land or whether that is farmland or any type of land. Every time you do modelling of big rain events and floods, you say, 'That's a flood area.'

What we need to do first, the very first thing we need to do, is clean the drains out. In my electorate, from Nilma all the way down to Trafalgar East, from Longwarry all the way up to Pakenham East, it floods. The reason it floods is because I have three different authorities – four in some cases – that are responsible for cleaning out the drains, but that does not happen. The drains are not clean. So what happens when the drains are not cleaned out? You have more flooding area. There are some arguments, and sometimes people go, 'Oh, you can't clean the drain because there's a frog' and all that rubbish. Bad luck. It is a drain; it is there for a reason. When you have got areas like Warragul and Drouin, which are undergoing very high development, you have to understand the way stormwater works. When you have a paddock it absorbs the water. When you have a development it sheds the water. So there is more water coming off these areas, and these areas to the east and west of Warragul and Drouin are continuing to flood. You ask any resident down there: 30 mil of rain and Trafalgar floods – only 30 mil because the drains are not clean. The frustrating part as the local member for Parliament is that someone rings me and says, 'My drain is blocked.' Okay. I ring Baw Baw shire, 'That's not my drain'; West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, 'That's not my drain'; VicRoads, 'That's not my drain.' Who in the hell's drain is it? Can we get the system sorted out so it works and people can do their job and give them the funding to do their job?

There is the other part: West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, for example, does not have a lot of money. Baw Baw shire is an area of 4000 square kilometres, and the council does not have the resources to clean all the drains. So before we go into flood mapping and flood overlays and everything else, get the drainage system right, because it is so important. If you just start rezoning stuff because of flood overlays, you will lose more land, and that is not good for anyone. We are not making any more land; we have to use the land we have.

In closing, there were a couple of amendments received about 5 minutes before this debate. The member for Caulfield has spoken to those. I would have thought the government would have had their

act together a little bit sooner than that. We will obviously deal with that in due course. As far as the MFR goes and as far as the construction industry goes, thank goodness someone saw some sense in it, because this government had no idea what this was going to do to the construction industry. When you are trying to get more homes in the market, more people into homes, you have to make it easier. That is my contribution done, but thank goodness the MFR got reversed.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:43): I am very happy to speak to – as far as I can within the time permitted, that is – the consumer protections that are being brought forward, very important ones, through this bill, as well as more broadly the modernisation of Victoria's building, housing and regulatory systems. I will just briefly speak to the modernising of event and festival approval, cutting to the purpose of the changes. The bill responds to issues identified through the government's events and festivals approval review, including uncertainty about when permits are required, inconsistent decision-making and overlapping approval processes. I cannot do it justice in the time provided. There are a lot of nuances to this, and I understand the vicissitudes of events indoors, outdoors et cetera and that the events industry more broadly – those who organise events – take these matters very seriously, as they should, because there are safety requirements, and I want to pay respect to that.

I will put two caveats: one, I believe the matter will be thoroughly transacted through both houses. Secondly, I think the member for Caulfield should be a little cautious about saying that we are trying to shut down fetes and other events as a net effect of the changes in this legislation. I just think perhaps that was a step too far, perhaps a few miles too far. It is important to be careful when we are talking about industry and the holding of events et cetera. Furthermore, I think that the member for Glen Waverley beautifully articulated that we are the major events capital. I do not see that changing anytime soon, because we do have a significant investment and impact, a very targeted approach, and the Victorian community turn up; that is the other side of the equation. There are all sides to these matters.

Anyway, coming back to the consumer protections, I want to zone in on what is actually a major focus of this bill, and that is protections for Victorians who purchase apartments. The bill introduces a decennial insurance scheme for new residential apartment buildings of more than three storeys to provide 10 years of insurance cover for relevant defects in major building elements after an occupancy permit is issued. As someone who lives in an apartment myself in a very tall apartment building – and I have a lot of residents who reach out to me regularly about certain defects et cetera and concerns about how they are going to get them rectified – I do understand that nervousness and anticipation when you buy in. And when you buy into any property you are always hoping for the best, that you can be confident that that property will meet reasonable expectations in terms of its ability to endure and also that you will not encounter unreasonable defects, or any defects, I should say, along the way in building; let me make an important caveat there. Apartment owners fundamentally should not be left carrying the financial burden of serious building defects outside their control, and I think that is what we are cutting to here. The scheme has been modelled to the extent possible on reforms in New South Wales and is designed to support higher quality construction and stronger consumer confidence in the apartment market.

More and more people are choosing to live in apartments. I know the member for Caulfield was shocked, and I do not know, he could not believe, perhaps, that people would want to live in activity centres and be near railway stations and good public transport and have accessibility perhaps to the arts and schools et cetera, but actually they do. I know there are many families that live in my area and are making a conscious choice because of the overall amenity and lifestyle that they are electing to be part of.

This insurance may be taken out by developers for the benefit of owners corporations and will operate as a first resort – I think that is an important point – no-fault insurance product, reducing the need for lengthy and costly litigation. And there is a second point that is really, really important: where a claim is accepted, insurance will arrange or pay for rectification work, helping owners to have serious defects fixed more quickly and effectively. I think in anyone's language proceeding with litigation is always

going to be costly and always going to be extremely stressful. You can never predict the outcome, necessarily. You will get the best possible advice, and oftentimes you might have, for example, a defect that might be corrected for 10 grand versus spending $100,000 even before you have hit the doors of the court. I am quoting figures from a recent matter that I heard about. That was before they had even got in the lawyers that they needed, the barristers, to be able to proceed to full-on litigation, and the distress – these matters can go on and on and on. So we can see that the purposive elements of these changes can be really impactful and are most welcome.

The bill also introduces reporting and information-sharing requirements for developers and insurers to strengthen oversight of the decennial insurance scheme by the Building and Plumbing Commission, and together with the existing developer bond these reforms significantly strengthen Victoria's consumer protection framework for apartment owners. I certainly take some comfort in that. I am speaking not necessarily for myself but for the many residents in the seat of Albert Park and many other seats around the state who very much are making that conscious choice: 'Yes, I want to live in an apartment. I don't necessarily want a garden to look after. I want to be in close proximity to certain lifestyle elements that suit me,' or perhaps they do not want long commutes or whatever it is, the good reasons that they have to invest in this way. But at the same time they want to have confidence that that purchase is going to be backed in. There is nothing more devastating than discovering defects and not really having a timeframe or appropriate parameters for them to be rectified, so these are really pleasing protections being brought about and really much needed.

Another element of this bill is supporting the first-resort home warranty scheme. The bill strengthens the operation, I should say – let me just make that qualification – of the first-resort home warranty scheme. It enables regulations to provide limited exemptions or delayed premium payments in appropriate circumstances – this is a very nuanced caveat – including for social housing developments that remain under government or community housing ownership. Why? It ensures protections remain available for future home owners without unnecessarily increasing the cost of delivering social and affordable housing. I was a little taken aback by the member for Caulfield, who was having a go at the building and construction of social, affordable housing by the Allan Labor government. I am like, 'Yes, you've jacked up to everything we've put forward.' I noticed one of the Liberal members for the Southern Metropolitan Region popped into the site at Barak Beacon trying to stir up trouble there. Also, I might add, the Greens political party did their best to try and stymie it. But I am pleased to say that that development is going really well and will be completed later this year; certainly there will be a 46 per cent uplift in social housing on that site, in spite of their opposition. You cannot just say one thing in here and do another thing out there; you have got to be consistent. The opposition do not have strong footing when it comes to supporting social and affordable housing, and I am really not going to cop that. I just thought that was a little bit loose and fast on their part and certainly not backed in in any way, shape or form by anything they have done out in the community.

Another element that I want to talk about briefly is flood risk. I live in a flood-prone area, and this is something that people should be very mindful of, but we are also making sure that the appropriate protections are in place ahead of construction. What I mean by that is the bill introduces powers to support implementation of a new, state-led approach to managing flood-prone land. Poor or inconsistent flood information can lead to costly redesigns, delays and uncertainty during development, so under the reforms the Minister for Housing and Building will be able to designate flood-prone areas of land based on advice from flood plain management authorities. This will ensure more accurate and up-to-date flood information is applied earlier in planning and building processes; we can see that is infinitely practical and important. The reforms will also improve transparency for potential purchasers of flood-prone land in updated section 32 statement requirements. That means that from the outset the purchaser knows what they are in for, so to speak. Together these changes will support faster and more informed decision-making for development of land while improving resilience to flood risks. I think that is extremely important. I do not think I need to elaborate on that fact as to why it is important, but it just shows the significance of the reforms being brought about through this

bill. I am pleased the opposition have said that they will support the bill, when you can see the importance that these reforms will have for Victorians.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (11:53): It is great to rise on the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. I nearly choked on my breakfast when I saw 'tax relief' on a Labor bill, I have to be honest, because it is not something that happens too often in this state, where you have tax relief. We have got the biggest and most expensive state in the country when it comes to taxes.

I welcome back the member for Narracan. It was great to listen to his contribution to this, because when we look at these bills and we look at them in detail, it is always good to go back to someone who has been in the industry and who was, I am going to say, a proud builder – I am sure he was a proud builder in his time. He has built many homes and he understands the impact of legislation and the impact of changes to regulations, not just the debate in here but how they impact the builder at the forefront who has to make the changes within their business and how it impacts the customers that they have to deal with when prices go up and what can happen with those. He also knows that good builders take care of things and take care of defects and everything over time, but you do need protections in place for consumers because there are some builders out there that probably should not be out there. During this discussion we have also over time met with the Housing Industry Association – I note that Steve Bright's name made it into *Hansard*; he will be happy his name is in there twice, to be honest – and we have had discussions with Master Builders Victoria and other associations. As you would imagine, there are plenty of builders out in my electorate, because we are one of the fastest growing communities in the state. My electorate now is, I think, the second fastest growing electorate in Victoria.

There are some things in here that I probably want to focus on. I know we have got some amendments in there. One of them is regarding the place-of-public-entertainment permits. The reason I want to focus on this is because of the impact on growing communities, particularly those who want to try and establish what we have had the pleasure of doing over such a long period of time in areas like Casey, formerly Berwick and Cranbourne before the amalgamation of the councils. Building a community is not easy. It is pretty easy to build houses. It is pretty easy to build roads. It is easy to plan how you are going to put your septic in and your water and your power et cetera. Out in Clyde North they might argue that it is hard to work out how to put phone reception in, but everything else they seem to have got down pat. They can build a school; it is infrastructure. They can build a hospital. But it is very difficult to build a community. Why is that important? Because if you do not build a community, then all you end up with is effectively the infrastructure and a disconnected area, which can obviously lead to an increase in crime. It creates social isolation. There are other things that happen within those communities. That is why I worry about the place-of-public-entertainment permits.

The events that I know bring our community together are large-scale in areas like Berwick. Anzac Day is probably one of our main ones. On Anzac Day we have two major events. I know there are members in this room who are from down our area. The member for Narre Warren North is here. We love catching up at 5:30 am on Anzac Day each year, and we have a bit of a chat. I think I am going to speak on behalf of the member for Narre Warren North as well. When we both stand there, it is heartwarming to see so many thousands of people turn up to one event. Whilst we are there for a specific reason, the commemoration of Anzacs, it is also a bringing together of the community. They meet new schools and they meet new groups. They meet new people.

The second one I go to – I actually think the member for Narre Warren North joined me at this one too last year – the main event in Berwick, is the 10:30 march. We all get to come down and commemorate. Each year we make decisions based on what the decision is for the morning. The RSL have got a connection, and if it is looking like it is going to bucket down rain, we make sure we have got some marquees down there, because we do not want our veterans sitting out in the rain on wet seats. Someone gets up and goes and sets that up. They get a company in to do it. Now the question would be: what permit do they need to put this infrastructure up? Do they need to get a permit? Are

they protected under their insurance if they do not have a permit? Who is responsible? Who is liable? These are questions that really are important to all of our RSLs, as they have to make these decisions on any given day.

All of these things, as I said, these community events, with the exemption of those under 5000, can get quite big quite quickly. Does it include markets? Berwick market has more than 5000 go through every single week. I am sure the Akoonah Park committee would be looking at this and going, 'What if?', because no-one can really explain it to them. That is the problem with the legislation and the way it is put. We are sending out a message that you may need a permit, and then they are not really sure exactly how it is going to impact them. It does not specify how exactly the new system will operate. When governments do not put that out in the first place, that is when you end up with these organisations having a genuine fear of how it is going to impact them in the longer term. What are the costs going to be? Who is going to end up paying those costs? There is concern about over-regulation of them. It is things like – every area has got them, and I will speak specifically to my electorate – those big markets. We have that big market in Akoonah Park that has thousands of people go through every week, which the permit system could now impact quite dramatically. That may run the risk of them thinking, 'Well, hold on, is it worthwhile?' Once you lose those markets, you do not get them back. We see that through many areas. For growth areas this is a huge concern. I just want to place it on record. I would love to see exactly how the regulation is going to operate. I think if you are going to bring this in, we need to find out the information in this place as fast as possible so we can go back out to our communities and ensure that they can continue these events. As I said, building community is not easy. Once you lose it, you generally do not get a chance to rebuild it in the future; you can lose it for life.

The other part, which I note that the member for Narracan, the Acting Chair now, also raised is around the flooding changes and the flooding overlays. I have genuine concerns when it comes to flooding overlays. The reason I say that is because this government brought in the fire overlays. Some of the challenges we have seen with that over the past decade have been hugely challenging in growth areas when we want to try and have some infill building. It is a big issue when you look at areas that we have got in Berwick. A prime example is on Manuka Road, on the corner of Allan Street. There is an area in there that the bushfire overlay has actually prevented them building on for seven years. It has literally gone through in the last few weeks.

Seven years ago they put forward a plan to put in townhouses and some nice houses in that area, some more affordable homes in that part of Berwick as well. That has been held up. Over seven years how much do you reckon a townhouse has gone up in the Berwick community, particularly in that part of Berwick? You would have been paying probably over $450,000 for a decent townhouse seven years ago. You are paying probably a million or more now in that area. So the government that tells us that they are all about affordable housing has now put another group out of the opportunity to live near Berwick high school, primary schools in the area and some of our private schools, not far from the highway and pretty close to the railway stations. Because of the delays of the government not wanting to make a decision, these people now are not given the opportunity to buy affordable homes in an area that they would have liked to have chosen to have lived.

But it is going to get worse – and exactly as you said, member for Narracan. You had a look at what was down in your area through Drouin and Warragul. Imagine this in Clyde and Clyde North, where it was all market gardens, and in the stroke of a pen many years ago the Labor government – those that stand up for the green wedge zones and tell us all about how they protect them – overnight and without telling anyone turned it all into urban development. But where they have done it we now see, as you said before, Acting Speaker Farnham, there is no longer the ability for the ground to absorb as much water. We have got roads, houses and a pretty ordinary drainage system, so these flooding areas are moving out further on the boundaries of this or moving further in, where we are waiting for the inner fill. I do not trust this government, unfortunately, to process these quickly enough and make

decisions fast enough on the flood overlays, which, again, will see the delays that we have seen with the bushfire overlays out in parts of my community.

Clyde and Clyde North should be a place of affordable living. It should be a place where people can go and buy a house and land package and have the opportunity to raise their family without having the extreme stress of some of the mortgages here in our state. But what we are going to see, because of the new flood overlay, is that areas in there will be delayed. Eventually the permits will be given, but it will be years later. We know that if the property prices continue to increase at the rate they are now we are going to actually make these areas unaffordable. Another generation is going to miss out, or they are going to have to go and actually get that much finance that they are going to have mum and dad working two and three jobs and then we will not have that opportunity to build the community that we want to have out there.

As I said, we have put forward our position in relation to the building legislation. I have raised my concerns in there, and I hope the government takes them seriously, because they are about ensuring people get the opportunity for affordable living.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (12:03): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. Acting Speaker Farnham, I am also always a keen listener to your contributions from your own experience in your previous life before coming here and your experience in and dedication to the building industry. It was also good to have listened to the contribution made by my very good friend here the member for Glen Waverley. This is another important bill and one that has several objectives, the first of those being to enable modernisation and reflect on current industry practices in the building industry by improving the place-of-public-entertainment permit scheme; enabling greater flexibility in the Building Act 1993 to incorporate relevant documents, including international standards, by reference; and improving the operations of the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. Acting Speaker, it is also good to know that you and those on the other side are supporting, not objecting to, this bill.

Events and festivals are a vital part of Victoria's cultural, social and economic life, in particular in our vibrant community in Clarinda and in the south-east of Melbourne. I am very lucky to represent such a diverse community, and my calendar is always filled with amazing celebrations and events, particularly from the many multicultural organisations that we have in the district. The multicultural festivals and events grant program is always a very popular program in my electorate. It is a great opportunity for community organisations to hold cultural festivals and events in Victoria and helps many multicultural Victorians to celebrate and preserve culture, share traditions and connect with one another. I have been very proud to attend and support many events locally funded under the program, and it is always great to see the broader community taking part in cultural events and developing an understanding of and respect for our different cultures.

One of the major events that we have locally is the Springvale Lunar New Year Festival. I am proud the Allan Labor government has supported this with a contribution of $400,000 across four years, and I recognise and acknowledge the contributions of the Springvale Asian Business Association, who always do an amazing job there. It has been more than 20 years of delighting and entertaining our community, with thousands of people coming together to enjoy the entertainment and attractions. I am always honoured to join with the local member the member for Mulgrave and neighbouring members of Parliament, councillors and community representatives to participate and to attend and to enjoy the many festivals there. The Allan Labor government is always proud to support festivals and events like this, because we believe that multiculturalism makes our state strong and more vibrant, and our festivals and events are important celebrations of our diversity. Our events and festivals are a vital part of Victorian cultural, social and economic life.

There are important changes in this bill. One is reforming the place-of-public-entertainment permit scheme to reduce unnecessary administrative burden whilst maintaining public safety, which is very important. This reform responds to issues identified through the government's events and festivals

approval review, including uncertainty about when event approvals are required, inconsistent decision-making, duplication across approval processes and late-stage uncertainty for organisers. We heard the member for Berwick say how he enjoys many of the events in his electorate, such as Anzac Day. The reforms enable a more risk-based and proportionate approval framework that offers clearer definitions, more guidance, an optional early certification process for prescribed temporary structures and added flexibility for existing buildings. These changes will support a vibrant events industry while keeping safety at the centre of the approval system, important changes modernising event and festival approvals that my community will be happy to learn about. I would like to also take this opportunity to shout out many of the events, once again, in my district, ones where we see more and more of our multicultural community. Thank you to Anil and many of his executive volunteers for hosting for the second year these events in my electorate.

Further changes will support stronger protections for apartment owners, including here. We know the challenges in housing and building at the moment. This is a concern across Victoria and in my electorate of Clarinda, and there is a lot of work being done to combat these challenges. This bill forms part of a broader package of reforms to Victoria's regulatory framework for housing and building matters, and we have seen many of those outlined in the building statement released by the Minister for Housing and Building in 2025, which outlines a suite of reforms to strengthen Victoria's building system and complements the goals of the housing statement released in September 2023.

Not long ago we were honoured to have the Minister for Housing and Building out to the beautiful Development Victoria site in Springvale South in my electorate to celebrate the completion of the 47 new townhouses at the Coomoora residential development there. I have been out doorknocking since, and it has been really great to meet with residents and to see them settle into their new homes and to see what Coomoora offers residents outside, with access to dedicated open space areas which make up 20 per cent of the site, including landscaping, car parks and also existing trees and outdoor recreation, where residents of the 47 homes can come and meet and have the kids play in the middle of the estate.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank and commend the minister on the developments. These deliver high-quality, affordable and sustainable homes, ensuring more Victorians have a place to call a home of their own. That is a major focus of this government. We want to continue to support Victorians through challenges in housing and building, and this is something that I hear a lot, particularly from my constituents in Springvale South and Clayton South, which have a really significant number of renters. Many of those are looking for their own home, and many are looking at buying an apartment to get into the housing market, and they want to have access and want to have confidence in this space. These are important changes in this bill, because apartment owners, as we know, should not be left carrying the cost of serious defects in a home that they have bought with the expectation that it was built safely and proudly.

This bill introduces a decennial insurance scheme, which as you said quite correctly in your contribution, Acting Speaker Farnham, is for new residential apartment buildings of more than three storeys. This will provide 10 years of cover for relevant defects in major building elements after an occupancy permit is issued.

There are several other changes that I am sure my colleagues will touch on, including the first-resort home warranty scheme, the change for safer land management and designations on flood-prone land, as well as changes to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and simpler land tax settings to owners whose principal place of residence is unoccupied due to construction and renovation, giving owners more flexibility. This bill is a practical, important package of reforms, and I commend the minister.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:13): It is a pleasure to follow my friend the member for Clarinda, who is such a great advocate for his community and for many of the multicultural communities across Victoria. He is an ornament to the Parliament, and I hope that he will be running again come November

and that he secures his re-election. I rise to speak on the Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026. The title is clunky, and there are a few things in it, but we are just going to have a little crack in the first instance at building regulation. There are consumer protections, land tax and some provisions regarding the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund in here as well. I should say the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund sounds like some sort of very benevolent thing, but it is funded by a hypothecated tax which has been the source of some controversy in this place.

I will say that, like many omnibus bills, there are parts I strongly support, there are parts I think might require a closer examination and there are a number of parts which are profoundly and deeply boring, which is fine; that is just part of the gig. But I want to focus my remarks on what I believe to be one of the most important aspects of the bill, and that is regarding apartment buyers, because we have seen an outbreak of apartment faults and defects in Melbourne that have caused enormous economic harm and enormous social harm not just right across my community but right across Victoria. We know that Melbourne is changing. Whether we like it or not, our city is growing and is growing quickly, and we need more homes. In my view, greater housing density in the right locations is not only inevitable but necessary. The alternative is pushing more and more families further away from jobs, from schools, from public transport and from services, while asking taxpayers to fund ever-expanding infrastructure on the urban fringe.

Infrastructure Victoria, a very good organisation and a well-led and well-managed organisation, have made a compelling case for this. They estimate that Melbourne needs 1.3 million additional homes by 2051. Before we get too alarmed about that, that is only a generation away – 25 years will go really quickly – and 1.3 million homes is a staggering number. Infrastructure Victoria have consistently argued that accommodating more people in established suburbs makes better use of the existing infrastructure, reduces pressure for endless urban expansion and improves access to jobs, services, public transport and open space. I think intuitively we understand that. I think intuitively people get that it is better to run more frequent services on an existing railway line than to build a new railway line. When I say better, I mean it is more economically efficient. I think we intuitively understand that parkland that currently has, let us say, dozens of visitors a day but can easily accommodate hundreds of visitors a day is obviously going to be more efficiently used if there are more residents in its immediate proximity. I think Victorians understand that.

Infrastructure Victoria has also found that infrastructure to support growth on the urban fringe can cost up to four times more than accommodating growth in established areas, and that is why activity centres have become so important. I support them. It is not necessarily a universally popular idea in my part of the world, in Ringwood, but in the eastern suburbs alone, Ringwood, Mitcham, Nunawading and Blackburn have all been identified as locations that will accommodate significant housing growth in the years ahead. Those are three suburbs in my electorate and one that is partially in my electorate. Indeed the *Ringwood Activity Centre Plan* contemplates at least 8200 additional homes by 2051. There were some issues with the way in which that plan was put. Maroondah City Council, one of the more forward-thinking councils, had done a whole bunch of work on this and then got clobbered by arbitrary government rules about walkability and exactly where the circle was going to be drawn – and about if it was in fact a circle. Maroondah City Council had done a bunch of work getting their layouts right. So I continue to encourage government to look more carefully at the work that at least Maroondah has done in pre-empting some of these necessary changes.

We know of course that those additional homes will largely be apartments, townhouses and other medium- and high-density housing options. I think that is an important part of addressing the shortage, but we have got to protect apartment buyers. Apartment owners deserve exactly the same protections as other home owners, and that is where this becomes pretty important. I have spent a lot of time with Samantha Reece from Australian Apartment Advocacy on a range of the issues affecting apartment owners, and the stories are remarkably, disturbingly and distressingly similar, not just across Victoria but indeed across the nation. Someone saves for years to buy their first home, they finally get the keys

and a defect emerges. It might be, and typically is, around waterproofing or structural issues or it could be the fire safety systems. Suddenly the owners corp is presented with a repair bill for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars. If the builder has gone bust, has disappeared or cannot meet the costs, well, who pays? It is not the builder and it is not the developer, it is the owners. Ordinary folk who thought they were buying a home suddenly find themselves staring down special levies for tens of thousands of dollars, and those moneys are near impossible to finance.

My great friend Brett Elliot, a home financier of incomparable skill, will tell you that it is very easy to finance vanilla things but it is very difficult to finance things that are off template, like special levies for apartments that have already been financed to be able to be purchased in the first place. That is not a theoretical problem, that is happening right now. So I welcome the introduction of the decennial liability insurance. It is not a silver bullet – of course it is not – and it will not stop defects from occurring, but it does provide that additional layer of very important protection for people who are undertaking the biggest purchase of their lives. Australian Apartment Advocacy and Sam Reece have strongly supported the reforms, and in my view, they are right to do so. A young couple buying their first apartment in Blackburn should not have fewer protections than someone buying a detached house, a pre-existing dwelling, in Heathmont. Home ownership is home ownership, and no matter the type of home, Victorians should have confidence that the biggest purchase of their lives is protected. As our housing mix changes, our consumer protections of course must change with it. So I commend that part of the bill.

There are also a bunch of changes in this bill to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. As I have mentioned, that is funded by a hypothecated tax, which is somewhat controversial. Some of these changes are sensible, and I think expanding the volunteer rebates is sensible, but there are a couple of quirks that I would encourage the government to take a look at, perhaps in the other place. I think it is good to make it easier for volunteers and retirement villages to access the rebates. I welcome the introduction of a levy offset for community housing organisations, and I say that community housing organisations are magnificent organisations. Those providers perform an extraordinary role delivering affordable and social housing to Victorians who would otherwise struggle to secure a place to live. The Community Housing Industry Association has said the measure will deliver some $2 million worth of savings across the sector. That is a very, very good thing. That is money that can be redirected into the maintenance of these existing homes, supporting tenants and delivering additional social and affordable housing.

But there is a bit of a question on this because the government is proposing to exempt in its entirety all Homes Victoria land from that levy. I support relief to community housing associations, but I think it ought to rank pari passu with Homes Victoria housing. The reality is community housing associations exist to address market failure. Homes Victoria exists to address market failure. They are servicing incredibly similar demographics – people who otherwise would not be able to afford a market rent or would not be able to afford a market price for a home. I just say that it raises the question about why there is this differentiation between Homes Victoria, as a provider of social housing, and community housing associations, as providers of social housing. So I raise that matter, and I hope the government might very well address it.

There are some other sensible reforms in this bill. The new framework for flood-prone land and disclosure requirements will help ensure that prospective purchasers have better information about the risks. I have a minute left, and so I cannot go too deeply into the contracting processes for buyers, but I have dealt with purchasers of apartments who have presented to me the contracts they signed that number 80, 100 or 120 pages full of legalese. They are incredibly complicated documents, and we are talking, frankly, about people who do not necessarily have access to lawyers to help them to decipher all of it and who frequently sign these things unrepresented. I think there is a big job to do to make sure that people understand what they are signing better and to ensure that developers produce contracts that are readily understood by the purchasers. Apartment buyer protection measures are the most significant feature of this legislation. They are by and large good measures, and I congratulate

the government, at least on this occasion, for bringing these measures to us and for bringing this bill to the house.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (12:23): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (12:24): I rise on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026, and I will first of all put our position in relation to this from the coalition, the Liberals and Nationals, that we will be supporting this bill. There are many reasons we will be supporting this, but I think as a starting point we must understand why we are where we are when it comes to needing police reservists back in police stations here in Victoria. Any person that woke up this morning and managed to read either or both of the major papers, being the *Herald Sun* and the *Age*, would have read another article about more crime here in Victoria, and they could actually understand, because they had some stats that highlighted some of the major issues here in this state.

On car theft, over 32,000 cars were stolen in a 12-month period. That is getting to a stage where each and every day people are genuinely concerned that when they park their car at a train station, it might not be there when they get back. The biggest impact of this is that insurance companies, as we saw today, have had to pay out $243 million in claims for 12,000 of those cars just in Victoria – $243 million has been paid out in insurance payments for stolen cars here in Victoria. The next state is Queensland, with just over $100 million. That is a big difference: just over $100 million paid out in Queensland, $243 million paid out here in Victoria. If I combine every state total of what was paid out on insurance for stolen cars, it still does not add up to what was paid out here in Victoria.

That is a stat that people should be worried about. We are just talking an average car, a Toyota RAV4 from 2020. The insurance rates on that vehicle now are skyrocketing in one state and not others. The saddest part about it was when a minister was asked about it he turned around and said it was because of the technology in the cars. That is why the cars are getting stolen: it has been made too easy by the manufacturers. From what I could hear from the minister I think his message to those people that are struggling to pay their insurance because it is too expensive is that what they should do is go out and buy a new car with newer technology, with less chance of being stolen. All those families out there that are struggling with the extra $500 in insurance, if you can just go out and buy yourself a $50,000 or $60,000 car, there is less chance of it being stolen. That would work if we were not seeing Audis being stolen, Mercedes being stolen, BMWs being stolen and Maseratis being stolen. It does not matter here in this state. They are stealing any car they can get their hands on.

There are two groups of people that are profiteering out of this. There is a bunch of crooks, some that are doing it just for a bit of a thrill. There are others that are probably selling on those cars, putting them on shipping containers and sending them overseas. The other one making money on this, believe it or not, is the Victorian state government, because insurance keep going up and every time it goes up there are new duties. The stamp duty goes up. All this extra money comes in from taxes because there are so many taxes on insurance at a state level. No wonder they are not trying to stop the crime happening here in this state. They are profiteering out of it. That is a massive concern here in Victoria.

There are plenty of reasons that we need to make some changes, and it is not just around this bill today, but I will go into that in a second. Victoria's crime rate, everyone knows, is at a 20-year high. Everyone knows it. We are getting to a position now that these are record crime levels in almost every category, across every crime, in every region and every part of Victoria. This is not a Melbourne metro problem. A crime in this state is committed every 50 seconds. I have not even got to 5 minutes in – 10 crimes have been committed here in this state in that time. There is a theft from a retail store every 13 minutes. Someone is stealing something from a retail store every 13 minutes. Again, someone is profiteering from it. Kids or whoever is stealing it, whether it is for themselves or others that go on in organised crime, are taking it off and selling it. But I can tell you who is paying for it: every person in Victoria who goes shopping at Coles, Woolworths, Aldi or your local stores, because they have got to recover their costs somewhere and their insurance bills are going up and they all pass that on to the final person, the consumer. That is what is impacting partly not just our crime crisis but the cost-of-living crisis here in our state. We need to stop it.

There is a serious assault every 28 minutes here in this state. And as I said today, a copper going home from work, from protecting the community this weekend, was walking through Southbank and was set upon by three people and assaulted in the street. Why is it that a copper who has done his job, his time, his shift, to protect us cannot even walk home safely? How do you reckon that copper felt the next morning when he woke up and read on the front page of the paper that one of those crooks had just been let go from court with a 12-month good behaviour bond for burning down a factory and causing $4.6 million in damage? In what state, in what country – in what place anywhere else in the world – can you burn down a factory and cause $4.6 million in damage and walk away with a 12-month good behaviour bond? Nowhere. That is why we have got a crime crisis here in this state – because the consequences are weaker than I have ever seen in my time here.

Every week there are nine carjackings across Victoria. Carjackings used to be when you watched *1990: The Bronx Warriors*, a movie that was out many years ago. All the carriages through New York were graffitied, and you hopped in your car and you saw every so often a carjacking. It was something that happened in the movies. There are nine a week on the streets here in Victoria. Nine times a week someone is sitting in their car and someone comes up and assaults them to get that car. They steal the car from them at that spot at that time.

The reason this is all happening is because we have got more than 1500 vacancies on Victoria Police rosters. It does not matter where you are in the state. There are shortages in stations in Werribee. There are shortages in stations up in Swan Hill. There are shortages in Mildura. There are shortages down in Drouin. There are shortages down in Mallacoota. There are shortages in Warrnambool and Portland. Heaven forbid, we have even got a station that has no police, not even to respond – not even out on the road. So when the government say, 'The reason we're closing these stations is to put more police on the beat,' they should explain that to the people in Clyde North. They do not even give them police to hop in the van. The consequences of that were seen this weekend. We saw a violent attack with machetes and baseball bats in a shopping centre, and blood was all over the ground. People do not want to go shopping there – their own community are now avoiding it. That is the crime crisis we have here in this state.

All of these things that have been happening do not even go into the area that I know the member for Brighton talks about a lot: aggravated burglaries. Victoria recorded 7878 aggravated burglaries in a 12-month period. That is getting to the stage of nearly one an hour. We are seeing aggravated burglary at nearly one an hour. Many of us in this place will have people contact their office who are victims of crime. When you speak to them, you know the pressure that is on them. They do not ring their local member of Parliament after that unless they are pretty stressed out. Imagine being home and having someone break in. You walk out of your room – this happened to one of the local dads I spoke to, Mark, and his wife Tenille – and there are two guys in the hallway and your daughters are in the house. How would you feel? I know what I would want to do and, let us be honest, what most people would want to do. We are seeing this happen too often. I have spoken to it in here before.

The member for Mildura introduced me to one of the dads up in Mildura who got a phone call. He and his wife were at a concert in Perth and the phone kept ringing. You know what it is like if your daughters are ringing – you go out and answer it because you want to make sure they are okay. He answered the phone: 'Dad, someone's in the house.' He was in Perth – what could he do? They were in Mildura. It was an aggravated burglary in their house. They rang the coppers, and the coppers were brilliant – they turned out as quickly as they could – but those kids will never feel safe in their own home. That is what this crime crisis creates. It creates a place of absolute uncertainty and unsafety. People do not feel safe in their own communities, in their own cars or in their own homes.

That is why we will support the bill – because we do support bringing reservists in. I may be corrected, but I think there is still one reservist in the system. If they are not, it is not that long since they left. The reservists in the past used to do a lot of the admin work. They would also help out with rosters – they would put the rosters together. Obviously a lot more of that is electronic now. Putting the reservists in the station means we can bring back some experience. We can bring back police officers who understand investigations and understand the operations of a police station. The rules are in the bill: you have to have done more than two years. I guarantee you there are a lot of coppers out there that have done 10 or 15 years and are no longer in the job but would not mind going in and helping out. They want to educate and train the next generation as well and work with them. These are good men and women who have served our state and are willing to come back and help serve it again. Can I just say thank you to them for coming in and doing this role. The pay rate is not the biggest pay rate in the world. They are not coming in here for money, they are coming in here because they know that they can genuinely make a difference.

One of the biggest reasons that I am going to support this bill today is because the number of people who are resigning from Victoria Police and the years of experience we are losing will impact the next generation of coppers coming through. They will not be able to have the same mentors that I had when I was there, the ones I still remember, like Leo van Tol, who every time that I did something right or wrong stood by me and made sure I learned how to do it better next time. If it was Nigel McGuire White and you went out and spoke to someone at the flats in Prahran and you went in there and you did it and you came out, but you did not do it exactly as it should have been done, Nigel would work with you to make sure you got it right. There are coppers that have been there for years that pass on to the next generation how to be a better copper. It is not the stuff you can learn in a book at the academy. The academy teaches you not to get sued. That is what it teaches you. The coppers you work with teach you how to become a copper, and we are losing that. At a retirement event for Victoria Police that came through recently – they have their big event once a year; it used to be about 50 or 60 people they would get along to celebrate and thank them for the work they had done – there were 300-plus, on one Friday. Now, you do not get invited there if you have done two years in the service. These were people who were long-serving police officers, and 300-plus of them were going in one go. That is a lot of experience that we are losing from Victoria Police.

The reason we are going to support this bill is that hopefully a few of them will go, 'I'm going to go back. I want to go back in and pass on the skills that I have.' They may have been a detective from homicide. They may have been in the armed robbery squad. Some of them have been around long enough that they would have been in the old Asian gang squad. These are the skill sets that we need and that we can pass on, such as how to talk to people. Going through the academy you learn in a very controlled environment. They do the best they can with what they have got. They teach the best things they can in those environments. The academy over time has improved so much on the skill sets that people walk out with because of the way they can set up the role-plays, but the reality is that it is always a controlled environment.

That changes when you get out and you walk into someone's home for the first time for a domestic violence situation. You are told the things that can go wrong, but until you experience it you do not really get it. A good example of that is if you go into a place for a domestic violence call and you know who the victim is and you know who the offender is. You already know it; you have heard the stories

before. You walk in and there is a bloke, and you know he is the offender. Then you go in to do the right thing and you go to arrest him and remove him, and you get attacked by the victim, because the victim is scared. They are not attacking you because they do not like you, and they are not attacking you because they hate coppers; they are attacking because they are fearful that they will be blamed for you arresting their offender, their perpetrator. These are the things you cannot train for much in the academy until they happen, and that is why you need the experience in the street. If you send in two constables without that experience, the consequences will be horrendous.

Over time in Victoria Police we have seen a decline in the numbers. We have more than 500 fewer full-time members in there, but we have also got 1500 vacancies and we are starting to get to a position now where the Chief Commissioner of Police is coming out and saying that by closing or reducing the hours in stations we can put more police on the beat. The reality is we used to have both. That is how you keep the community safest. The real way to fix this – whilst this is a very, very, very small bandaid for a very big broken leg – is to actually bring in 3000 new police and ensure that we can recruit the numbers we need so we can open the stations again and get police back out on the beat. The advantage of this program is now we can do that as well by bringing them in and having the experience back at the station to work with these recruits and newer police officers as they go through.

I met up with a couple of the coppers recently from the academy. They will tell you now that there are plenty of people that want to come in, and the government are going to be patting themselves on the back at the moment, going on about double squads and what have you right now. It is a shame they did not do it last year when we had the vacancies. All of a sudden they have just realised there is a problem when it comes to going through the academy. Let me assure you the one thing that every copper that I have spoken to has turned around and said they do not really trust this government on is that on 1 December, if they are still in government, there go the double squads, back down to what they were, because, let us be honest, they have a plan. This government has got a plan to cut the numbers in Victoria Police. Let us be honest, that is their saving. And there is no bigger evidence –

Members interjecting.

Brad BATTIN: They can all laugh, but let us be honest, there are 500 less police today, full-time equivalent, than there were under Daniel Andrews. Jacinta Allan is the one, the Premier is the one, that has cut by that. They have cut them. There are 1500 vacancies from when Daniel Andrews was there, until the new Premier. The new Premier has come in, has obviously been left the debt from the previous and is now cutting Victoria Police and cutting safety here in our state.

A member interjected.

Brad BATTIN: I heard 'Not true'. The facts are in their own figures. In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings they came out again last week. There are less police today than there were two years ago by 500 full-time equivalent police. There are 1500 vacancies on the rosters. There are more than 40 police stations closed. Mernda police station, a 24-hour station here in this state, is now going down to two or three days a week. Whittlesea is going to 'by appointment'. I am just going to ask you: how many people can make an appointment for when an aggravated burglary is going to happen? I do not think you can. How many people can make an appointment at their local police station and say, 'I'm getting chased by somebody. I'm the victim of domestic violence, and the place of safety I want to go is the local police station'? You just cannot. This is where this government has failed when it comes to Victoria Police, and as I said, this bill here is a very, very minor fix for it.

I think it is really important that we do what we can do to make a genuine difference when it comes to community safety here in Victoria. We need 3000 new police. We need to recruit 3000 new police, get them through the academy and get them onto the beat. Why? Because there are 1507 vacancies – we can fill them – and we need 1500 extra so we can get the number back up with the population growth we have had here in this state. The population here in Victoria is growing at a rapid rate. In Casey we have got nearly 400,000 people or probably just over. Compare that to Tasmania. We have

actually got a population similar to that of Tasmania. They have got a whole police force; we have got three stations, and one has no police. There is a big difference in what is happening in those communities. We are lucky to have three or four vans on the road at night. In Tasmania they have got many stations open all night – a big difference. Crime rates are different too. Maybe that is reflective of having Victoria Police available to go on the road.

We want to make sure that train stations, as we promised in 2010, become places of safety. The way to do that was by putting PSOs at the train stations on platforms, and this government is removing them from 119 stations across Victoria, across metropolitan Melbourne. 119 places that have been places of safety are now no longer places of safety. They are not going to be there. People will just feel more unsafe on the public transport system. There has been a 74 per cent increase in crime at train stations, and the answer to that 74 per cent increase in crime has been to remove the PSOs. No-one has been able to explain that to me logically – that the best way to solve crime on platforms is to remove the PSOs that are there to keep people safe. There is just zero logic in it.

We need to give police the powers for stronger pursuit laws, because each and every time these young offenders steal a car – 32,000-odd here in Victoria – and the police go to pursue them, they basically call off the pursuit. Nobody is willing to take a risk. If we keep letting them get away, they are going to keep stealing the cars. They know that all you have to do is put the foot down – 'The coppers aren't chasing you. You'll be right; you'll get away with it' – and they are getting away with it. Some will say, 'But we can go and catch up with them later on because it is safer. No worries.' Seventy per cent of stolen cars here in Victoria remain unsolved crimes, so they are not catching up with them later on. They are getting away with it, and the kids know it. Do you know what they do then? They tell their mates. That is why we have gone from about 100 in the cohort that were really the worst offenders here in our state to over 600 that are the worst offenders here in our state, because the recruitment drive is simple: 'Come out, earn a little bit of money, steal a car. Coppers can't get you. If they do, don't stress. Go to court. We'll get out before they finish their paperwork. Get bail. Eventually, when we go for sentencing, we'll get a 12-month good behaviour bond and be back out again.' And it continues and it continues. Or even better, you can commit 109 offences and go to court and get all 109 dropped because of doli incapax – yet you still managed to google before you left how you could do these offences, and you then explain later on, 'I didn't know the difference between right and wrong.' That is a broken system.

The pursuit laws are to ensure that Victoria Police can continue a pursuit knowing that they will be protected, that they will have a government from this side who will stand with them and protect them in a legal manner so that if they go into a pursuit they will basically not be able to get in trouble unless there is absolute negligence. The other side of it is that, in the event a person starts a pursuit, they should be charged for initiating a pursuit, so there should be a charge specifically for initiating a pursuit. If during that pursuit, there is an accident – not necessarily them but another car from the pursuit, even a police car – and there is a death, the person who started the pursuit should be held accountable. They started the pursuit. Let us send a clear message: it is not okay to steal a car and take off when police chase you, and if you put the community at risk you will be held accountable. Let us send a pretty clear message: a Wilson-led government stand with police and not with the crooks. We will stand with the victims and make sure offenders are held accountable.

We have seen, I am going to say by now, 10, 15, 20, 30 media releases saying, 'We've got the toughest bail laws in the country,' yet every day another story comes up and someone who is on bail has committed another crime. It happens over and over and over again, so much so that I spoke to a copper in regional Victoria who arrested a person for a double stabbing and the next day he walked past the crook and said, 'Hold on, I arrested you yesterday.' He literally turned around and said, 'So what, boss? Bailed,' and walked off – not a care in the world. Now the copper feels pretty guilty about what goes on. We have seen the outcomes of what happens when people continuously get bail and they continue to commit crime. You only need to look up the car accident up near Mildura recently where one died and one kid ended up in hospital with serious injuries – they were the offenders.

But that is also the outcome of weak bail laws. That is the outcome of weak sentencing. These kids, if you have the proper sentencing regime, if you have the proper programs to intervene with them, if you have the proper programs to work with them and their families and their community and you can keep them out of the life of crime, you will save their lives, because these kids are dying. I am going to tell you here, I went into Victoria Police not to see crooks die but because we could actually make a change. Programs that were run made a difference. The police cannot run those programs anymore; they have not got the staff. The old gym system, the Police Citizens Youth Clubs, where coppers interacted with these kids and they had the programs with the boxing, are nearly all gone. We have got to look at bringing some of this stuff back, actually getting them back involved and building the respect levels again. Some of these kids may still go down a path of crime, but it is different because they will have respect for the Victoria Police. And if you can get police out there understanding that as well – it is those old-school coppers, the ones that have been there that know how to deal with these kids. It is those ones that we need to make sure are still working with those kids and that they are building the respect between them. They build a great level of respect. It does not stop them committing crime all the time, but it does build the respect and the crime is different. One of the biggest things that have changed in the last 10 years is that whilst our crime rate has increased it is the violent crimes that have increased. The home burglaries have plateaued recently, but the aggravated burglaries have increased, because these kids do not care. The car thefts have increased, but carjackings continue to massively increase. Kids walking around the streets with machetes and batons is almost normal.

I refer back quite often to the book by Geoff Canada – and I have always said, we will never get there – which is *Fist Stick Knife Gun*. It is the New York model. It is about how it eventuated from kids that had fights in the street until eventually someone brought a stick to the fight. Then they started to have fights with sticks until someone brought a knife to the fight. The natural progression from that was that someone brought a gun, and that led to the gun violence through America. I hope we do not have the same gun culture here. We do not have the same availability of guns here in Victoria or Australia. But I never thought we would get to the stage we have got now, where 16-year-olds are turning up with machetes in shopping centres in broad daylight and they do not care. They literally do not care. In Chapel Street we saw someone running down the street with a knife. In Lygon Street we saw a group attack each other with machetes, and we are almost coming to a stage where it is a normalised part of Victoria. It is not normal – it is just not. The best way to stop those things, particularly when you think of those areas – Chapel Street, Lygon Street – is to put coppers back on foot patrol in the area. Give them the police resources so they can have the foot patrols down there.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Brad BATTIN: The bill is about putting 200 reservists in one station. I guarantee, member for Pascoe Vale, this will not put one extra copper on the street, because these are for the 40 stations that are already shut. The coppers are already out there, according to you. According to the Labor government the coppers are already back out on the street. That is why they have closed the stations. These ones are to reopen part of those stations, not to put extras out there. If you want to put more coppers on the street, recruit 3000 Victoria Police, put them back out in the stations where they are needed, bring back bike patrols, bring back foot patrols and bring back where community safety is also around a perception. When coppers walk down the street in a group of three or four and sit down and have a coffee, have a chat to some of the business owners, walk along Chapel Street at night in their hi-vis vests and chat to some of the people waiting at nightclubs, that is what changes crime, because people feel safer and crooks look around and see coppers everywhere and go, 'I'm not committing a crime today.' If you wanted to move the drug habit, which we did back in the day in Dandenong, you brought in the force response unit. I could not stand them half the time, because they came in and gave out fines for everything, and all the crooks would get angry down there and cause us more drama. But it worked because we would go in there and start to get the ones that were offending – and back then you used to get jail time, so they would catch the offenders for committing crimes – put them away, and we would see the crime increase again six and 12 months later after they got out of jail. Now you see it increase 90 minutes later, because they get out on bail.

These are the things that you can do, but you need the resources for it. As I have said, we do support bringing in the 200 reservists, but it needs to be part of a broader plan. Let me assure you, under a Wilson-led Liberals–Nationals government we have the plan to make Victoria safer, and that includes the 3000 police. That includes a genuine break bail, face jail, so if you commit crimes whilst you are on bail you get one strike and you are out. We will protect our coppers with proper pursuit laws to ensure that they are protected and those that start the pursuits are held to account here in our state. We will make sure the police have the resources to put more police on the beat and to protect the community. We will get the PSOs back on the railway stations so people know where the places of safety are. One of the things that are most important is that we will reopen the 40 police stations that the Labor government have shut or reduced the hours for, so when you need the police you know where to go and when you get there you will not be met with a closed sign; you will be met with support from a Victoria Police officer who is there to help you and make sure that you stay safe.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Just before I call the member for Pascoe Vale, I will remind the chamber of the use of proper titles.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (12:54): I rise to speak in support of the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. In doing so I commend the Minister for Police for bringing this bill to the chamber and the work of Victoria Police in informing it and guiding it, which of course I support in my capacity as the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Safety as well. Everyone across our community deserves the right to be and feel safe in their homes, in their streets and in their suburbs, workplaces and communities, and that is why the government will continue to take strong action to keep our communities safe, strong action on crime and strong action on the root causes of crime – very much contrary to the comments of the shadow minister, which I will turn to in a moment. As part of this I would like to acknowledge and commend the work and the role of Victoria Police in keeping us all safe 365 days a year, 24 hours a day right across our community. We know the risk that police face every single day when they put on the uniform and go out on duty, and we saw the devastating consequences and risks of what that means on 26 August last year in Porepunkah. We continue to commemorate Detective Leading Senior Constable Neal Thompson and Senior Constable Vadim De Waart-Hottart.

We must continue doing more than ever to keep our community and our police safe by giving them the powers, the tools, the resources and the investments they need, they deserve and they request in doing their job to keep us all safe. Again, contrary to the comments of the shadow minister, we have continued to take that strong action. We have appointed the new Victoria Police commissioner Mike Bush, who is now a year into the role and very much working towards modernising the deployment of Victorian police resources. We have invested $5 billion in Victoria Police since 2014. We have provided police officers with a pay rise, recognising their work. We have recruited more police – again, contrary to those comments. 3600 more police have been recruited under this government since 2014. Victoria has the largest police force in Australia – period, full stop – with 15,500 sworn police officers and 1400 PSOs. Our Made for More campaign, which received more money in the recent state budget, has seen applications skyrocket to five-year highs, the amount of people applying to join the police force, with 8700 applications last year alone. The police academy is continuing to facilitate double squads graduating every two weeks, with 1300 new recruits each year, 52 recruits every two weeks.

In terms of laws, we continue to progress strong laws, including the bill that is before us today of course, starting with our tough bail laws to crack down on violent, dangerous and serious repeat offending. We have implemented adult time for violent crime so that serious, violent young criminals face the same consequences as adults; life sentences for recruiting a child to commit serious crimes; and tougher laws and measures to crack down on organised crime, bikie gangs and illicit tobacco. We have tripled the number of tobacco licensing inspectors. Just today Minister Erdogan announced the introduction into the Parliament of new laws around closure notices for tobacco premises that sell illicit tobacco.

These laws are making a difference already. Remand decisions where a judge sentences someone to jail have increased by nearly 70 per cent. That is 10,000 more offenders that have been remanded since these laws have been brought into effect. Bail revocations have increased by 84 per cent. Children's Court bail refusals are up by more than a third, and overall bail refusals are now at record highs. We have also of course introduced the nation's first ban on machetes and other measures to take dangerous weapons off our streets, and that has led to 17,500 machetes being seized by Victoria Police and over 12,000 being surrendered. Almost 30,000 machetes have been taken off our streets since the machete laws were introduced by this state, which the opposition continue to campaign against. We have introduced brand new offences for assaulting workers and posting and boasting about crime online, and we have introduced serious vilification reforms.

We are listening to Victoria Police about how they deploy their resources too, with a new intelligence-led PSO model enabling Victoria Police to put PSOs where they are needed, when they are needed, based on real police intelligence. As well there is over $8 million in funding to support Operation Pulse, which is seeing PSOs patrolling shopping precincts to keep families, workers and shoppers safe. We are boosting more PSO resources even further, with $44 million in this year's budget to recruit at least an extra 50 PSOs. In terms of crime prevention, we have established the violence reduction unit, which is investing in local place-based initiatives and youth crime early intervention diversion programs, including community safety and social workers in schools, which we are funding through organisations like Blue Light, the Les Twentyman Foundation and so much more. As parliamentary secretary I am delighted to be working very closely with the VRU and its CEO Andrea Davidson to progress that very important work.

One of the biggest issues that were not mentioned by the opposition speaker in his opening contribution was the number one law and order issue in this state, which is family violence. He did not even go anywhere near that.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge in the gallery His Excellency Dr Siswo Pramono, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, and Yohannes Jatmiko Heru Prasetyo, who is the Indonesian Consul-General in Victoria. Welcome.

Members

Minister for First Peoples

Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today I will answer questions for the portfolio of First Peoples, the Minister for Ports and Freight will answer questions for the portfolio of roads and road safety and the Minister for Sport and Major Events will answer questions for the portfolio of community sport. For the period of time that the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs is not in the chamber, I believe the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing will be delighted to answer those questions.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Motor vehicle theft

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. This morning the Minister for Police once again blamed car manufacturers for Victoria being the car theft capital of Australia. Does the Premier agree with the Minister for Police?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In addressing the Leader of the Liberal Party's question, I believe the Minister for Police did no such thing. In a week where the Leader of the Opposition has shifted positions on a number of matters, I think it is difficult to take anything the Leader of the Opposition has to say at face value. This is a serious matter. Certainly those of us on this side of the house take community safety incredibly seriously, which is why in supporting the work of Victoria Police, the largest police force in the nation, we thank Victoria Police for the important work that they are doing.

We understand that motor vehicle theft is a serious issue. It is also a concerning and for some traumatic experience to happen to anyone. It is just unacceptable. That is why, in backing the work of Victoria Police, we are taking advice from Victoria Police, who tell us that organised crime is a big issue behind this matter, where we know that organised crime is recruiting young people to do their dirty work and treating them like disposable assets. That is why we have introduced a maximum life sentence for people who recruit children for serious crime. It is also why we are supporting those young people –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the Premier is debating the issue. The question is about why Victoria is the worst – not that the crime exists but that it is so far beyond. If it assists the house, I can make available the insurance council's media release, which simply is headed 'Victoria still leads Australia's car crime insurance claims'.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: We will continue to support the work of Victoria Police and, alongside that, that is why we have strengthened our bail laws. We are seeing far stricter bail tests, and those stricter bail tests are working as bail refusals are at a record high. We will continue to work hard to support Victoria Police to deal with these issues where organised crime is behind so much of this behaviour, and again I thank Victoria Police for their work.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Why have car theft claims surged in Victoria while declining in every other state, putting significant pressure on the insurance premiums of hardworking Victorians?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I draw the Leader of the Liberal Party's attention back to my comments in the answer to the substantive question. Victoria Police tell us that organised crime is a big part of the challenge here, where they are recruiting young children, and it is why we are introducing tough new laws to punish those organised crime people who use young children. It is also why the work of the violence reduction unit is so important.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, this time on relevance, Speaker, the question was specifically about why Victoria is worse than every other state, where the claims are going backwards, and the Premier has not gone near that.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was also referring to the important work of the violence reduction unit. This is taking a new approach to the challenges that I acknowledge are there with too much youth offending. I do note that those opposite do not support the violence reduction unit. They would cut the violence reduction unit. We will support Victoria Police and we will support the violence reduction unit to support young people turning away from crime.

Ministers statements: rental reform

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (14:08): There are only two things that are certain in politics: Labor delivers and the Liberals cut. No-one knows that better than the one-third of Victorians who are renters. Labor has delivered more than 150 rental reforms to balance the scales and make renting fairer. We have banned no-fault evictions because no renter should be kicked out of their

home for no reason. We have ended the dreaded double bond because renters should not have to find a few thousand dollars just to move house. We have banned rental bidding, making it illegal to charge more than the advertised price. But we know those opposite love a bidding war. They have been running one for the leadership for years, and the price keeps on going up for that leadership. We are capping the cost of breaking a lease because not everyone can get a bailout just to stay in the building. We are investing $98 million in the Victorian renter rights program so renters know what their rights are and have somewhere to turn, which is exactly what those opposite would cut. We know they love a landlord. The biggest one in the house is sitting across from me with $40 billion worth of cuts.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister knows that his ministers statement is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. He was sat down for it yesterday, and I renew the point of order from yesterday.

The SPEAKER: Minister, will you come back to your ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Paul EDBROOKE: I miss the member for Brighton. Looks like we touched a nerve today. With $40 billion in cuts coming, it is the regulator that protects renters that will be cut. They opposed every single one of these reforms, and they would strip every single one of these reforms back, harming Victorian renters, harming people who want a roof over their head. Victorians know only Labor is on the side of renters. Only Labor is in the back corner for renters, and that is exactly what we will keep delivering in this government.

Youth strategy

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:10): My question is to the Minister for Youth. In her first speech the minister thanked Johnny Setka for his support during her campaign – the man whose leadership, according to corruption buster Geoffrey Watson SC, turned the CFMEU to 'looking after gangsters' –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House will resume his seat until the member concludes her question. I ask you to not start again but take off from where you were.

Nicole WERNER: My question is to the Minister for Youth. In her first speech the minister thanked Johnny Setka for his support during her campaign – the man whose leadership, according to corruption buster Geoffrey Watson SC, turned the CFMEU to 'looking after gangsters, standover men, bikies' –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Warrandyte will be heard in silence. Member for Warrandyte, I ask you to not start again but take off with the question from where you were at.

Nicole WERNER: What safeguards are in place to ensure young Victorians looking for a mentor through the government's Youth Central hub are not drawn to the same corrupt and criminal networks that backed the minister's campaign?

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to respond as it relates to her portfolio.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:12): I thank the member for her question. Although I do not agree with the characterisation of the question, I will make a few observations.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister has a right to be heard in silence also.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: As I was saying, youth are our future, and that is why the Allan Labor government invested $33 million out of this state budget into our youth. My job is simple: to give every young Victorian a go, and under our youth strategy we are investing $33 million. We are engaging over 135,000 young people through Amplify, through Engage! and through the Future Ready programs.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. I would ask her to come back to the question.

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

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: As I was saying, the Allan Labor government has invested $33 million in youth in this recent budget. We have engaged over 135,000 –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The minister is being relevant.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: Thank you, Speaker. Maybe I will get through it this time. As I was saying, $33 million is what the Allan Labor government has invested in this year's budget, and it is because youth matters to us. We are investing to make sure that young people are engaged through Amplify, through Engage! and through the Future Ready programs – you name it. Just yesterday I had the great pleasure of meeting up with some of the members of the Le Mana Pasifika program, and it was incredible. To hear from these young people and to hear what they had to say was just amazing.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, this is not relevant to the question that was asked by the member for Warrandyte.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister is being directly relevant to her portfolio of youth and directly relevant to the tiny bit of the question which was relevant.

Danny O'Brien: On the point of order, Speaker, the question specifically went to the safeguards in place through the Youth Central hub, which the minister has not touched on at all.

The SPEAKER: From my remembrance of the first part of the answer from the minister, she rejected the characterisation of the question at the outset.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: As I was saying, our youth strategy is *Our Promise, Your Future*, and that is what matters. Yesterday I had the great privilege of meeting with the Le Mana Pasifika project, an incredible project. I met with them a few weeks ago up in Melton with my good friend Steve McGhie, wherever he may be seated, and we got to hear from these young people on how this project is directly changing their lives.

Danny O'Brien: Speaker, I renew the point of order on relevance. This is about something the minister did yesterday. It has nothing to do with the question that was asked.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the minister how to respond to the question. As I said before, I believe she already responded at the outset and rejected the characterisation of the question.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: The Allan Labor government supports young people, and we will make sure that they are always looked after. I conclude my answer.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:16): In that same speech the minister said she was 'grateful to have found fellow travellers' before thanking Johnny Setka. How can young Victorians be sure they can access safe mentoring through the government's Youth Central hub when the minister's own mentor has been convicted of dozens of offences?

The SPEAKER: The minister to respond as it refers to her portfolio.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:16): I thank the member for her question. The Allan Labor government has invested $33 million in youth. We are doing that through our youth strategy, *Our Promise, Your Future* –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I think it is appropriate for members to remember that when there is a request for silence when a certain member is on their feet it also goes for when other members are on their feet.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: We have engaged over 135,000 young people through a number of programs, something that I as Minister for Youth am incredibly proud of. Through these programs we have many mentoring paths, which is the most important thing for these young people.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: public transport fares

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport, Minister for Women and Girls) (14:17): On this side of the house we are taking real steps to put more money back into household budgets, making it easier and more affordable for Victorians to get around. We know Trump's war in the Middle East has put enormous pressure on Victorian households. It is why the Allan Labor government took immediate steps to deliver free public transport in April and May, reducing pressure on the pump and saving Victorians money. During that free public transport period, we saw patronage return to pre-COVID levels, with more than 100 million trips – up 17 per cent on last year – and that told us loud and clear that this extra support was needed and was being embraced by Victorians. Because we know that Trump's war will continue to put pressure and have an impact on households for some time to come, we have made public transport fares half-price until the end of the year, saving the regular commuter over $850.

This is on top of free public transport for kids. It is on top of the free weekend travel for seniors, disability support pensioners and carers as well. The only reason that Labor has been able to offer such significant fare relief is because we have invested in the projects that have boosted services and capacity around our public transport network, projects that those opposite opposed, extra services that those opposite opposed, affordability that those opposite opposed over and over again. And with a promise of over $40 billion in cuts, they are promising Victorians crush loading and gridlock for generations, particularly in some of our fastest growing areas in the country. They are blockers, not builders. They are cutters, not creators. Only Labor plans for the future.

Youth strategy

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:19): My question is to the Minister for Youth. The government's Youth Central hub tells young Victorians they have the right to a safe workplace free from bullying and harassment. In her first speech the minister thanked Joe Myles, who was described by a Federal Court judge as having 'a deplorable personal history of offending', including calling a site foreman, an 'effing little grub'. How can young Victorians have any confidence in the Minister for Youth when she endorses the very workplace bullies her government tells young people they should not have to tolerate?

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, questions without notice are not an opportunity to try to trash individuals with statements that are not relevant to the portfolio.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to cease interjecting while the member is on his feet. The Leader of the House is on a point of order.

Anthony Carbines: Statements that are directly irrelevant to the minister's portfolio are not an opportunity to use question time to try to trash and smear other members. That is totally out of order.

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, this is your last warning.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Speaker, firstly, the question is entirely in order. If the minister trashed herself, that is not our fault.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I ask you to raise your points of order in the appropriate way.

Nicole Werner: On the point of order, Speaker, if it assists the minister and the Leader of the House, there was no trashing. It was the minister who thanked this person who called a site foreman those words – an 'effing little grub' – and that speaks to him being a bully. It was not trash talk at all; she thanked a workplace bully.

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

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 104, the behaviour towards the member for Warrandyte was outrageous.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton knows that is not a point of order.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 104 does give every member the right to raise a point of order. That was not an offer, but it does give every member the right to raise a point of order, and the member for Warrandyte has just as much of a right as anybody else.

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

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:23): I reject the premise of the question, but I will say that the Allan Labor government is proud to uphold all that we have committed to in the budget.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:23): The Federal Court has found Mr Myles breached workplace laws more than 20 times, including coercion. Given the youth strategy measures whether young people report feeling safe, has the minister sought advice on the extent to which her backers have undermined young workers' sense of safety?

The SPEAKER: The minister to respond as it relates to her portfolio.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:24): Thank you for the question. I reject the premise of it.

Ministers statements: TAFE funding

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry, Minister for Skills and TAFE) (14:24): When Labor see TAFE, we see opportunity. That is why we legislated the free TAFE guarantee. This landmark reform means at least 70 per cent of all government VET funding will go to TAFE, protecting the public training system that Victorians rely on. Right now thousands of Victorians are studying nursing, plumbing, disability support, clean energy, construction and other priority courses through free TAFE. More than 245,000 free TAFE students have saved around $3300 per student. For many families, that is money that stays in the pocket for groceries, petrol bills, household bills and much more. We are not stopping there. Through the

SEC apprenticeship academy, Labor will deliver 2000 electrical apprenticeships over the next four years, giving young people a good job, trade training and a fair go.

While Labor is backing TAFE and apprenticeships, there are some whose only plan is to cut. While we are backing skills and jobs in every corner of the state, with 44 per cent of our funding for TAFE capital projects going into regional Victoria, there are some who want to cut that to just 25 per cent. You cannot support regional communities while cutting the TAFE and training opportunities that they rely on. Victorians have not forgotten the last time the Liberals were in government with the Nationals; they ripped more than $1 billion out of the TAFE system, sacked more than 2000 TAFE teachers and shut 22 TAFE campuses. We know they will cut TAFE again as part of their $40 billion worth of cuts. You do not need a trade qualification to know that when it comes to TAFE Labor delivers and the Liberals cut.

Maroondah Hospital

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:26): My question is to the Premier. What is the expected completion date for the full redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): I thank the member for Warrandyte for his question. There is planning –

The SPEAKER: I think it was the member for Ringwood.

Jacinta ALLAN: Sorry; my apologies to both of you. I apologise and will start again. I thank the member for Ringwood for his question. There is planning underway for a number of hospitals, and that work is currently continuing.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:27): My supplementary question is: why doesn't the Premier know when the full redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital will be completed?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I draw the member's attention to the fact that work is going to deliver a new children's emergency department at the Maroondah Hospital. That planning is underway. The construction on the project is expected to start in 2027.

Ministers statements: electricity prices

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:27): On this side of the house, we care about just one kind of cut, and that is cutting the cost of living for Victorians. Last week I announced that we will be mandating lower energy prices for Victorians in embedded networks – in apartments, in caravan parks and in retirement homes. 174,000 households and 20,000 businesses are in these private energy networks. They were created in the 1990s when our energy system was privatised and have grown and grown since then. Those who did the privatisation told us that the embedded networks would provide cheaper energy, but that simply has not happened. Instead, private energy companies are making big monopoly profits at the expense of home owners and at the expense of renters who cannot change their retailer.

Whether you are a family in Prahran, Hawthorn, Albert Park, Footscray, Wangaratta or Euroa, in every part of the state Labor will back you, not big energy retailer profits. We will mandate, from 1 July next year, lower prices for all energy – electricity, gas and bundled services like hot water – to the cheapest market offers. Home owners and renters will be saving up to $250 a year and small businesses up to $600 a year for electricity alone. Plus we will deliver even more savings on their gas and bundled services like hot water. We will not be cutting $40 billion from services that Victorians rely on. We will not cut the Victorian energy upgrades program, we will not cut the SEC and we will not cut renewables and ban wind farms, because doing those things will hit Victorians hard on their energy bills.

Youth strategy

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:29): My question is to the Minister for Youth. In her first speech the minister also thanked Joe Myles's wife Elizabeth Doidge, who received $195,000 from the CFMEU for her successful Melbourne City Council campaign while both she and Mr Myles worked for the CFMEU. Will the minister update the government's Youth Central page encouraging young Victorians to get involved in politics to promote this CFMEU-funded pathway?

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:30): I reject the premise of the question. But the answer is no.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:30): A vision of the youth strategy is that young people are respected and central in decision-making. Will the minister revise the youth strategy to incorporate advice on how to compete with candidates funded by her corrupt supporters to ensure youth are central to decision-making?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:31): No.

Ministers statements: vehicle registration rebate

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:31): I have got some important information to update the house on this afternoon, and it is about our rego refund rebate. I want to make sure everyone in the house knows that 1.4 million drivers have already applied for their 20 per cent rego rebate, and over $34 million is starting to land in people's bank accounts – money back to families, money for motorists – and this is making a big difference. I want to share some further information with the house. It is not just Victorians who love it; there are many in this chamber as well. We all know on this side of the house we are backing our government's rego rebate, but there are a few others who have joined us as well. I would like to thank the member for Mornington for 'spreading the word' on Facebook, urging Victorians to not miss out on applying for their rego rebate. I would like to thank the member for Croydon, who has also joined in. I know props are not appropriate, but for those who want to go and check out the remarkable graphics and the traffic lights, well done, member for Croydon, who is certainly making sure his community is ready, set, claim on their rebate. And finally, to the member for Murray Plains – a helping hand with your rego rebate. I know the member for Murray Plains is always looking for ways to be helpful with his community. We will continue to back Victorians to get their rego rebate. The Leader of the Opposition opposes it; we are backing it.

Constituency questions

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:35): (1668) My constituency question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. This week at practically no notice residents of Highett and Cheltenham received a letter box drop informing them that works slated to begin next year at the Sir William Fry Reserve on the Suburban Rail Loop had been fast-tracked to begin just next week. These residents received no warning and no consultation surrounding this decision. This area of our community is already under immense traffic pressure, further exacerbated by the failed attempt by the Department of Transport and Planning to begin works on the Graham and Bay roads intersection. These fast-tracked works will lock in the removal of green space from the Sir William Fry Reserve, and I therefore ask the minister: why has the government chosen to fast-track works at the Cheltenham SRL site without community consultation, making themselves look busy in an election year and bypassing community consultation and respect for residents in the process?

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:36): (1669) My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. How much will patient capacity increase with the expansion of the Werribee Mercy Hospital's emergency department? Werribee Mercy's ED is being delivered as part of a $280 million investment from the Allan Labor government to boost the ED's capacity, with a further $95 million investment to support its opening in the growing western suburbs. We are also committed to continuing to deliver for our incredible healthcare workers and staff, including in the record health sector investment through the 2026–27 Victorian budget. $76 million will go towards strengthening and supporting the healthcare workforce to cater for the infrastructure expansions. I am proud to be part of a government that is investing in essential healthcare infrastructure, resources and educational pathways that will result in better care for families and better support for healthcare workers in Tarneit.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:37): (1670) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and the information that I am seeking is an explanation as to why the cost of building school toilet blocks has blown out.

The SPEAKER: 'What is the cost' might be your question.

Tim BULL: Exactly, Speaker, and why I ask that question is in 2020 we had Metung Primary School have a complete demolition and rebuild of its toilet block costing $146,000 and more recently, we had Tambo Upper Primary School and Lakes Entrance Primary School having simple refurbishments costing half a million dollars – the cost of a new four-bedroom home. So I am asking the minister to please explain why we are having that enormous cost increase. That is the information I am seeking.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:37): (1671) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Last month we learned that those opposite are planning on ripping trains off the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines. Whilst our budget makes sure that all peak hour services on the Wyndham Vale line will have nine-car trains, boosting capacity by 50 per cent, those opposite, in the member for Bulleen's own words, will leave these lines thin. What folks in Melbourne's west have to look forward to if those opposite were elected this coming November is not only tens of thousands of more homes dumped in the outer suburbs, putting further pressure on our roads and our rail, but they are going to take our trains away at the same time. It goes to show they do not know who we are in the western suburbs, and they will never deliver what we need. My question for the minister is this: how many passengers on the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines, including in my electorate of Laverton, would be impacted by taking these trains off these very, very busy rail corridors?

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (14:38): (1672) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police. When will the minister provide Mornington constituents with information about the adequacy of police resourcing across the Mornington electorate, given ongoing concern about violent offending, car theft, youth crime and community safety locally? A constituent of mine recently contacted me – whose name I will keep anonymous for safety reasons due to the ongoing police investigation. She was distraught about her daughter, who was recently allegedly dragged from her car, punched, thrown to the road and threatened by machete-wielding offenders in a terrifying carjacking whilst simply trying to get to work. Indeed, her concern reflects what I am hearing from many local residents that families no longer feel safe as they should. The latest available Crime Statistics Agency data shows 12,194 offences were recorded across the Mornington Peninsula LGA in the year ending December 2025, with Mornington reported as having the most offences. Locals are deeply concerned – *(Time expired)*

Werribee electorate

John LISTER (Werribee) (14:40): (1673) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport. How can local councils apply for the next round of sports infrastructure funding? Our sports clubs are at the heart of our community, and over the years the Labor government has championed good facilities for our up-and-coming sports stars. I have recently been in discussions with clubs at Presidents Park in the heart of my electorate. They have been back and forth with council for a little while on their master plan, and I welcome Wyndham city now committing to upgrades there thanks to the engagement from the Werribee Hockey Club and the nearby baseball club, and I look forward to helping facilitate further support for this work. The Allan Labor government has a strong record of investing in local sports infrastructure in Werribee, including in the great facility at Galvin Park, which we opened last year. I will continue to fight for the facilities our amazing sports clubs need, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (14:40): (1674) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police. When will the minister ensure a stronger and more visible police presence around the Domain Road precinct in South Yarra to deter hooning, antisocial behaviour and overnight public disorder? Local residents have contacted me deeply concerned about escalating late-night disturbances in and around the precinct. One constituent reported a man screaming continuously from approximately 10:30 pm until 5:30 am alongside repeated hooning and vehicle noise throughout the evening. Residents are entitled to feel safe in their homes, and they should not be forced to endure this kind of behaviour without clear and visible law enforcement responses. My community deserves increased patrols and an active police presence to deter this type of antisocial behaviour.

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:41): (1675) My question is for the Minister for Planning. When will the terms of reference for the proposed expansion of the Montrose quarry by Boral be released, and how will community be consulted within that process? My constituents in Montrose and the surrounding area are deeply concerned about the proposed expansion of the Montrose quarry and its potential impacts on traffic, amenity and the local environment. They are also incredibly concerned, as am I, about the impact on human health from the dust, noise and vibrations not only currently generated, but the increase that a proposed expansion may lead to. My community members have made it very clear that they expect a transparent and meaningful consultation process, particularly given the scale of the proposal and the long-term consequences it may have. I look forward to the minister's response.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:42): (1676) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question is: what can be done to support Margaret Cocking of Cobram? Her husband Graeme passed away from cancer a couple of years ago and the car was transferred into Margaret's name. As Margaret only holds a learner's permit, not a full licence, she applied for the rego rebate and was declined. I am looking to see what information there is and what can be done to support Mrs Cocking.

Ashwood electorate

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (14:43): (1677) My question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. What will the cost be per day to my constituents in Ashwood of demobilising SRL sites like Burwood? This is, of course, relating to well-documented plans of others to pursue their reckless policy of pausing and reviewing the Suburban Rail Loop. Works at the SRL Burwood site are powering ahead as crews prepare to lower two tunnel-boring machines into the ground ahead of their launch later this year, and since the start of major works in September 2025 the site has been completely transformed as construction progresses at pace. Victorians have voted for this project four

times at state and federal elections, and there are those others who think this is something that should be stopped. Mind you, one of them – the member for Bulleen – actually said, 'No, you can't put the dirt back in', and I agree with him. You cannot put the dirt back in, so I look forward to hearing what sorts of costs the others are putting on us all if they get in.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:44): Yesterday during constituency questions the member for Glen Waverley asked the minister what would happen if the opposition were elected and implemented their policies. Previous rulings have allowed questions seeking responses from ministers about their plans or preparations to respond to events, plans or circumstances that have not yet occurred or been implemented. This of course is in order because it is reasonable for members to anticipate that ministers have prepared for future possibilities and scenarios, and therefore reasonable for members to ask ministers about those plans. However, even in reference to a possible event that has not happened yet, the question must relate to matters a minister controls or could be anticipated to control within their portfolio. The member's question explicitly asks the minister what will happen if the minister is no longer a minister. The minister can only respond in supposition, and therefore the question is hypothetical and I rule the question out of order.

Bills

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:45): As I was saying before we were cut off for the lunch break and question time, and responding to the Shadow Minister for Police and Corrections' comments, one of the themes that he really overlooked as part of his opening remarks and contribution is related to family violence, and it is the number one law and order issue in the state. One woman every nine days has their life taken at the hands of men's violence. There is one police call-out at least every 6 minutes across Victoria as a result of family violence. If we want to free up police to be more proactive and responsive to whether it is family violence or other crimes, this is why this bill is so important – to get them out of the station, out from behind the desk and the admin work and out on patrol to keep our whole community, but particularly women and families, safe. We are also of course implementing significant reforms to protect victim-survivors. The introduction of a standalone offence for coercive control is being introduced and a lot of other measures to combat men's violence against women as well.

But of course, as I said, part of this is we know we need to do more to get police out of the stations and on patrol and out into the community. On this side of the house we back the Chief Commissioner of Police's plan to get more officers out on the streets instead of stuck behind their desks through the recruitment of 200 new police reservists to free up more frontline police officers to stay out on patrol. $62 million was allocated in this year's budget. Analysis by Victoria Police shows that police officers currently spend 4000 hours a day behind a reception counter or a desk. That is 1.4 million hours every year staffing reception counters at police stations. It is this chief commissioner's view and the government's view that those 4000 hours a day would be better spent out in the community, in the vans, walking the pavements and responding to calls for service. That is what reservists will make possible. They will do this by performing key administrative duties that are currently being undertaken by police officers. A police reservist scheme means that more frontline officers will be freed from desks and deployed into communities, responding to calls for service. Police officers are often taken away, as we know, from frontline duties to undertake non-operational duties, including responding to public inquiries and other administrative tasks. These tasks are important but do not need to be undertaken by police officers per se who would otherwise be used to prevent and respond to crime out

in the suburbs. That is why, as I said, this budget has funded a police reservist scheme through 200 reservists to provide that additional pool of resources. This legislation provides that necessary framework for a modern and fit-for-purpose reservist scheme to be established, but even though this is a new bill this is actually not a new scheme. A previous police reservist scheme existed under the former Police Regulation Act 1958. There were also provisions in the Victoria Police Act 2013 to manage existing police reservists.

This bill will empower the commissioner of police to appoint police reservists to perform non-operational duties. When on duty, police reservists will have the general duties and powers of a constable at common law and may perform non-operational duties such as but not limited to supporting the commencement of investigation, assisting with public inquiries and other front counter duties at police stations, such as taking crime reports at the counter or over the phone. There is quite a substantive set of provisions in this bill around how and when they will be guided to be recruited and to be trained. We are looking potentially at people with experience of at least two years in a police force in Victoria or an equivalent force and at a lot of other measures around the operations of how the scheme will roll out. Already 600 expressions of interest have been submitted, so there is quite a lot of interest, and people are encouraged to visit police.vic.gov.au to sign up and express their interest today as well. The scheme is of course supported by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and the Police Association Victoria. I would like to acknowledge Wayne Gatt, who I recently met with as well to speak about this bill, and also the Police Registration and Services Board.

The alternative is what the Liberals are proposing, and you cannot trust the Liberals to keep our community safe. The last time they sat on the Treasury bench they did not fund one single additional police officer during their four years of government. While they are busy politicising the issue of community safety, we are taking the real action to do something about it. Their proposal for $40 billion of cuts out of the state budget will impact one in seven public servants, and they are kidding themselves if they think this is not going to impact police services and frontline police operations. The shadow minister, of all people, has the least amount of credibility when it comes to talking to us on community safety. He was the Leader of the Opposition, and his own people, his own party room, did not even trust him to take action on community safety. When we introduced the tougher bail laws, he fled on a cruise ship. He fled on a holiday. He bailed. We are talking about a police reservist scheme, not an opposition leaders' reservist scheme, which he has now joined the ranks of, with the member for Hawthorn, the member for Bulleen, the member for Malvern and others. This is real action on community safety.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:50): I think the member for Preston has just proved how irrelevant he is.

The SPEAKER: Member for Murray Plains, it was the member for Pascoe Vale.

Peter WALSH: The member for Pascoe Vale has proved how irrelevant he is. Can I start off by saying that press releases do not stop crime. Press releases do not protect victims of crime. The government maybe thinks they do, but they do not. What we have is that every time there is a crime issue in this state the government will make a grand announcement and the government will do a press conference. Somehow, magically, their press release is going to reduce crime – and it has not. If, as the member for Pascoe Vale said, all these things have been done, why is crime still going up? A classic example is the machete bins. In my electorate there was one in Swan Hill and one in Echuca, put at the front doors of police stations, under the security cameras, with lights on them. What perpetrators in the state are going to go to the front of a police station to hand in an illegal weapon, where they can be seen and where a photograph can be taken of them?

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: Yes, 'So many machetes have been handed in.' Why is there still machete crime then? Why are people still fighting in supermarkets with machetes? If the bin program was so good, why is it still happening? It obviously has not been very good at all.

As an MP who represents a cross-border community, one of the challenges we have are the cross-border anomalies. Inspector John Nolan from Mildura, retired now, put a lot of work into developing a cross-border policing program called the cross-border justice scheme, modelled on the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankuntjatjara lands program in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. Tragically, every time I write to the government about that particular program, I get zip back on it. You have got the issue that a perpetrator just has to drive across a Murray River bridge and it is free and easy, because the police generally are not authorised to go across and chase them. If we actually had a proper cross-border policing program where the Victorian police could go to New South Wales and the New South Wales police could come to Victoria, people would not be able to escape. That program in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia uses the whole of the NPY lands as one jurisdiction. The model that was developed has the local government areas on both sides of the river named as to where the police could go. If someone was arrested on the Moama side, they could be taken to the Magistrates' Court in Echuca rather than having to go to Deniliquin or to Griffith or somewhere else. We talk about more resources for the police, but if we had a genuine cross-border policing scheme, that would make their lives a lot easier into the future.

The thing that I am very sad about as I speak on this particular bill is having the PSOs taken off train stations. I was very proud to be part of a government that put the PSOs on train stations. For all the train stations here in Melbourne, it was about having PSOs on those train stations from 6 pm till last train to make sure that people could ride on the train, could get off the train and could go to the car park or the bus stop knowing that they would be safe. We have seen the increase in violent crime here in Victoria, but for some reason the Labor government thinks we can take the PSOs off the stations because there is no issue with safety for people getting off the train late at night. That is actually counterintuitive given what is happening in this state with the increase in crime. People are frightened now – they are more frightened than they ever have been in the past – so why would you take the PSOs off the train stations and make it more unsafe for people to actually use the train late at night? It is just a short-sighted and I think very foolish move that will lead to more violence and more people being victims of violent crime into the future.

The other thing I want to touch on with this bill is the issue around increasing maximum sentences. This is believed to be a deterrent. If you look at the Magistrates' Court, the median sentence for perpetrators is actually reducing. Some of the magistrates that I have spoken to have said, 'We have to stay within the bounds and the norms of sentencing. Even though we would like to give a higher sentence to some particular perpetrators, if we actually go outside the norm – go outside the median – it is then appealed to a higher court, and if that appeal is upheld, we are in trouble. We get less cases on our casebook because we are believed to be costing the government and costing the judiciary system more money because our sentences are tough. We are doing what the community expects by making the sentences tougher, but they get appealed.' It costs the government money to defend that appeal, and they are in the bad books and do not get as much work in the future – and they get a black mark against them. That is why people can commit crimes, because they know there are no consequences. A press release does not stop crime. The thing that will stop crime is if people believe that there are serious consequences, that they will have serious penalties and that they will have their freedom taken away from them for committing those particular crimes. As the shadow police minister said in his contribution, when you can commit tens of if not a hundred crimes and all you are going to get is a community service order or you are going to actually have them dismissed, what consequences are there for those particular crimes into the future?

In my electorate you would have very, very rarely seen a stolen car burnt out on the side of the road. We are now constantly seeing burnt-out cars on the side of the road with police tape around them. Local government or Transport Victoria have to go to the cost of collecting those burnt-out cars from

the side of the road, because people know they can steal cars with impunity into the future and they are not going to have any consequences go against them. We all love watching the crime shows on TV, but the crime shows help teach the perps how to do things. They know if they steal a car and they burn it, there will be no evidence there as to who had that particular car. As I said, you would very rarely have seen a stolen car burnt out on the side of the road in my electorate. They do not even take it into the bush anymore. They just do it on the side of the road. That is how brazen they are with crime in my area, and I assume that it is the same right across the state. There are no consequences for people who steal cars, burn them and just get away. They are basically never, ever caught.

Over my time living in the country, it was not necessarily the right thing to do, but none of us used to lock our cars. If you went to the local town, if you went into Boort, why would you lock your car? No-one was ever going to steal it. But now everyone locks their car all the time, because they just know people are somehow wired that if they can, they are going to steal it. That is equally the same in a small country town as it is in a regional city or here in Melbourne. That is because we have a culture in this state now where if you commit a crime, there are effectively no consequences. Even if your car is locked, they now get the technology that can actually break into it. I own one of the cars that is apparently one of the favourites to be stolen and shipped to the Middle East, so now I am extra, extra careful as to where I even park my car, because I know the perps are going to be out there and they are going to steal them. They are going to be put in a container, they are going to be sent overseas and there are going to be no consequences and no comeback from that.

A member interjected.

Peter WALSH: They do. They just bring them to Melbourne through a chop shop and send them overseas, as you very well know.

When it comes to police reservists, we think this is actually a very good idea. Police get held up with a lot of different things that come to the police station. One of the things that the police have said to me over time is about statutory declarations, bits of paper that need a police signature or need a justice of the peace. In our communities there are nowhere near as many JPs as there used to be. It is very hard to find a JP to get something signed. As we all know in our offices, there are quite a few things a member of Parliament can authorise, but some have to go to the police station to get those pieces of paper signed. One of the ways we could save a lot of police time would be by having those people there that can authorise documentation that comes into the police station so the police can be out on the beat and be seen and the community would know they are going to be around. One of the big issues in Echuca now is people just walking out of shops without paying – going to the supermarket, filling their bags up and giving the bird to the staff as they walk out. They know there will be no consequences, because there are no police to chase them.

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:00): In speaking to the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026, I was reflecting on the principles outlined in the very early days of our modern policing by Robert Peel. These are principles that we inherited in Victoria that make it clear that the police are the public and the public are the police. This not only speaks to the need for an independent, impartial force – and clause 10 of the bill makes that quite clear – but it also highlights that police are in a special position out in the community. This Labor government has recognised the importance of keeping police out in the community, whether that is through the investment in mobile technology to allow police to complete administrative tasks on the road, utilising protective services officers for more than just patrolling platforms, our police assistance line taking calls that would usually go to a busy watch house or supporting those proactive units in stations like Werribee working with our community partners to keep the streets safe. In this vein we have also supported the work of Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush in his organisational review. This review identified many areas of policing where the police force had turned in rather than turned out to the community.

I have said on a number of occasions that a sworn police officer with powers of investigation and arrest should not be stuck behind a desk but rather out in a divisional van, out in the community. Early in his

tenure the chief commissioner visited Werribee police station, where I am sure he saw the level of dedication all the staff there have to keeping our community safe. Our inspector at the time would have gone through the number of police shifts being used to have that counter service, a vital service but one that could be done differently. I know when she took me through the numbers of the shifts that are in the watch house, it was staggering. The chief commissioner observed, in news reports from October last year, that he was:

> … quite surprised to see at every station, for every shift, we use uniform police officers to man our public counters and take calls for service …
>
> Those things are really important but they don't need to be done by highly trained frontline police officers.

That analysis, which I know my friend the member for Pascoe Vale referred to before, showed that more than 4000 hours a day are being spent behind reception counters or desks – 1.4 million hours every year spent staffing reception counters in police stations. It is this government's view that those 4000 hours per day for those sworn police officers would be better spent with them out in the community, in the vans, walking the pavements and responding to calls for service. That is what reservists will make possible.

With this long preamble, the chief commissioner's words bring me to the substance of this bill. The government is backing police command with these powers to deploy police reservists to duties that will free up those sworn police officers. The detail of the bill is quite interesting. Police reservists already exist in the Victoria Police Act 2013, which I always found interesting, especially when I was in a previous role, but we were not necessarily using them for what police were identifying, for that work in the station. Every now and then the FTE data would come up and you would see a couple of police reservists on it, and it was, like, 'What's going on here?' This is about formalising that and recruiting those 200 new reservists that we have committed to in this budget. The bill expressly provides that police reservists have the powers of a constable at common law in the exercise of their functions and any other powers imposed or conferred upon them by the Victoria Police Act.

Interestingly, when you look at how the act is being changed, a lot of the powers that those sworn police officers have will be there for those police reservists, keeping in mind that they will not necessarily be in a van or responding to those calls for service through 000. The bill provides a new oath or affirmation, which is particularly important because as things come to a police station or if a report is made, having someone who has taken that oath or affirmation, especially when witnessing documents, and has the functions and powers of a constable at common law, as it is described, is really important for future cases that may come up. The bill also amends a range of different powers to ensure regulations can be made relating to various matters pertaining to police reservists, so that later on, if we see their role needs to change within the regulations, that can be done through those processes. It is not proposed that police reservists will carry operational safety equipment, including firearms, but this amendment will give the chief commissioner those operational decision-making powers in the future, when it comes to the amendments to the Firearms Act 1996 that we see here.

Community safety has been a priority for me; I have seen firsthand the harm that crime causes in the community, especially in my community in Wyndham. This initiative is part of a range of investments to give police the resources and powers they need. But it is not the first time that we have looked at these sorts of powers to help police to get out on the streets. I do recall a very long time ago, back in 2015, work being done and investment being made in actually reducing the number of unmarked police cars, because it was considered important that we had more marked police cars on the road as a form of deterrent but also reassurance for the community. Later on came the community safety statement; rolling out over $4 billion for that record recruitment of police that we have seen, and that also funded things like the mobile devices and radio security program that we did; more divisional vans with the upgrades – I am pretty sure we changed to Ford Rangers, so we have gone through a few generations of different divisional vans; and also setting up PSO mobility at major events.

That investment in policing has continued. Particularly important for my community, I know from speaking to a lot of people who use Werribee Plaza or work at Werribee Plaza, is having the reassurance of the PSOs working at the shopping centres with police. We met them last year with the Premier, and I know that that work there is such an important deterrent to crime but also reassurance for the retail workers and shoppers there. We have also recently extended PSO patrols at Werribee and Wyndham Vale train stations from approximately 9 in the morning until the last train. I was particularly shocked to see PSOs at the cafe at 9:30 in the morning, going, 'PSOs are here. It's 9:30 in the morning.' I had to adjust my thinking – 'That's right. We have PSOs here all day, because crime doesn't just start from 5 o'clock in the afternoon.' We want to make sure that we have that presence at these stations and that flexibility of deployment that the chief commissioner can have to meet those different crime demands that are out there and address that crime. We have also built a new police station in Werribee and funded the establishment of youth crime and proactive policing units in that station. I know every time I go in there it is abuzz with different units that are addressing different types of crime in our community.

Listening to community members is so important, and I thank the people who attended my recent round table at Manor Lakes secondary college with the Attorney-General. Many spoke about police presence and getting police out into the community but also working with community members in a context that is not always about lights and sirens and making arrests, which is why the work of our proactive unit at Werribee is so important. They are amazing people in that unit. There was also acknowledgement that crime prevention also comes from building stronger communities. Thanks to Catherine, Graham, Amrik and his son, Polly, Sheri, George, Tori and Fraser for attending, and a special thankyou for the honest conversation that we had with Aluk, Chian and Maddison, students from Manor Lakes P–12, who spoke about their experience as young people in my community and their experience around crime but also their hopes for how programs like the violence reduction unit, which is running out of Manor Lakes P–12, will help strengthen our community and turn young people away from a life of crime.

The spirit of these reforms with this police reservists initiative is about giving that flexibility to deploy resources where they are needed most. Crime is not static; my inspector always comments that you can tell there are different trends that come up every couple of months when it comes to things like theft: it is either, as we have seen today, motor vehicle theft, we have had a little bit of that – well, actually increasing numbers of that in Wyndham – but before that it was things like burglaries. We are seeing different crime trends, so crime is not static; we need to be responsive. Part of having police reservists is about being able to respond to different crime trends. We need to make sure that the chief has ways to deploy his officers where and when they are needed. We have got to remember that the chief commissioner has that operational independence and that decision-making under the act, which we respect on this side; we do not dictate to the chief commissioner how he should deploy those resources. However, what we do do is listen. We listened to the review and we put that funding behind the police so that they can do the job that they are empowered to do. Policing is in the public, not behind desks. I would like to thank the people working at Werribee police station, both the public servants that help keep the place running and the police officers there, as well as the detectives. I have met them quite recently out with the fire brigade, so it is good to see them out in Wyndham doing what they signed up to do.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (15:10): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026, saying at the outset that the opposition is supporting this bill. We do not often have the opportunity to go for full support on bills, because we often find the work has not quite been done. As we saw earlier this morning, there were amendments put to building legislation 5 minutes before the bill happened. It is very hard to give outright support to something that you have only just seen. This, however, is quite different. It is different because prior to my current roles, I had the great opportunity of being the shadow minister for police and seeing the great work that our Victoria Police do each and every day to keep us safe in very, very difficult circumstances.

Having police reservists is not a new idea; it has been around for some time, but it certainly needs to be strengthened. The idea of being able to encourage those that have left the force to come back to the force to provide some knowledge and some support in a part-time, casual capacity is a great idea. Talking to many Victoria Police former members, they never really leave the job. They always certainly remember the work that they do. It stays with them for life, particularly at the moment for those who retired very early in the job. It is largely due to stresses with the job; it has become harder and harder. To give them the opportunity to come back in some capacity is very important. That is why, from that side of the equation, it is an important part of what this proposal is for.

The second part is about capacity. We have a huge problem when it comes to the shortage of police in Victoria. You have heard it; even the government have admitted to it. We are about 1500 police short, and we have also got a number of police on WorkCover and stress leave. I think the number is about 2000 by the time you add it all up. The Liberal–National coalition made an announcement to recruit 3000 new police and get them up and about on the front line to ensure Victorians are safe and police come when you need them. That is important. That is going to take time, and we know that the government have certainly been very slow in terms of recruiting new police. Some would argue that they have been on a bit of a go-slow, especially when it comes to advertising for taking police through the academy. You can contrast that with Queensland, which actually has a sign-on bonus of I think $10,000 to recruit police from right across the country. It says, 'Come to Queensland, get a $10,000 sign-on bonus' and up you go. We need to be more proactive, but in the meantime, this is a really good tool and that is why we are supporting it.

In addition to being thereabout 2000 police short, we have at least 40 police stations that are working on reduced hours or closed. That is a huge problem. Again, the Liberals and Nationals have announced that we will reopen and re-establish those 40 police stations. Three thousand more police, 40 police stations back to business – that is what the Liberal–Nationals will do should we win in November. It is important to ensure that community can feel safe. I do not care what you do in this state. I do not care what part of business you are involved in. Every minister in this government should have safety as an important, paramount part of what they do. In my portfolios of planning, building and housing and tourism and events, for every one of those, safety absolutely touches their areas and their roles. People have said to me that people are not coming to Victoria if they do not feel safe. Students are not coming to Victoria and studying here if they do not feel safe. People in the building and construction industry are not building projects in Victoria if they do not have safety as a paramount part of what they do. That has got to be part of everything that we do. Safety is non-negotiable; it has got to be absolutely first and foremost in everything.

You see the home invasions, the carjackings and the tobacco stores – it is literally Gotham City in Victoria, and that has got to change. If you see the extension of the tobacco wars to the firebombings of clubs, pubs and restaurants – that is a Victorian problem. That is a made-in-Victoria problem. It is not a national problem. We have tobacco wars in other states. We have restaurant bombings in Victoria. Why is it different in Victoria? That should be the question every Victorian needs to ask. Why do we have a firebombing problem in our restaurants, bars and clubs here in Victoria?

The answer is pretty simple: it is easiest to do business, when it comes to criminal activity, in Victoria than in any other state. For just about every other business it is very hard to do business in Victoria, but if you want to get into the business of crime, come on down – Victoria is the place to do business. And that should not happen. You saw about car theft. We are the car theft capital now, for heaven's sake. We are the car theft capital in Victoria, the firebombing capital in Victoria, the home invasion capital in Victoria and the drug capital in Victoria. These are records that we do not want to have in Victoria. We do not want those records. We want to be the best state in Australia. They are the records we should be striving for. But under your government it is a complete failure; this government has been a complete failure when it comes to safety and law and order. There is no confidence in Victoria. It is anywhere but Victoria – ABV – because people do not feel safe. That is what we need to change, and that is what needs to happen.

You only need to walk the streets. You only need to talk to people and say, 'Do you feel safe of a night-time? Do you feel safe going out to places?' I think it is a real pity. If you look at the CBD of Melbourne, we saw the daytime activity of the CBD never come back after COVID unfortunately. The most livable city in the world was Melbourne, I think for about four years in a row, and then we lost that reputation of being the most livable city. Unfortunately we ended up being one of the most leavable cities – from livable to leavable – thanks to the Allan Labor government.

Daniela De Martino interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Yes, this government can whinge and moan and carry on. I tell you what, member for Monbulk, that is what the facts say. That is what Victorians say.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): The member for Caulfield, through the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: Through the Chair, facts are facts, and the fact of the matter is people are leaving Victoria because the Allan Labor government has failed to keep them safe. That is why – they have failed to keep them safe. That is a fact. And as I was saying, Melbourne was the heartland, and Melbourne – have a look at it. Get out there and have a look. The one thing that we had left in Melbourne was the night-time economy. That is what was up and about – the beautiful, fantastic restaurants – and what has this government allowed to happen? People firebomb these restaurants and firebomb these cafes, bars and clubs in Melbourne. And do you know what the response is? 'Not our problem,' says the Allan Labor government. So what is our police response when it comes to Melbourne's CBD? The Melbourne City Council is running a police transit unit. That is what the response is. It is not Victoria Police; it is the Melbourne City Council running their own police force, because this government is useless. They have not funded Victoria Police, and now Melbourne City Council have to run their own police force. That is what we have got to – desperate straits.

Of course we need reservists. We need to bring back retired police because this government has failed. That is what it has got to, because this government has failed to do its job. That is what has happened. The government can quibble and moan and do whatever they like here –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: but the facts are the facts, member for Frankston. You know that that is the truth. We want to change it, and we want to work with you, member for Frankston. But the simple answer is: fund the police. Get more police on the beat. Acknowledge the problem, open up the police stations and give the powers to Victoria Police so they do not have a revolving door of crime. Lock them up and let them out – that is what our judges do. Police lock them up, judges let them out – that is what happens in Victoria. It is a catch-and-release program here in Victoria under the Allan Labor government, and the Allan Labor government want to pat themselves on the back – 'We're tough on crime.' Not one Victorian believes that this government is tough on anything except when it comes to corruption – that is what they are good at – except when it comes to the CFMEU and their Labor corruption mates. $15 billion worth –

Dylan Wight interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: That is part of crime. That is all part of it, member for Tarneit. It is a police response. The member for Tarneit says, 'What are you talking about?' I will tell you.

Anthony Cianflone: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this is a bill about police reservists. He has not gone anywhere near the substance of the bill, which is about police reservists.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order and relevance, Acting Speaker, can I please take my point of order on relevance. We are talking about a lack of policing and the need for police reservists, and that is because this government – hopeless, useless – have failed to do their job.

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

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:20): I remind the opposition that the last time they sat on the Treasury bench they failed to fund one single additional police officer during their four years in government. So you know, standing on your record – what record? Not too good. We are actually –

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes. That is a little bit of an embarrassment. And I will also say, since coming into government we have made record investments of more than $5 billion in Victoria Police – I know those opposite were suggesting we had not invested in them; well, I will just clarify for the opposition in case they have forgotten, conveniently I might add – to deliver Victorians the modern, world-class policing service that our state deserves.

I should say we are absolutely backing in the Chief Commissioner of Police's plan to get more officers out on the streets. I know in my community it is something that is fed back quite frequently. People really love seeing our local police, and I will give a shout-out to Southbank police, South Melbourne police and also St Kilda police stations. All Victoria Police do a magnificent job across our state. I do not know how they do the job they do; it is a very complex job. They have to confront the most amazing and difficult situations we can imagine, so I just want to express my gratitude on a personal level and from our government for all that they do to keep our communities safe across Victoria.

On average it is detailed that police officers currently spend more than 4000 hours a day behind a reception counter or desk; that is 1.4 million hours every year staffing reception counters in police stations. It is our government's view that those 4000 hours per day would be better spent out in the community, in the vans, walking the pavements and responding to calls for service, so that is the premise of this bill. I did feel the member for Caulfield was going on some other tangent, because he was talking about all these matters, and in fact the actual action in terms of the remedy is right here before us, and that is deploying up to 200 police reservists. That is exactly what this bill will do once it is passed.

This legislation provides the necessary framework for a modern, fit-for-purpose reservist scheme to be established. And we should say, just to give note to the popularity of this scheme, we know that Victorians and those from further afield are lining up to become a police reservist, with over 600 expressions of interest already submitted and certainly of a very respectable calibre too. This will certainly provide a fantastic boost for our police force. But I will say that we do have the greatest number of police out of all the states, and this is something that the opposition conveniently gloss over frequently when they are trying to undermine and diminish the investment that we have made in this state into our police force. I think it should be noted, because it is certainly not –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: No. Your record was pretty poor. I did say that from the outset, but I am going to repeat it: the last time they sat on the Treasury benches the opposition failed to fund one single additional police officer during their four years of government. So just a bit of perspective here, a benchmark – what we have done versus what they have done – because since we have been in government, since 2014, we have had more than 3600 additional police delivered by our government. But we are doing more on top of that, and certainly this bill is backing in the addition of up to 200 police reservists. But also it is not only about the actual police themselves, it is about giving them the tools they need so that they can really function at their optimum, and that is $18.3 million to roll out 3000 mobile devices for specialist police, such as detectives. What this will mean is faster decisions on the ground with real-time information in their hands instead of back at the station. I can imagine how much more convenient that will be – that they can actually feed that information in where they are in situ and will not have to go back and forth to the station or perhaps have to defer that information being submitted to later in the day et cetera.

I know myself, not pretending to be a police officer – or even to imagine what it is like to be a police officer – the quicker that you can submit information in the moment when you gain it, that special intelligence –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: I can see the opposition does not want to provide the 3000 mobile devices for specialist police. It is very sad that they are not thinking of police being able to be reactive on the road. By contrast, our government is backing them in with these tools, and of course we liaise closely with Victoria Police to make sure that we are making the investments that they want and need, because we are backing them in all the way.

With regard to police recruitment more broadly, because the member for Caulfield was also saying somehow we had been slow or otherwise with the recruitment and I found that a perplexing comment to make, we should say Victoria Police continues to receive record numbers of applications and has more applications than any other Australian jurisdiction. Fancy that – because if you listened exclusively to the member for Caulfield you would have thought it was exactly the opposite. He claimed that there were thousands of Victorians fleeing the state, that there were no more restaurants open at night, that we had turned into this funny little backwater that nobody could enjoy. He was really trashing our state, and it was quite astonishing that anyone would not have pride in our beautiful state of Victoria that we on this side of the house absolutely love and back all the way. But anyway,

I should say on a further note that the academy is full, with double squads of 52 recruits graduating every fortnight. I might just repeat that for the sake of the chamber: with double squads of 52 recruits graduating every fortnight.

John Mullahy interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, proudly in Glen Waverley, if we are going to be really precise about where they are training. Good to know. That is certainly important. And I should say Victoria Police have undertaken a range of measures to streamline the recruitment process, including reducing the training program to 25 weeks and introducing entrance exam exemptions for applicant cohorts such as former ADF members, because one could appreciate that ADF members would have already had an extensive amount of training that surely would help and give them the requisite experience that would help lead into being police officers. We will continue to work with Victoria Police to look for opportunities to continue to improve our recruitment processes – this is not a static element – to get more police back out into the community, providing highly visible patrols.

You can see that we do have a comprehensive program. Here we are backing in up to 200 reservists. We also are backing in 50 more PSOs. We also have increased the police force by 3600 since 2014. And those opposite? Well, it was not so good. It was not too pretty. But nevertheless, it is good to be able to have this debate and just remind them of the things they are trying to forget and they are trying to ignore because it is a little bit uncomfortable. I should say that when we are backing in our PSOs, that is a $44 million investment in this year's budget, and we know that it is important across our state.

The other thing that I did want to – oh, 55 seconds. No, we are not going to get a lot done there. In any case, again I will express my immense gratitude for all that our Victoria Police do day in, day out. Shift work is not easy, and dealing with the vicissitudes of behavioural challenges that they have to face is incredible, and we certainly are backing them in all the way. We take the advice of Victoria Police. I think that is another important point to make in terms of the reforms that we bring about. We do not pluck them from the air; we take their expert advice. We are duly acting on that advice, acting on certainly the leadership of the chief commissioner, who has rightly recognised that we can get more police officers out on the street doing the job they love.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:30): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026, and this is a bill that we will be supporting. The reason we are supporting

it is because this is a desperately needed activity for our state. We have had reservists in the past – there is still one in the system – and they have worked in the past very well. The reason we need them right now is because we are losing a lot of capability from the police force. We need to have, in any workplace, people with wisdom and experience that can mentor the people coming into a profession, particularly a profession like the police force, which is a very stressful environment. But it is only stressful and as bad as it is today because the truth of it is that after 10 years of a Labor government Victoria has a very serious problem. Crime is rising, community confidence is falling and Victorians feel less safe than they have for years. Crime is on the rise exponentially, and police numbers have fallen drastically. That in itself does not make much sense, and it is why we have a crime crisis here in Victoria.

Today we are hearing about the consequences of these soaring car thefts that we heard on the radio this morning. Today Victoria is the car theft capital of the nation; that was this morning's announcement on the radio. We are also the capital for house break-ins and the capital for youth crime. It is not something we should be proud of. Today's news about being the car theft capital of the nation is nothing more than shameful. Insurers in Victoria are paying out $243 million per annum – more than all the other states combined. What that does is it sends a message to our community, particularly to our youth. We definitely have a youth crime crisis in Victoria. It sends a message that in Victoria if you do something wrong, there really is no consequence. The opportunity for you to continue to get it wrong and to break the law is facilitated by the system that we have at the moment. It is absolutely not because of the good work that the police are trying to do. It is because we have a Labor government that are weak on crime, that continually talk about bail laws. I think there would be 10 or 20 press releases in the last 12 months about how we have the strongest bail laws in any state in this nation. That cannot possibly be true. Just because you keep saying something does not make it real, does not make it a fact.

No Victorian is falling for that statement that we have the strongest bail laws, because the reality is we are seeing day after day young people getting into trouble, doing serious crimes like firebombing premises and then being released on bail and actually physically assaulting people, causing massive injuries to people, and being released on bail over and over again. What we are doing is sending young people a very bad message. The message is that if you break the law there is very little consequence for that. We are creating a culture where offenders increasingly believe they can steal cars, commit violent offences, terrorise the community and avoid meaningful punishment. That is not a message that builds any respect for the law, and it is not a message that builds respect for police.

Our police do an extraordinary job, but they are not valued under the Labor government. They are valued by our communities. In South-West Coast we very much value our police, but we are frustrated by the fact that we are seeing our police stations with reduced hours and closed overnight. People do not know when they can access the police station. It is frustrating for the police, and they want to be out on the beat, there is no doubt about that. They do not want to sit behind a desk alone, but they do have to have both the stations open and enough police to go out and do their job. Therein lies the problem. Therein lies why we are having this bill put before us today. Not because we do not think reservists are good; that is right, we do. It is because we have 500 fewer police than we had just two years ago. Jacinta Allan, the Premier of today, in just two short years has reduced the police force numbers by 500 police. Now, think about that.

We also have 1500 vacancies in the police force. You can boast about all the things you want, but the reality is stark: more crime, fewer police. That puts enormous pressure on the police who are left behind. We hear almost every day from people who say they call the police and the police are unavailable or delayed because their resources are stretched so thin. How do you think that makes the police feel? They joined the police force to protect their community, they joined to help people, yet increasingly they are being placed in stations where they simply do not have the resources to do the job that they signed up to do. I spoke to a gentleman in Portland who retired recently. He said, 'I've

had enough. I'm burnt out.' I really hope he comes back as a reservist, because those young policemen in Portland need that wisdom and that mentoring.

I met the police in Heywood the other day driving around. I went to the police station, but unfortunately it was closed because there are not enough resources. They were out and about. I saw them a bit later in the day. I went to the police station. Imagine if I had been fleeing family violence or someone who was attacking me and I went straight to the police station and could not get anyone because there was not anyone there. Even the intercom was broken. That is how few resources are going into maintaining a police station and the infrastructure that goes with it. It is frustrating. That policeman from Heywood said to me 'I love this job' – and I want to hear that from police over and over again. My brother left the police force absolutely burnt out and moved interstate. It would be great to see those guys who have 30-plus years experience back. They worked hard and they cared for their communities, but they are burnt out, they are exhausted and many of them have had enough.

They do such a wonderful job. Overnight in South-West Coast we had 50 mil of rain. We have had 5 mil every hour on the hour so far, and we have seen an incredible amount of damage from water. But through the Panmure township – a township that was promised some roadworks back in March that never occurred; I suspect the government ran out of money and pulled the pin on what they had been advertising for some months was going to happen – the road has just fallen apart. I had a phone call last night from a woman who was standing beside her car with a massively damaged tyre and rim, and the young woman behind her – a P-plater from Melbourne, she said – was absolutely distressed because they both could not go any further. They were stuck – on the Princes Highway, mind you – in the middle of the night. I got a call this morning from the father of a young fellow who hit the same pothole at 8 o'clock this morning. The police are now standing there on the Princes Highway – there are witch's hats set up – in the pouring rain because there is so much damage. I spoke to another person who told me there were six cars getting their tyres fixed at Tyrepower today because of that one pothole.

This is what our police are doing: they are standing in the rain guarding potholes on roads that have been destroyed by Labor not fixing the roads. We all know winter is going to give us some rain. We have had 50 millimetres of rain before. This is not unusual; well, it is becoming more unusual. But 2 inches or 3 inches of rain we have seen many times. It does not usually mean the roads become catastrophic, which is what we have seen today, and the policemen are there guarding a pothole – how disgraceful. The government cannot fund our roads. They cannot fund our police force. They are not funding our hospitals. We have got people homeless all over the place because there are not enough houses. The government have failed drastically.

I continue on the bill about reservists because what this government can do and will do through this bill is put some police officers back behind desks so we can open stations. But the Liberal–Nationals have committed to putting 3000 police on the beat – recruiting 3000 more police. That will cover the 1500 vacancies, but it will also add another 1500 because we are seeing the population increase and we are seeing violent crime escalate. We will reopen the 40 police stations the Labor government has closed and open stations which have had reduced hours, like police stations in South-West Coast. We will recruit 200 more PSOs because we are seeing them being taken away from train stations by Labor.

I will be advocating for PSOs on the Warrnambool line because of the chaos this government has created. The overcrowding has meant people's behaviour has got bad. Girls that go down to university are telling me they do not feel safe on the train anymore because there are people who are affected by drugs or alcohol, and they are very, very dangerous and scary for these young women. We are going to need PSOs in the country because of the way the government have allowed crime and behaviour to escalate due to their mismanagement.

We will also see the implementation of genuine adult time for adult crime for 20 new offences, including arson. Can you believe you can go out there, bomb a place with a firebomb, cause enormous damage and not be put in prison for that?

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (15:40): I am delighted to rise today to speak in support of the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. It is great to follow the member for Albert Park; it will be hard to follow her great contribution on this side of the house. This is another important bill, one that includes reforms to establish a contemporary police reservist framework and one that aims at addressing the sustained frontline staff shortage being experienced across various operational areas in Victoria Police. These are important changes which will continue to build on the government's work around community safety. Community safety remains a priority in my community. It is something that my constituents raise with me consistently when I am out doorknocking or in my mobile office, so I am happy to see significant investment this year into keeping Victorians safe.

Victoria has the most police in Australia, the nation's toughest bail laws and the nation's first violence reduction unit. We have seen some really strong investments in the budget targeted at getting more police officers out from behind desks and onto the streets where the crime is. This includes a $62 million investment to recruit up to 200 reservists for administrative duties, which will free up frontline officers, putting more police back in the community where they are needed most. We heard the previous speaker on this side say that this bill will do just that.

This bill will operationalise that commitment with amendments to the Victoria Police Act 2013 that will reintroduce the power for the Chief Commissioner of Police to appoint police reservists and will provide other necessary amendments to provide for a police reservist scheme, including by making consequential amendments to other related acts. This is a really important proposal, one that will boost capacity and ease pressure on frontline police officers by enabling police reservists to perform a number of administrative and support tasks.

More police in our community will mean that we all feel safe. Certainly we do not want anyone in the community to feel unsafe at home, out in public or at work or anywhere for that matter. This is unacceptable for me and unacceptable for this government. It is for that reason that I was very happy to be involved in the debate on our tough bail laws, which put community safety above all else in bail decisions by removing the principle of remand as a last resort and creating the toughest bail laws ever for serious offences – with bail tests which are extremely hard to pass – and targeting repeat offenders for those worst crimes.

It is a really important measure, and we are seeing the results in the remand rates. That is really important because there was and is a really clear expectation from the community on this. As I mentioned, it is one of the most common concerns in the community, and it is still one of the major concerns, along with the cost of living, roads and major infrastructure, which are all really important. We will keep working in particular around community safety, and we will continue to work on tough bail laws to keep Victorians safe by putting community safety above all and targeting repeat offenders for the worst crimes. This work includes the violence reduction unit, because violent youth crime is hurting families, kids and workers in our community.

We are ensuring that there are serious consequences with our adult time for violent crime laws, which passed the Parliament in December. Under those laws children committing violent crimes like invading someone's home or injuring someone in a sickening act of violence will face adult sentences in adult courts. Jail will be more likely and sentences can be longer. For home invasions – if I can take a few seconds – causing injury in circumstances of gross violence, carjacking, aggravated burglary and armed robbery, it is adult time.

There are no easy solutions to youth crime, and these are serious consequences for violent crime to protect our community. But we know it is better to stop crime before it starts. Our nation-leading violence reduction unit shows that violence is preventable, not inevitable. The budget backs more community-based pathways away from youth crime, with more than $44 million for the violence reduction unit and other programs. We are backing the violence reduction unit with $33 million to deliver local initiatives which tackle the root causes of violent youth crime through targeted preventative measures. This includes $3.7 million for the violence reduction unit to pilot a New York–style violence

prevention initiative here in Melbourne to steer young people away from violence. Almost $15 million will continue to fund early intervention support for children and young people to keep them in the education system and reduce potential contact with the justice system. It will also deliver a new pathway to help divert some children away from the justice system before they are charged. We have had some really positive crime prevention work happening in the south-east of Melbourne. I am looking forward to that work continuing and expanding, steering our young people away from crime and violence.

There is broad support for this bill. There has been a targeted group of stakeholders consulted in the development of these reforms, including Victoria Police, the Police Association Victoria and the Police Registration and Services Board, all of whom support the proposal, and I am sure that this proposal will have broad support in my community in the electorate of Clarinda. We have many fantastic Victoria Police officers working in the Clarinda district, and I thank each and every one of them for their amazing work in keeping us safe day in, day out. I also want to thank my community for voicing their concerns with me when I am out doorknocking, at the mobile office or at community events. This feedback is important, and it is driving change.

As I said, there has been some really significant change over the last year, and this is because the community has set a really clear expectation. The government will continue to work hard around our tough bail laws, around adult time for violent crimes and around the violence reduction unit, together with Victoria Police and the justice system more broadly, to make sure that everyone in my community and across Victoria is feeling safe.

That work continues here today with this bill, one that will deliver a contemporary police reservist framework and one that is aimed at addressing the sustained frontline staffing shortages experienced across various operational areas of Victoria Police. These are important changes, changes that will continue to build on the government's work around community safety. Once again I thank all the Victoria Police in my community. I commend the minister for bringing this bill forward, and I commend it to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:49): I am more than happy to rise today to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. Any opportunity that I do get to speak of the wonderful members of Victoria Police I will always take up. It does give me an opportunity to once again thank our local members. I am not going to go through them by name, because I would start reeling them off and then I would forget someone and that would cause all sorts of issues, so we will not do that. However, I do want to thank the Chief Commissioner of Police. During a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing, as you might be aware, or you may not be, Acting Speaker Mercurio, he indicated that things are moving ahead and announced that the first Victoria Police regional academy will open in Mildura next year.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Jade BENHAM: We will love that. This is something that VicPol members in Mildura have been working on for a long time.

There have been those that have even re-entered the force – they left the job. There have been a few – I have seen this – of those with many years of experience that have either left to go and raise families or indulge in other careers but then have come back and need updated training but do not want to go away and leave the kids, or they are having a late-stage change of career. But again, once you have got kids – and Mildura is a long way away from Melbourne. I know you know this, Acting Speaker Mercurio, having been born in Swan Hill – both of us having been born in Swan Hill. Swan Hill is only a couple of hours away from Mildura. There is a real need for this regional academy, and that will help of course the Nationals and the Liberals deliver those 3000 additional police officers in the coming years. But the regional academy is a really good piece of work. What we do need, though, is police housing; that is a whole other issue.

But our police members in the bush at the moment do an extraordinary job. There are currently two back on the job, I believe now, in the Mallee – two members of Victoria Police looking after an area four times the size of some of the metro electorates. Two police officers, all in single, from Ouyen right down to Donald. For three-quarters of my electorate, there are two coppers looking after that entire area. The problem with this is –

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: Let me take that up because I am more than happy to discuss this. It is not a lie. I will take up the interjection and explain how this works for those that have never been any further west than Bacchus Marsh. What happens is –

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: They cannot listen to one another. I will explain it to you, Acting Speaker. What happens is, as we well know, our police members are under an enormous amount of pressure, and they obviously become ill, there are some WorkCover issues, there are all sorts of things that mean that our police members need to take time off, sometimes up to two years. When you are at a single-man station out in the Mallee, it means there is one house and a single-man station – for example, in Speed. I will use that as the perfect example. The member there had the house and that position but then went on long-term sick leave, meaning that house and that job could not be filled permanently for a period of two years. Meanwhile, given that there was no officer in that area, there were some, let us say, undesirables that moved to the area because of course no law. It is the Wild West out there, I will not lie. It is a bit like the Wild West. There is no law out there. The nearest station from there will be Hopetoun; they are under the command of Warracknabeal. So you have no coppers out there and things start to kick off, which has a real impact on community safety. That is an issue, not being able to fill those roles and put someone in those houses in the instance of long-term leave. It is a real problem. And at the moment, like I said, we only have two members, sometimes five, depending on where you draw them from – for example, there is no-one permanently in Sea Lake at the moment, but they draw on members from the Swan Hill station mostly, sometimes Mildura.

I do need to shout out to Annie Coobs, who after 17 months on leave – and I know it has not been easy for her – is back on the job at Culgoa. She is an amazing pillar of the community, people love her, and this is the thing about country coppers – people love them, they just do. They are pillars of our community, everyone knows who they are and they do their job over and above their position description and community expectation. They are remarkable human beings. So Annie is back after 17 months off the job. But again, because she was off the job for 17 months there was a house and a single-person station there that was not being resourced, so you are then pulling members from elsewhere. There is no-one in Sea Lake; the next one down is Culgoa, so there are no permanent ones there. That is all part of the problem, because the geography is so vast. Ouyen to Sea Lake would be at least an hour, then Sea Lake to Culgoa is another 40 minutes, and all the way down to Charlton – the geography out there is a while.

I know members on the other side tend to laugh when we say there are only two coppers. If you get out there and you actually go for a drive around, you understand the landscape and how it really does affect not just the community safety when you have certain members of the population moving into the area and causing an issue. Not having those cops in town in uniform, wandering around having coffee, having cheesecake in Culgoa – it is a very good cheesecake there – does affect country life, because you would know –

Dylan Wight interjected.

Jade BENHAM: No, it is not. I am going to keep going now. You have really annoyed me, so I am going to use my entire 10 minutes. I have another 3 minutes and 13 seconds left that I intend to use to speak about Victoria Police, because they deserve every minute of our support and recognition, they truly do. I actually caught up with – well, I do on a regular basis – our police members in

Robinvale, who are in fact pillars of the footy club as well. They wear many, many hats. And we had a good catch-up with a few members at the footy a few weeks ago and then a follow-up at training the next week, and that is how we just get things done in the country, because we have to.

But that leads me to the last couple of minutes of my contribution. This is not just a bill that we do not oppose. We support this bill, because the police members in this state are overworked. They are at times I think undervalued by this government – but not by us. We will continue to work with them. And can I just also recognise the member for Berwick, who, having served as a Victoria Police member, knows this space intimately. That is one of the things that makes those of us on this side very, very different, and we will be very different in government. The member for Berwick, having served as a Victoria Police member, deserves not only the respect of those on this side but the respect of everybody in this chamber because, as he has said once before, it does not matter if you have served with Victoria Police for one day or for 100 days or for 10 years or for 50 years, everyone that puts on that uniform deserves our respect. That includes the member for Berwick, who will be the next minister for police in the state of Victoria.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:58): You have done pretty well, actually. Thanks for that. You gave me a minute; I will take it. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a contribution in favour of the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026 – it is a bit of a word salad. It is a bill that is incredibly important to my community in Tarneit, my community out there in Wyndham. I do commend the opposition for their bipartisan support of this piece of legislation, although I will pick up some points in some of the contributions that were made prior to me standing on my feet here this afternoon. Whilst they do support the piece of legislation, they have taken it upon themselves to speak absolute nonsense through the vast majority of all of their contributions up until now – you know, mostly irrelevant to the bill. I am following the member for Mildura, who was talking about footy training and cheesecakes at one point. I think the member for South-West Coast was talking about regional roads.

But I will pick up a couple of points. The opposition sit there and they talk a big game about how they support Victoria Police, how they fund Victoria Police. Let us not forget the last time that they were in government, between 2010 and 2014. They cut over $1 billion from Victoria Police's budget. They did not hire one new recruit. The academy in Glen Waverley was empty week in, week out because those opposite, last time they were given the chance to govern, cut funding and cut resources to Victoria Police, which meant there were less police on the beat. They stand in here and talk to us and cry and say that there are less police on the beat now than there were two years ago. There are still way more police on the beat today than there were the last time you guys were given the chance to govern. They stand here and say, 'Oh, we're going to open another 40 police stations.' Rubbish. Utter rubbish. No, they are not. They have already come out and said that they would cut $40 billion out of the Victorian public service. You cannot cut $40 billion out of the Victorian public service without cutting police. It is what they did last time. It is in their DNA. We know that.

As I said at the outset, because I am not going to take all my time here, this is an incredibly important piece of legislation to my constituents in Tarneit, because what we want is Victoria Police members and PSOs out on the beat keeping the community safe, not stuck behind a desk. But I do not discount when members of the community go into a Victoria Police station that they expect to see somebody behind the desk to talk to them to deal with their issues. Analysis by Victoria Police shows that officers spend more than 4000 hours a day behind a reception counter or a desk. The Chief Commissioner of Police has rightly identified that as time not best spent by our Victoria Police officers. Time best spent for our Victoria Police officers is out on the beat, responding to incidents, responding to issues and having a visual presence to keep Victorians safe.

A really good example of that is Operation Pulse, particularly in relation to the presence at Werribee Plaza. Tackling crime across my electorate of Tarneit is a priority. I have stood in this place before and said our number one priority as a government is to keep the community safe. That is why we have changed bail settings. It is why we have changed legislative settings. It is why we are now debating

this legislation. Operation Pulse sees an extra police and PSO presence at select shopping centres around suburban Melbourne, and Pacific Werribee, or the Werribee Plaza, is one of those shopping centres that is taking part in Operation Pulse. I had the pleasure of visiting Werribee Plaza with the member for Werribee and the Premier a couple of months ago and met with PSOs and local law enforcement to talk to them about the operation. What we have seen as part of this is a 73 per cent drop in retail theft and stock loss and a 50 per cent drop in violent events. We have to be honest with ourselves, if we have paid attention to social media or to the media: prior to this there have been some incidents at Werribee Plaza. That is not new. It has been happening since Werribee Plaza has been in existence – for decades – but Victoria Police rightly identified that as an issue and have undertaken Operation Pulse to great success.

As I said, I am not going to take my full time because I have a meeting, but this piece of legislation is incredibly important to my constituents in Tarneit. It ensures that Victoria Police are doing the most important and meaningful work that they can do, and I commend it to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (16:04): I am pleased to rise today on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. The member for Berwick earlier started with quite a few points, but he did say from the outset that we do not oppose this bill and for good reason. Having an increased reservist force, I suppose, for want of a better word, actually may help us get some stations reopened first and foremost. We have had a lot of skill leave Victoria Police of late.

I think the member for Berwick referenced earlier – correct me if I am wrong – that when there was a retirement party it used to be 50 or 60 people and now it is like 300 people. They are the people we actually do need to come back. Even if they come back as a reservist, as the member for Berwick rightly pointed out, they can be there to lend that older ear of advice to new recruits coming through that do not have the experience, that have not seen all the ramifications of a decision that they can make. To have that older set of hands there and that older head for advice is actually really, really important. It is probably the same in any industry. It is no different to this place. It is true; the new MPs in this place rely on the ones with more experience to learn. I think this is a good opportunity for the reservists to come in to actually guide the new recruits coming through. It is a positive thing. That is why our Shadow Minister for Police and Corrections the member for Berwick has not opposed this bill, for good reason.

But we also know at the moment in Victoria there is a crime crisis. There is no doubt about that. We also know at the moment we have over 40 police stations closed or on reduced hours. That is not in dispute. We also know at this point in time we are missing roughly 500 full-time positions, and that is putting pressure not just on the public, not just on the community, but on the serving coppers that are there now. I think in all these discussions we should always remember those who are actually out there protecting our communities 24 hours, seven days a week. What impact is the police shortage having on them? I hear this from my local police down in the West Gippsland area. I have mentioned it before in this chamber. I have one 24-hour police station in 4500 square kilometres. That is a very big area. When I have stations out at Neerim South, Rawson, Drouin and Trafalgar that are either not manned or on reduced hours, it puts enormous pressure on that nucleus of the force that comes out of Warragul out of that one 24/7 station. If you think of this in a practical sense, Warragul and Drouin now have a population of about 43,000 people – one 24-hour police station and 43,000 people just in the two towns. That excludes the other 4000 square kilometres within that electorate. If a crime occurs in Drouin and it is out one side of Drouin and they have got to come from Warragul, that is 20 minutes. They are two towns that are close, but they are quite congested at the moment.

That is the problem we are having in regional Victoria, and we have come up with a solution for it. We do support the bill, but we have come up with a solution because we have recognised the shortages that are occurring not just in regional Victoria but also in the city. It is why we have said we are going to put an extra 3000 police out there: because there is good reason. We need 1500 immediately, and then the extra 1500 we will need as this state grows, and we know this state is growing. That is why the member for Berwick has come up with his policy for our commitment to putting 3000 extra police

out on the beat, and we need to do it, not to mention the extra PSOs we need on our stations. The PSOs were introduced for a good reason: so you felt safe when you went to a train station.

Anyone in here that has got kids – I have got a 28-year-old daughter – knows you do hold your breath sometimes. Even though she is an adult now and it is her own life, I am still her father and I still hold my breath thinking 'I hope she gets home safely' when she is going to a train station, because they can be areas where some fairly undesirable people hang out and take advantage of vulnerable people within our community. To take away that policing leaves the fact that the community now may not feel as safe in the stations. But we have problems in this state with crime; we heard it today in question time. Over 32,000 vehicles have been stolen in the last 12 months, more than any other state. It went up 25 per cent when everyone else's figures came down. It is okay to sit there and say, 'We know there's a problem with organised crime.' I mean, to be honest, that is stating the bleeding obvious at the end of the day. You probably do not need to really consult Victoria Police to know that there is a problem with organised crime. Everyone sees it every day, whether it is cars, whether it is restaurants being firebombed, whether it is smoke shops being firebombed, whether it is machete attacks on the street. We know there is an issue with crime in this state. The reservists, yes, may help. But at the moment in this state we are in trouble, and no-one seems to have a solution. The government does not have a solution. The Minister for Police would probably rather be at the races than talk about actual policing.

What is the solution? The solution is what we have come up with, and I do not know why the government has not come up with that further. Every time we turn on the news now we see a firebombing, a machete attack, an aggravated burglary or an aggravated carjacking. All these are happening now, and I think that what concerns me more than anything is that the public are nearly becoming numb to the news. It used to be horrific. We used to see something come up on the news, an aggravated home burglary, and say, 'Oh, my goodness, that's horrible.' It still is. But the problem we have got now is it is happening so often it is nearly becoming the norm, and we should not be living like that. Our communities should not be living like that. We definitely should not have over 32,000 vehicles stolen and then the Minister for Police blaming the car manufacturers. That is not a solution to the problem. That is just shifting the blame. Whenever there is a problem, we should be getting to the source of the problem and finding a solution to it, not shifting the blame sideways onto other people or manufacturers. This is where I think the government has failed. They have lost sight of the fact that our crime rate is so high that they have become immune to the fact, and I do not think the government have done enough to address crime – I really do not. Our bail laws are weak. We see it time and time again. The government is saying, 'We have the toughest bail laws.' But that is not true, and the general public does not believe it when someone on 109 charges gets bailed again. The general public do not believe this spin anymore, and this is becoming a problem for the government, because they have literally failed even their own narrative, which is that we have the toughest bail laws. That is the narrative of the government, but it does not happen. How is the general public going to believe the government when they say this?

We have a long way to go in this state when it comes to getting crime under control. Whether it is juvenile crime or whether it is organised crime, carjackings or cars being stolen, we have a long way to go. We are miles behind. The public has had enough. Yes, this bill hopefully will give the new recruits a chance. But man, we have got a long way to go in this state.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (16:14): I rise to speak in favour of this bill, the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. As has previously been mentioned, these reforms will enable the appointment of police reservists as was announced by the Allan Labor government in the budget, and I think the funding is there to employ up to 200 at this time.

Back in time, prior to 2014, there were provisions in the Victoria Police Act for reservists. However, when that legislation was updated – I think that was done under the Napthine–Baillieu governments – they got rid of police reservists. What we have seen is there is a real requirement to have those reservists back again in order to allow sworn police officers to be out on the beat, on the front line,

dealing with crime, which is on the streets, not in the police stations. The legislation goes through what the reservists will and will not be, but one of the things is they have to have served as police officers for a period of time in order to become reservists. The expectation from the Chief Commissioner of Police is that it will be, in many cases, retired police officers that will take up these positions. I understand many have already expressed an interest in the role. They will be people that already have that experience, and they will be able to share their great experience and knowledge with younger members of the police force and mentor them.

There will be two roles for these reservists. One is doing some of the behind-the-scenes administrative work rather than the work on the front line, and also they can be there to mentor and support serving officers that are on the front line. The administrative duties of police officers are important, because they may involve preparing briefs for the prosecutor or dealing with issues of the public when they come into a police station and have things that they want to raise with the police. All these things are very important jobs, and the Allan Labor government is about making sure that we do have the best police force in Australia. Already we have the largest numbers of police compared to other jurisdictions, but this just provides that extra bit of support so that the police can be out there on the front line, catching criminals and ensuring that the community is safe.

I turn to talking about Epping police station. We were advised by the police command of the area that they were reducing hours so that they could have more officers out on the beat in the vans, making sure that they are visible and deterring crime as well as being right on the spot in order to deal with that crime as it comes up. It will be great when we have these additional police support people, the reservists, because they will no doubt be working from police stations. I will be very strongly advocating that there ought to be some police reservists at Epping police station in order to support the public and the residents of the Thomastown electorate.

When we listen to the opposition, of course it is going to be doom and gloom and they will say everything is no good, but the fact is we all acknowledge that there is concern within the community about levels of crime. I am concerned about it. The Allan Labor government is concerned about it. That is why we are not just talking about the additional 200 reservists that this legislation today will facilitate, we are also talking about a number of other pieces of legislation and procedures and regulation in order to really elevate the importance of dealing with crime and stopping crime in its tracks. There has been a lot of legislation. We hear the opposition say nothing is being done. There are many things that have been done, but these things take some time in order to get through the system. When we look, for example, at the toughening and tightening up of the bail laws, judges and magistrates have to look at whether or not bail should be provided to an individual based on whether it is safe for the community for them to do so. That is a change that we made in order to make sure that we do not have these situations where people continue to commit crimes while out on bail, but it takes time to get through. We have already seen, though, that the number of rejections of bail has massively increased. I did a community forum the other week. I think it was something like an 84 per cent increase or more in people not being able to get bail.

I have done a number of community safety forums, and I have gone through and explained to residents some of the legislative changes that we have made. And when we explain it and acknowledge that there is concern in the community and go through the steps that we have taken, there really is an understanding of why it is happening, why we are doing it and what we expect to come from it, rather than this constant frightening of people that we see from the opposition without any acknowledgement of the legislation and changes that we are introducing in order to address some of the crime that is happening at the moment.

Another good example – and I think the member at the table was giving the case of somebody on bail earlier today and the sorts of sentences that people are getting – is that we are conducting, as part of our announcements, a really thorough and full investigation of the sentencing legislation. Now, you cannot do that overnight. That takes time; there are processes. But that again is an acknowledgement that community expectations may not be being met when it comes to the sentences that criminals are

receiving for certain acts and crimes that they are committing. That will, again, take some time, but that review will be undertaken and is in response to listening to Victorians and what they are concerned about.

Another example is the legislation that we have passed around the idea of adult time for violent crime, and that is when young people commit serious, violent crimes that should be matched with adult sentencing. But in countering that we also want to make sure that every opportunity is given to young people to become prosperous and contributing members of society. The violence reduction unit is about doing just that, trying to change behaviours very early on to prevent young people turning to crime, so that we can do two things: prevent crime and make the public safe and also change the behaviour of those young people, which will make the community safer as well as allowing them to have a better life.

These are all the sorts of examples. There are many more, but I do not have a lot of time left in my 10 minutes to talk about all of the examples of what as a government we are doing. There are things that, yes, we would love to see happening straightaway – immediately – but things just do not happen like that. You have to follow the processes. In terms of sentencing changes, we need to do a proper review so that we can get the experts in and talk to the practitioners and the lawyers as well as other organisations, including the police, to look at what is the best solution for some of these issues. Of course, there are also examples of life sentencing for those that recruit young people into serious and violent crimes and of making sure that the penalties and the punishments are warranted by the types of crimes that are being committed.

When we talk about these sorts of things, we have to have a logical and organised approach to them. You cannot just be doing things for political grandstanding or using them to your own political advantage. One of the things that I guess is an example of that is the machete ban. There was talk that these machete bins were costing thousands and thousands of dollars. That is just not true at all, and yet these are the things that people are spreading within the community, causing further angst and anger when we look at the issue of crime. So I am looking forward to this legislation passing and coming into action.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (16:24): I rise to stand and make a contribution to the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. This bill effectively creates a modern reservist framework designed to supplement the work of sworn officers by allowing suitably qualified individuals to assist the Victorian police in a range of non-operational duties. The purpose is straightforward: to free up sworn police officers from administrative and support functions so that they can spend more time focusing on frontline policing and community safety.

I want to begin by my contribution by acknowledging the extraordinary work undertaken every day by the men and women of Victoria Police and particularly those in my electorate. Whether it is responding to emergencies, investigating crime, supporting victims, maintaining road safety or being present in our communities, our police officers continue to carry a significant and growing workload, and every single day they risk their lives to keep our communities safe – something that I and my community are incredibly grateful for. My region continues to face many of the same policing challenges seen elsewhere across Victoria, including increasing crime, closed stations and reduced police station operational hours. Residents need to access police support when they need to, and hopefully by reducing the police office and administrative burden it will take some pressure away and get more police on the street and have our stations open.

Our region as a whole is significantly neglected when it comes to our local police stations and resourcing. We have many of our police stations only open for limited hours. I recently met with the police at the Mooroopna station, as the community had raised that the station was often closed and they could not get through on the phone. Mooroopna has a population of 8000 people that need to have a police presence and the station open. Very recently we had two tobacco stores firebombed and completely destroyed in the main street of Mooroopna. This has been very confronting for this small

community, as you can imagine, and has escalated fear and uncertainty. Along with the increasing crime in the region, including aggravated robbery, burglaries and motor vehicle theft, retail theft continues to rise, not only across my region but across the state, as relaxed bail laws and the Allan Labor government's refusal to put the safety of Victorians first have led to increasing crime.

Crime rates have reached a record 20-year high. A crime is committed every 50 seconds. There is a serious assault every 28 minutes and a theft from a retail store every 13 minutes. I have called on the Minister for Police and Minister for Community Safety numerous times now to provide more support to a number of my local police stations. Seventy-five per cent of the Shepparton police's time is taken up with dealing with domestic violence incidents, which is taking them off the streets and leaving them unable to get out to call-outs in the community. This also has a significant impact on our police officers. I have called on the minister, together with the Shepparton police station, to address the desperate need for a specialised, dedicated family violence response team. Breach of family violence orders now sits as the number one crime in the Shepparton district electorate. This is a very specific matter, which has been ignored for far too long. As I said, we have seen increasing crime across the board. It is no surprise with those figures that the police are not able to get out to call-outs when the community need them.

I also raised in the chamber this morning the alarming increase in youth crime. We are seeing very young perpetrators. Just recently in Shepparton two 11-year-olds were viciously attacked walking home from school, and there was another violent attack in a schoolyard a few days later involving teenagers. Both of these matters are being investigated by the police. These serious acts of violence, as you can imagine, have left victims traumatised, families distressed and many members of the community deeply concerned about the safety of their children. Every member of our community has the right to feel safe at school, on our streets and in their daily lives. When young people find themselves heading down the wrong path, we need strong intervention, meaningful support and clear accountability to help turn lives around before more harm is done.

We know youth crime across the board is escalating because they are getting away with it. Communities right across the state are feeling unsafe. Business owners, our police officers and first responders have all had enough of Labor's soft approach when it comes to crime. I meet with our local police often, and they are doing the best they can with the resources that they have. They have been significantly, as I said, under-resourced. There are over 1500 vacancies across police rosters, and over 40 police stations are closed or operating on reduced hours. That is why a Nationals and Liberal government will recruit an additional 3000 police to address crime and community safety. We are serious about crime and protecting our communities.

The lead speaker, the member for Berwick, who is in the chamber as we speak, also raised the alarming statistic around car theft that more than 32,000 vehicles were stolen in Victoria in the past 12 months, equating to almost 90 vehicles every single day. That is an astounding figure to comprehend. Victoria also recorded more than 12,500 insurance claims for stolen vehicles in 2025, with payouts exceeding $243 million. This has a significant financial impact on insurance premiums at a time when people are already struggling to make ends meet. I had one of my staff, Melissa, come to Melbourne a few months ago to work with me here at Parliament, and, guess what, she went to leave to head home only to find that her car was gone, stolen in an undercover car park where you would not expect a car to be able to be stolen. The car was her pride and joy, never to be seen again.

Crime rates have reached a record 20-year high, and as I said, every 50 seconds there is a crime committed. Our police officers should be spending as much time as possible protecting the community, responding to incidents and engaging with the public rather than being tied up with administrative tasks that can be undertaken by appropriately trained support personnel. Every hour that a sworn police officer can spend on patrol rather than undertaking administrative work is an hour that can be directed towards crime prevention, community engagement and public safety, and that is something that we welcome.

The government has identified that police currently spend more than 1.4 million hours annually undertaking station reception and administrative functions. That figure in itself shows the total neglect of resourcing our police. The intent of this bill is to redirect some of that workload away from sworn officers and back onto appropriately trained support personnel, allowing police to spend more time undertaking other duties.

The bill provides that police reservists will perform their functions under the direction and control of the Chief Commissioner of Police or another authorised police officer or reservist. This position reflects a recognition of the operational pressures facing Victorian police and the need to reinforce frontline capability through practical workforce measures. The reservists will be able to assist with a range of support functions that currently consume significant police resources. These duties may include assisting with public inquiries at police stations, staffing front counters, taking crime reports in person or over the phone and supporting the commencement of investigations, undertaking administrative tasks and assisting with justice-related processes. I hope that there will be a strong uptake at regional stations and that this is well supported and welcomed.

The legislation also enables regulations to prescribe eligibility requirements for reservists. It is anticipated that applicants will generally be former police officers with a minimum of two years cumulative policing service. Importantly, eligibility is not limited to former Victorian police members, with former officers from other Australian jurisdictions, as well as New Zealand and the United Kingdom, expected to be eligible if they meet the required criteria. This role will be open to former police members who have at least two years of service with Victoria Police or other Australian jurisdictions, as well as those who have served in, as I said, either New Zealand or the United Kingdom. Another positive aspect of the model is that it recognises the value of experienced former officers who still wish to contribute to community safety rather than losing decades of policing knowledge and experience upon retirement or other reasons for leaving the force. This framework provides an opportunity for that expertise to continue supporting Victorian police and the Victorian community.

The bill also makes clear that reservists are intended to perform non-operational roles. They are not being recruited to replace frontline police officers, nor are they being deployed in the same way as sworn operational members. Instead, they provide support capacity that allows fully sworn officers to focus on policing responsibilities that require operational training and powers. When police officers are freed from administrative and support functions, they can spend more time where the community expects and needs them to be: out on the streets, responding to incidents, engaging with local residents and businesses and providing a visible deterrent to crime. A stronger police presence makes a difference. It helps build community confidence, improves perceptions of safety and strengthens relationships between police and the communities they serve. People feel reassured when they see police actively patrolling shopping precincts, attending community events and maintaining a visible presence in neighbourhoods, something that has been neglected for quite some time. Importantly, freeing up sworn officers also means more capacity to respond to calls for assistance. When a member of the public contacts police, they expect a timely response. Whether it is a family violence incident, an assault, a theft, suspicious behaviour or a road safety matter, Victorians rightly expect that police will be available when they are needed. For regional communities such as Shepparton and my broader electorate, where police often cover large geographic areas and face significant workloads, hopefully there will be some relief. More officers available for operational duties can mean faster response times, greater police visibility, more protective policing and a stronger focus on preventing crime.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:34): I rise to speak on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026, and as I commence I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to all our VicPol members for the great work that they do under very trying circumstances, and in particular this year and last year when they have had some really tragic events occur within their membership. I just want to extend my appreciation, but also to the PSOs – and the PSOs that protect us here around this precinct. Their work is amazing, and I thank them very much.

This is a practical, sensible and forward-looking reform that will help Victoria Police do what Victorians expect them to do every day and keep our communities safe. That is the fundamental reason for this reservists bill. At its heart, the bill is about highly trained police officers spending more and more time out there policing throughout our communities and less time sitting behind a desk doing administrative duties. When people call 000, when they need the police assistance and when they see a crime or antisocial behaviour in their neighbourhoods, they would expect and want police officers to respond to them as soon as possible. They expect VicPol members to be out on patrol and visible in their communities, preventing crime and protecting public safety. But it is not always the way, and many police officers currently spend a significant portion of their hours of work undertaking administrative and non-operational duties within police stations, behind the desk, dealing with what we would say are non-operational things. But of course some people within the general community expect police officers to be behind a desk when they rock up at a police station. Those duties are important, and they are necessary for the effective functioning of Victoria Police, but do they need to be done by operational frontline members? Possibly not. It is tying up frontline members. Victoria Police told us that currently police officers spend more than 4000 hours every single day behind reception counters or desks in police stations across the state. That is the equivalent of 500 eight-hour shifts per day, every day of the year. If you translate those 500 shifts from behind a desk out onto the road and out policing within the community, that will make an enormous impact on any potential crime. Just being out there and being visible would be amazing. As I say, those hours could be put to greater use, rather than them being stuck behind a desk. They could be used for responding to the calls, in particular 000 calls. That is exactly what this bill is trying to achieve.

Recently I attended a community police forum out at Melton. It was a great forum, attended by many, many community members. Again, the police informed us that domestic and family violence was the biggest crime that they attend. I think probably two or three out of four cases that they attend to would be domestic and family violence, and of course we know that that has a relationship to youth crime. I think we have got to think more broadly than just more policing and harsher penalties and things like that. This is a community issue, and it has really got to come back to families and community. We are not just going to be able to police our way out of youth crime and other crime. It is also about how the community addresses it at the local level through families and things like that. Unfortunately, some of that youth crime is caused by families where those kids have seen domestic and family violence under the roof of their house. Some of those kids cannot even go home because of that very reason. These are the things that we have got to address, just not by policing but by the community getting involved and dealing with those sorts of things and reporting domestic and family violence and any other crime.

This bill establishes a modern, fit-for-purpose police reservists scheme that will provide additional administrative and operational support to Victoria Police and free up frontline officers to focus on frontline policing. It is a practical solution to a practical challenge. Victoria has previously operated a reservist model under earlier legislation. I think it was referred to by the member for Thomastown, who said it was during the years of at least 2010 to 2014, I think by the previous coalition government. We know reservists can play an important role in supporting police operations. We know that it can reduce administrative pressures on frontline members, and of course it makes better use of resources. Again, talking to the Chief Commissioner of Police Mike Bush this morning at the TAC event that was in this building, it reintroduces the power for the chief commissioner to appoint police reservists and establishes the legislative framework necessary to support a contemporary reservist program. That is what this bill will do.

It supports the chief commissioner's vision of getting more police officers out from behind the desk and into our communities; I believe that was a model that he introduced in New Zealand when he was over there as the commissioner. We were talking about this legislation, and he told me of the need for more cops to be on the front line and how important it was to free them up from that backroom work so they can police and be out there and be more visible, which is a great idea. That is what we want to see happen and obviously reduce any type of crime – it is not just youth crime, it is all types of crime,

and unfortunately we see organised crime exploiting young members of our communities at the moment and we have got to get on top of that also.

I also spoke to him about advocacy and getting a new station in my area of Cobblebank. I have previously put in a couple of bids for that; unfortunately, I have not been successful, but I will continue to mention it because I think with the enormous growth in corridors like Melton and Wyndham, these are some of the services that we will need to plan for well in advance of that population growing. I can see some members looking at me with their ears pricked, saying probably the same thing in their areas too. But anyway, it is something that we have really got to consider and plan for, and I am sure VicPol do that and I am sure the commissioner will do that. But I know Melton is going to increase its population by another 200,000 over the next 20 years, so it will go to 450,000. Between Melton and Wyndham, by 2045 there will be a million people, which will be one-tenth of the Victorian population, so police resourcing is a key issue for us. It is a very young community. I think average age will be 32 or 33, so it is a very young, diverse community. These are the things that we have got to think about in regard to dealing with our community members. It is not just about crime; police do other great work; they do not just deal with criminals. It will be great to see some of these reservists come in. I am hopeful that we will get some in Melton to allow the frontline members to get out there and undertake the work that the frontline members do in many, many different ways.

I want to go to a recent event in Melton where the police concentrated on an event dealing with vehicle issues, stolen cars and things like that. I think they call it Operation Momentum. Of course, I cannot find it when I need to find it. But they laid so many charges, and they recovered something like 50 stolen vehicles. I think there were over 100 charges, something like that. It was a really successful campaign that they ran out at Melton – a dedicated campaign. Again, this is another example where you can have reservists come into a police station and be able to do that administrative and desk work and allow the frontline members to get out there. Yes, it was called Operation Momentum – 180 arrests since it was launched. It happened throughout Brimbank and Melton. It was started in March, I believe – 180 arrests, 750 charges – and it located some 50 stolen cars. These are the types of things that VicPol members can concentrate on when they have the reservists to release them from being stuck behind a desk and allow the reservists to do that administrative work and allow the operational members to get out there. I know it will be bringing back some very experienced former members, and we thank them for putting their hands up and expressing an interest to come back into the fold of supporting our operational members. I am pleased to see that we have had such high numbers of expressions of interest. This is an important bill and I commend it to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (16:44): I rise to talk on the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. I do not think it matters who you are here in the chamber; visible police on our streets are what the public want and what makes the public feel safe. I know I talk with my community down in the Latrobe Valley, and when we have operations, as the member for Melton was just talking about then, and we see the visible presence of our wonderful officers on the street, automatically straightaway if there are issues about they stop, because not only can the decent people that want to feel safe on the streets see them there, the criminal element also see these uniformed officers on the street. It makes a difference. It makes a difference to the community, whether you are young, whether you are a mum or dad walking down the street or in particular if you are of an ageing fraternity in our community. They just feel safe on the streets.

We were talking today about the theft of cars, and it is prevalent down in the Latrobe Valley, as it is through regional Victoria and also here in metropolitan Melbourne. We have a really high rate of cars being stolen right across Victoria, and we see the high-end cars going, but more importantly and more of a passion of mine is the tradies that are getting their utes stolen. Not only is their car being stolen, it is taking away their livelihood, because inside those cars are all their tools. It does not matter if they are a builder or a plumber or an electrician – and this is going on all the time. So we need to make sure that we are getting on top of that, and the way to do that is to have more police in our system. We hear the numbers – that we are 1500 officers short and we are pushing younger officers through training.

But the older fraternity that have stepped out for whatever reason and finished their time as an active police officer, to have them be able to step back into running the front of house, as such, in our police stations right around Victoria I think is a fantastic move. The member for Berwick spoke earlier about our younger constables getting that on-the-job training, and it does not matter if you are a tradie or if you are a teacher or a baker or whatever it is; if you are a young person coming through, that older element that you can rely on and use as a sounding board makes a huge difference, and I think this will make a big difference.

Down in the Latrobe Valley we have got the Churchill police station on reduced hours and also the Moe police station on reduced hours. So I can see these reservists being able to go front of house in police stations, not only in the valley but right across Victoria, and being able to get our members back out on the street. As I said before when I started, that is exactly what the people of Victoria want to have. As a coalition I know we have stated that we are going to make sure that we have got 3000 more police officers on the street, because that is the feedback, no matter where I go, that I am getting: we need more uniformed officers on the beat.

We also talk about PSOs. We are a region that is pretty lucky. We have PSOs in Traralgon. Number one, it makes a difference straightaway when they are there. They are not always there, but when they are there it makes a huge difference. But we need more PSOs in regional Victoria, and why we need them is because it is proven that when these uniformed officers, whether they be our police or our PSOs, are on the street, people feel safer and the criminal element disperses. So that is why we need to get these people back out on the street.

We are moving into a long weekend this weekend, and the police will be saturating our destination areas right across Victoria, as they should, because they know we need to see them out and about in their cars. It was only a few years ago when we used to have people complaining that they did not actually see that visible presence out and about on the roads, detecting people speeding and doing drug and alcohol tests. We know that if we are getting those officers from having to sit behind a desk back onto the street and on our roads it is going to make a huge difference for our community.

I have spoken before about the ageing fraternity at one of the bowling clubs down in Morwell. They have actually changed the way that they are providing meals for the pensioners and so forth at the moment, because as winter has set in they want to be home, locked up in their house before it gets dark. They are still going about their daily routines, but they are changing the way that they live their lives and go about their day-to-day lives because of the criminal element that is on the streets. We are not immune in the Latrobe Valley to home invasions, youths stealing cars and fighting. They are prevalent everywhere, so we need to make sure that we are getting these officers where we need to get them. There was a court case with the mushroom lady last year. This was the first time the court case was in Morwell, and we had some criminal activity going on on the streets before the mushroom court case started. The way they fixed it is they had officers visibly present on the street. They fixed it within 5 minutes. People that were normally going about their daily routines were going up to our police officers and actually coming into my electorate office and saying how great it was to see these police visibly back on the street.

This is where we need to get to as a society in Victoria. As a young kid – and I am sure you would have done this too back in the day – I played cops and robbers, running around the house. The cops always outnumbered the robbers back when I was playing, but unfortunately in this day and age the robbers are outnumbering our policing fraternity, so we need to get that balance back. Do not give them an easy ride, because the criminal element here in Victoria do not care – they do not care about rules, they do not care about being arrested and they do not care about going to court because they know at this particular stage they are going to get a slap on the wrist, get let out or get bail and be back out on the street, so we need to get tougher. I think everybody knows that we need to get tougher.

The model that we have here, the police reservists – and the member for Berwick spoke about it – is a proven model, because it has been in once before. There are the older police, and as the member for

Melton said, we thank them for actually engaging and putting their hand up and wanting to come back in to help out, because these are people that are retired. Over their journey they have probably seen enough trauma for anyone's lifetime, but they are putting their hand up to come back in because the community needs their help so they can get our authorised officers, our VicPol officers, back out on the roads, get them back out on our footpaths walking up and down the street, because as I have stated a few times here, this is what makes people feel safe.

We do not oppose this bill. We would like to see more police officers injected into the Victorian police force. We need to make sure that we are pulling every lever to make sure of that visible presence, whether it be on a train, whether it be on the street or whether it be on a highway as you are driving up and down, especially this weekend, going to a long weekend destination. We need to see them at the football, at local football and in sporting fraternities. We need to make sure that we are doing everything to have more officers on the street to keep every single Victorian safe.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (16:54): I am very proud to speak in support of the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. This is an important piece of legislation that reflects a simple but powerful principle: our police officers should be spending as much time as possible protecting Victorians on the front line, not sitting behind desks undertaking administrative duties that can be performed by others. Victoria Police analysis shows that police officers currently spend more than 4000 hours every single day staffing reception counters and undertaking administrative tasks. That amounts to around 1.4 million hours every year. Those are 1.4 million hours of valuable policing capacity that could be spent out in our community in police vehicles and on foot patrols, responding to emergencies and helping keep Victorians safe. That is exactly what this bill seeks to address. The Allan Labor government has listened to Victoria Police and acted, and through this year's state budget we have provided $62 million to support the deployment of up to 200 police reservists. This legislation provides the modern and fit-for-purpose framework necessary to establish that reservist scheme and make it a reality. At its heart the bill is about ensuring that Victoria Police has access to an experienced, operationally trained workforce capable of undertaking important non-operational duties, thereby freeing up sworn police officers to focus on frontline policing. It is a practical reform, it is a sensible reform, and it is a reform that Victoria Police itself has identified as a valuable way to strengthen policing services across our state.

The introduction of police reservists comes at a time when recruitment into Victoria Police is also exceptionally strong. Victoria Police received 8700 applications last year, the highest level seen in five years. Victoria Police continues to be the largest police service in Australia, with approximately 15,500 police officers and 1400 PSOs serving our community. These figures tell an important story, and they demonstrate that Victorians continue to see policing as a worthwhile and respected profession. I would like to thank Victoria Police, particularly those officers that are serving my electorate of Mulgrave. The response to the proposed reservist scheme has been remarkable. Victoria Police has already received more than 600 expressions of interest from former police officers seeking to return and support their former colleagues. That level of interest significantly exceeds the number of reservist positions currently funded, and it demonstrates the strong connection many former officers maintain with Victoria Police long after they leave service. It also demonstrates the confidence former officers have in the value of this initiative.

The purpose of this bill is straightforward. The bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 to reintroduce a power for the Chief Commissioner of Police to appoint police reservists. Importantly, these reservists will perform non-operational duties that support frontline policing. This may include responding to public inquiries, undertaking reception duties at police stations, taking reports from members of the public, assisting with administrative processes and supporting the commencement of investigations. These are important tasks. They contribute to the effective operation of Victoria Police, but they are not functions that necessarily require the full deployment of a sworn frontline officer. By enabling trained reservists to perform these duties, Victoria Police can redeploy sworn officers to frontline roles, where they are needed most. The bill also establishes clear eligibility requirements. Applicants must

have at least two years cumulative service as a police officer in Victoria or another policing jurisdiction. This ensures that reservists bring relevant policing experience and operational understanding to the role. These are not individuals that will be starting from scratch. They are experienced former police officers who already possess valuable skills and knowledge. The bill also allows regulations to prescribe additional eligibility requirements relating to character, fitness, qualifications and training, ensuring that appropriate standards are maintained. Together, these provisions create a comprehensive and contemporary legislative framework for the operation of the scheme.

Community safety requires more than rhetoric; it requires practical measures, good public policy and meaningful investment. This government has consistently demonstrated that commitment. This bill builds on a model that has previously operated successfully. On that note, I commend the bill to the house.

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

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (77): Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, 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, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Anthony Marsh, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bridget Vallence, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

Noes (3): Gabrielle de Vietri, Will Fowles, Tim Read

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Nick Staikos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 1, page 3, after line 25 insert –

   "(ia) to amend the **Duties Act 2000** in relation to the concession from duty for newly constructed dwellings in strata subdivisions; and".

2. Clause 2, line 32, after "Part 9" insert ", Part 10A".

3. Page 116, after line 28 insert the following heading –

   "**Part 10A – Amendment of Duties Act 2000**".

4. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 147 and the heading proposed by amendment number 3 –

   '**147A Consideration for the transfer of dutiable property – adjustment for construction costs**

   In section 21AA(1)(c) of the **Duties Act 2000**, for "21 October 2026" **substitute** "21 April 2027".'.

5. Long title, after "residential land" insert ", the **Duties Act 2000** in relation to the concession from duty for newly constructed dwellings".

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Anthony CARBINES: I move:

That the sitting be continued.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (17:07): I move:

That the consideration of government business, orders of the day 5 and 6, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Rulings from the Chair

Strangers and officers

The SPEAKER (17:07): I would like to respond to a couple of points of order that have been raised this week. I wish to make some remarks about strangers and officers – that is, people in the chamber and galleries who are not members. People in the public galleries, the press gallery and the advisers boxes, along with the chamber staff, PSOs and Hansard reporters and monitors, are not active participants in the chamber. They observe proceedings and support the operation of the house, but they do not and must not contribute to debate. People in the galleries are required to sit quietly and not interject, and officers seek to be unobtrusive.

Accordingly, members are prohibited from referring to strangers other than under standing order 114 and should refer to officers only where absolutely necessary. There is a fairness aspect here, as those people are not able to respond to comments in the way a member can. If members persist in referring to the galleries, they will no longer be heard by the Chair.

Further, I refer members to the multiple rulings in chapter 27 of *Rulings from the Chair*, particularly on pages 172 and 173, about acknowledging the gallery. I further draw members' attention to Deputy Speaker Fogarty's ruling on page 174 that it is inappropriate to refer to the presence of advisers in the advisers boxes. Such officers are here in the course of their work and should not be drawn into chamber proceedings.

Statements of treaty compatibility

The SPEAKER (17:09): The Acting Speaker referred to me a point of order by the Manager of Opposition Business about a statement of treaty compatibility. I consider this to be a matter for the house. However, I refer members to section 66(3)(a) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, which requires a statement of compatibility to state whether the First Peoples' Assembly was given an opportunity to advise on a bill. The minister's statement contains that information.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (17:10): I rise to address the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I will be frank, I was not expecting to be addressing this bill this week, but because of the circumstances the house finds itself in, this bill has been brought forward, and I am now in a position where it is being considered by the house and I am now making a contribution on behalf of the opposition. This bill does a number of things. It seeks to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the education system. It requires all schools to implement policies restricting student use of personal electronic devices during school hours. It seeks to reform teacher registration and regulatory processes through the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). It seeks to expand the Victorian student register to support national data reforms, including the unique student identifier. It seeks to introduce information sharing and governance changes across the education system and further seeks to make minor and technical amendments to improve legislative clarity and administration. The bill also makes a minor statute law revision to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. So there is a bit in there, and I intend to address a number of those points.

It is, according to the government, part of a broader suite of education and social policy reforms being progressed by the Allan Labor government. It reflects a number of policy priorities for the government, including embedding Aboriginal recognition and self-determination within legislation. The bill also aligns with national reforms including the rollout of the unique student identifier. Concerning

Aboriginal recognition and self-determination, in particular, this bill inserts a formal statement of recognition of Aboriginal people; introduces guiding principles requiring decision-makers to consider self-determination; expands the definition of 'parent' to reflect the Aboriginal understanding and Aboriginal parenting structures; and formalises, but does not mandate, that Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives are included across all learning areas in line with existing government policy. It requires consultation with Aboriginal stakeholders on policies and system targets, although I might add that the specifics around consultation requirements are not specified in this bill. It mandates availability of cultural understanding training across the education workforce.

In the area of restriction of personal electronic devices, this bill seeks to require all registered schools to implement policies restricting students' use of devices during school hours. It links compliance with these policies to school registration requirements and applies across the government and non-government school sectors. In relation to the teacher registration and regulatory reforms, including those impacting the Victorian Institute of Teaching, this bill seeks to expand information-sharing powers for teacher registration and assessment and strengthens the interim suspension arrangements and review processes. It broadens the registration register to include disciplinary conditions and outcomes. It adjusts governance arrangements of the VIT council and streamlines health assessments and investigative processes. Specifically in relation to the Victorian student register reforms, this bill seeks to expand the type of data collected, including country of birth and other prescribed information, and supports implementation of a national unique student identifier system. This bill further seeks to enable greater flexibility in ministerial orders, remove certain administrative constraints on appointments and introduce minor technical amendments, as I have previously addressed.

In considering this bill on behalf of the opposition, I have sought to engage with a number of education stakeholders and I might say, Speaker, in reference to your previous ruling which you have just given in this chamber, I will not make direct reference to the advisers in the chamber present this evening, other than to say that I am grateful for the engagement of the minister's office and the Department of Education in this process. I am grateful for the briefing which they offered the opposition. I am further grateful for those present from the department and the minister's office taking a series of questions on notice. And, Speaker, I think that you will be as surprised as I am, but I have never had as comprehensive a response to the questions that were taken on notice during that bill briefing as I had, as provided by the Minister for Education's office, no doubt supported by the Department of Education, and for that I am grateful. I also indicate at this point that the opposition intends to not oppose the passage of this bill through this chamber.

There are a number of other stakeholders that I sought to engage with as part of this process. They include Independent Schools Victoria, the Australian Education Union, the Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools, the Victorian Principals Association, the Victorian Catholic Education Authority, the Australian Principals Federation, the Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association, the Country Education Partnership, the Australian Christian Lobby and others. I am grateful for the feedback that those and other organisations gave on this particular piece of legislation. Both Catholic and independent school representatives have welcomed in particular the ban on electronic devices, and they are quoted in subsequent media articles. I note that on the day that that was announced by the government they did so I believe in a Catholic school, and that event was attended by the CEO of the VCEA Elizabeth Labone, who was quoted in a media article as saying:

> We welcome today's announcement and are supportive of all measures that enhance student engagement and learning.

The CEO of Independent Schools Victoria Rachel Holthouse also noted:

> We welcome today's announcement and acknowledge the government's efforts to balance access to electronic devices with the need to support positive learning environments and student wellbeing.

I do place on record a note that I received from the Australian Christian Lobby, who raised concerns regarding the Aboriginal reconciliation and self-determination provisions within the bill, particularly

in relation to curriculum content and implementation. ACL expressed opposition to key elements of the bill, including clause 5 and related provisions, arguing that they may introduce an unbalanced perspective in the Australian curriculum:

> Clause 5 appears to promote a one-sided narrative … while overlooking the contributions and advancements brought by British settlement.

ACL also raised concerns about the practical operation of the provisions, noting that while some elements are framed as principles based, they may become effectively mandatory in practice through associated requirements. ACL further noted that these concerns indicate that aspects of the bill relating to Aboriginal recognition and curriculum content are likely to attract further scrutiny and debate. In our view, having taken into consideration all of those matters, as I say, our position is to not oppose the bill.

The bill includes a number of broadly supported measures, particularly the extension of mobile phone restrictions across the non-government school sector. The provisions relating to Aboriginal recognition and self-determination are largely in our view symbolic insofar as they are not compulsory and are unlikely to materially change what is taught in schools as it currently stands. The expansion of the VIT powers to strengthen child safety and oversight we believe to be a positive reform.

There is one other stakeholder that I did engage with, but they did not formally convey their views to me in writing. Therefore I raise their concerns during the course of this debate but do so with reference to a memory of a conversation we had rather than an email that I received or a formal response that I received. That was in a conversation with both the Australian Education Union and the Independent Education Union, who raised concerns around changes to a requirement for the head of the Victorian Institute of Teaching. From memory, their view was that they believe it is reasonable for the head of that organisation, given it is the Victorian Institute of Teaching, to have a current teacher registration. I am somewhat sympathetic to that view, I might say, and I expressed that to both the AEU and the IEU at the time during the course of those conversations. But in fullness, I wanted to convey at least my memory of that conversation. Thank goodness for privilege, because my memory of that conversation may not be accurate in the slightest. But I believe it to be so. Perhaps next time the AEU and the IEU can convey their thoughts to me formally via email.

I will now refer to some of the questions that were raised during the course of the bill briefing. In relation to the Aboriginal recognition and self-determination amendments, I did have a question around how these amendments were determined, in particular whether these particular parts of the bill in fact fulfilled the Department of Education's obligation following the passage of treaty legislation. And I was, I will admit, somewhat surprised to understand that the process undertaken to bring these amendments to the house today operated somewhat independently of the treaty process and whatever is now required of the Department of Education and the Minister for Education with reference to the treaty legislation. The amendments that are in this bill were developed and refined, as I am advised by the department and the minister's office, through consultation with Aboriginal community representatives as well as stakeholders from the early childhood education, schooling and vocational education sectors, including the union and the principals association. But they further note here the proposed amendments are not in response to obligations or considerations arising out of treaty, and so I just simply note that at this point in time. I note that and signpost it, I guess. I dare say that for the Department of Education and the Minister for Education to fulfil their obligations under treaty, they will be required to bring further amendments with a thematic similarity, perhaps, to the ones that they are bringing here. But I just note that at this point in time to simply say for those interested: watch this space.

In relation to the amendments to the student register, I did have a question during the course of the bill briefing. There is a new requirement for a country of birth to be captured, and my question at the time was how in this particular instance does the bill, through the government, I guess, choose to define 'country of birth'. 'Country of birth' could mean nation-state. but 'country of birth' could mean,

through an Aboriginal Indigenous lens, the land in which you were born in accordance with the tradition of those elders and that societal structure. I thought, given one of the stated intents of the bill is to expand Aboriginal reconciliation and self-determination, that that was a fair question to pose. I have been advised that 'country of birth' within this bill means the nation in which a student was born, and in collecting this data the department relies on the standard Australian classification of countries produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I am further advised the majority of countries which can be listed as a student's country of birth under this arrangement are independent sovereign nation-states but that there are some exceptions to this – Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales within the United Kingdom, for example.

In relation to data that is being collected, this bill enables a new data point to be collected, but I did ask the question during the course of the bill briefing: was consideration given during the course of developing this bill to the existing data points that were collected, and do they still remain relevant today? I will give you just one example if I may. A local father of a couple of kids, when he registered his first child at the local state school, filled out the registration form. During the course of filling out that registration form, one of the questions that was asked was – and I am paraphrasing, as I have not got the form in front of me – 'How far away do you live from the school that you are seeking to register your child at?' During the course of the proceeding years, when it came to registering his second child, this father found himself in a similar circumstance, and the answer had changed between the first child's registration at the school and the second child's registration at the school. It had changed from 400 metres in the first instance to 1.4 kilometres in the second instance, but it was still a change. On registering their second child, they dropped off this form at the school office and noted at the office that they may need to change the details that were registered for their first child, only to be told, 'We don't use that information anymore. Don't worry about it.' It appeared, as has been reported to me, that regarding the information collected through the school registration process, certainly within the state system, in that instance there was more concern around emergency contact details, medical information et cetera. I do not question that that sort of information should be prioritised, but this particular parent was quite keen to have the information provided to the school updated.

That is why I raise the question: if this bill now requires more information to be collected, was the process of developing this bill, taking it through the cabinet process and bringing it here for consideration, also an opportunity for the Department of Education and the minister's office to ask what I believe to be a fundamental question about what data we currently collect and whether we need to collect it? I thought it was a good opportunity to reduce a bit of red tape – reduce the questions perhaps or sharpen the questions that parents are asked during the course of registering their child at a school. I would have thought that information relating to the distance you live from the school where you intend to register your child would be helpful – perhaps for the Department of Transport and Planning, for example, or perhaps for local councils in relation to school safety or well-used transport routes or from a road maintenance or footpath maintenance perspective. It perhaps highlights what I believe to be a broader concern, and I will wear my Shadow Minister for Government Services hat in saying this. It is a bit like those orange cards that you fill in on arrival back into Australia. I am not entirely sure where all of that information goes – I do not think anyone is. There are many, many, many data points that many departments in the state collect. I am not saying at face value that that is a bad thing, but I think that there is an opportunity to be using that data in a better way to help inform the decisions that policymakers make, to be data led in our decision-making and ultimately to help Victorians in a more direct way.

I will move on to point 5. Following the amendment to the minister's powers to make acting appointments, I further ask: what sorts of limits would apply to the way in which these appointments are made? This bill, as I understand it, enables the minister to effectively make an acting appointment with certain existing limitations removed. I understand why that may be the case. It may take some convincing for someone to step into an acting position, and that may need to be incentivised, but I ask that question through the prism of public accountability and the fact that we should not be paying

employees of the state whatever. There needs to be some sort of accountability and justification mechanism.

I am advised here that under the act the minister may make an acting appointment where a member is absent or otherwise unable to perform the function of their office. In general, I am told that appointments to authorities may be made for up to three years, as noted above. There is an example that is offered here as well – on the one hand, where an acting appointment is made to cover a substantive member's absence, the acting appointment's term cannot be for a period which is longer than the substantive member's absence. The appointment and remuneration guidelines issued by the Premier regulate the making of appointments, including acting appointments to government non-department entities. So I am of the belief that there are sufficient guidelines in place for that not to be an issue.

Item 7 – I did ask how the Victorian Institute of Teaching is going to transfer the relevant data held in the RODA. For those playing along at home and who need a bit of an explainer on that acronym, that is the register of disciplinary action onto the register of registered teachers. I asked: is this data held all in the same system? Will there be any audit or other assurance of that data transfer to ensure it is all correct? The reason I asked that question was because the information that is held on this system is, well, it is quite personal information. It is the difference between the future professional progression of a teacher or otherwise, depending on the behaviour that they are accused of or otherwise. And so I believe that, specifically when we are dealing with information as sensitive as that, the incorrect transfer of that information or misuse of that information, or if security processes and procedures and scaffolding are not considered around that information, then that can have implications for an individual which may be detrimental to their future professional opportunity. For that reason, I was very keen to understand the safeguards that the department and the VIT had in place.

I was told the following: the RODA is maintained as a manually updated PDF document, with information entered and amended through administrative processes. VIT has a register of disciplinary action policy that is guided by a set of principles to ensure the RODA is accurately recorded and appropriately disclosed in accordance with the statutory requirements. You would imagine that was the case. I have been further advised the register of registered teachers is generated as an automated extract from the teacher registration database, with information populated directly from system-held data. VIT advises it has audit processes in place to review information contained on the RODA, including cross-referencing against the RRT to ensure all relevant information can be accurately included on the RRT to meet the new requirements in the bill. VIT will also conduct a data-cleansing exercise to ensure that from the commencement of the new provisions, VIT is able to publish conditions, limitations, restrictions, cautions and reprimands, where appropriate, in a consistent and compliant manner. I further advise the department has engaged closely with VIT in the development of the amendments in the bill, and VIT confirms it has the capacity to implement the required changes when the provisions come into effect after royal assent in early June.

I was pleased I asked the question, and I am pleased and grateful for receiving the comprehensive answer that was provided to me by the department and the minister's office, because, free of politics, information such as this should be considered with the greatest degree of sensitivity.

I further asked how many people are on the RODA, the register of disciplinary action, at the moment and was advised that there are currently 335 entries on the RODA. VIT is in the process of auditing all existing entries to ensure they comply with the publication requirements applying to both the RODA and the RRT. This includes verifying accuracy, relevance and appropriate treatment of information in light of the legislative changes. I might say at this point in time to those from the department or the minister's office who are present or watching along at home that it does concern me that the VIT as part of this process will verify the accuracy of the data. Fair warning that I fully intend at some point in time, whether it is through a question on notice or whether it is through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process, to ask specifically this question: in the course of this data-cleansing exercise undertaken, was there a point in time where there was any data that was sought to

be verified and found to be inaccurate, and what were the circumstances around that? I would like to think that a current database that holds information as sensitive as the information that we are considering at the moment would be accurate without a shadow of a doubt. But if there are inaccuracies, I would be very keen to understand those.

Not all teachers on the RODA, I am advised, will appear on the RRT, because information about a teacher may be recorded on the RODA even if they are no longer registered, whereas the RRT only records information for teachers who are currently registered. Again, I am grateful to the department and the minister's office for providing a bunch of that information. The assurances that they have provided are fair assurances, to the point where I was able to take the position of not opposing this bill to the shadow cabinet, which they agreed to and which the coalition party room has also agreed to.

I might say that in relation to the changes to what technology can be used and cannot be used in schools, I understand why the government is doing this. I understand that the government wishes for this to be front of mind when those who live outside the bubble of this place consider the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. But I will also add that there were many schools that did not wait for the government to introduce this legislation to make these arrangements compulsory before they put that into practice within their own schools. In fact I think you will find that the Catholic sector and the independent sector had largely banned mobile devices, AirPods and smartwatches prior to this bill being introduced. Credit to them, I think that they recognised quite early in the piece the distraction that these provide to students in a learning environment and the distraction that they perhaps provide to students through an explicit instruction pedagogical structure, and they themselves, without the need of the government introducing this bill, implemented these changes of their own volition. I think credit should be given to them for doing so and recognising their students' learning opportunity.

Finally, I will say this: although it has been a bit of a kumbaya contribution in many respects and a nonpartisan love-in on behalf of the opposition, there are a bunch of things that could be done a hell of a lot better in the education space, and it would be remiss of me, with a minute to go, not to mention some of those. On maintaining the Education State label on the numberplates: I am just not sure it flies. In fact I think it does not fly. I reserve my right, in holding the shadow portfolio of not only education but also government services, as someone who could actually make the decision, with the engagement of one person, to suggest that we change that arrangement. I will consider my options in that regard.

Look, there are a number of things that could be done better in this state, and just as one example, there is the impact that the government's schools tax is having on the independent sector. I note the changes that they made during the course of the last bill, but I also note the contrasting position of the opposition. We are going to scrap the tax on independent schools. We will, not just for the independent sector and the Catholic sector, the non-government sector, but also for the government sector, because education matters.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (17:40): I do thank the member for Sandringham and Shadow Minister for Education for the bipartisan approach he has had to this really important legislation, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. He spoke about the slogan –

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Education, unfortunately you have already spoken on this, so I am sorry, but I cannot allow you to have a second chance.

Ben CARROLL: I seek leave.

Leave granted.

Ben CARROLL: Again, I echo my comments before on the bipartisan way the shadow minister has approached this bill. This bill is important for a few different reasons. Labor is the party of Mabo, the party of land rights and, under Jacinta Allan, also the party of treaty.

The SPEAKER: That would be the Premier.

Ben CARROLL: Premier Allan. The Education Act 1872 is one of the oldest acts on the statute book, and it is very interesting that it does not recognise our First Nations people. Premier Allan's government are fixing that, and this is in National Reconciliation Week, which we know concluded yesterday, putting truth, justice and healing at the front of everything we do. I always say as the Minister for Education when I am speaking at many different events that our first students, our first educators, were Aboriginal people, and Australia's Aboriginal history and culture within the education system are crucial to building understanding while granting Indigenous people their respected place in the Australian story and in the Australian education system. We recognise how important they are and that they count. I have had the great honour of being able to sit down with Noel Pearson on more than one occasion and learn from him as one of the greatest educators we have in Australia, so I am really proud that we are doing this, because as the Yoorrook Justice Commission said, it is not about words, it is about deeds. We saw the great Travis Lovett himself just this week walk some 900 kilometres to Canberra as part of his National Walk for Truth. I think in Victoria what we are doing is so important, and I know the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association and the Australian Education Union have been calling for this reform for some time.

Equally though, we are the jurisdiction that led on phone-free schools, and now we are leading on screen-free schools. We know all the evidence. Whether it is loneliness, young people not being able to develop the relationships that they should be able to or the effect it has on the prefrontal cortex, the reward system, the biggest social experiment we have at the moment is social media and how smartphones are rewiring a generation. All the evidence shows, particularly at those foundation years, that getting smartphones and screens out of the classroom is having a really big impact on students' learning: they are concentrating more, classes are calmer and they are getting deeper relationships with their fellow peers. This is something that the government system led on, and it has been so successful that the non-government sector have also asked for coverage for them to introduce mobile phone bans and not just that but digital devices, EarPods – all of those things that we know are distractions in the classroom. Widening this policy to make it a statewide policy will be a really important measure that we know will help everyone in the Education State deal with having the best opportunity they can have in the classroom.

We know there is no more important investment than in education. That is why we are also, though, doing really important work around the teacher registration system, making sure that the Victorian Institute of Teaching gets all the support it needs to and making sure that our teachers feel valued and feel respected. They are the biggest lever we have in the classroom, and I could not be more proud of the improvements we are making to the registration framework to further strengthen the teacher registration framework under the leadership at the VIT. Currently we are working very hard to make sure that with the reviews of teachers everything gets done as quickly and efficiently as possible. We are also going to make sure though, through this, that we expand the information available for teachers on the register of teachers and enable the removal of obsolete or unnecessary information from the register of disciplinary action, as well as widening the pool of eligible candidates for the chairperson of the VIT. We know more and more now that we have to widen and make sure that our boards within the Department of Education have multiple skill sets, and that is what we are doing through this legislation.

We are really proud of our reforms. The shadow minister did touch on the Education State and the logo. It is very clear for us that this is not just a slogan on the bottom of our numberplates – it is a track record of investment and achievement and delivering results. When you look at Victoria we have the best NAPLAN results in the nation, the best NAPLAN results in our history, the most students strong or above, the fewest students needing additional support, the best results for priority cohorts, the strongest results for disadvantaged and First Nations students and the highest number of young people engaged in school or work. These results are no accident. They are due to the sustained investment of nearly $40 billion under the Andrews and Allan Labor governments. What we will be delivering soon

are the highest paid teachers in the nation as well, and we will also be giving a really substantial pay rise to our education support staff. We know that schools are now more than ever service systems in the local community, and whether it is the work we are doing through the Glasses for Kids program or the school breakfast and lunch programs, we are making sure every school is not just about the bricks and mortar and what happens in the classroom but is a place of wellbeing and a place for families to come. We are doing everything we can to make sure the school environment is as strong as it needs to be.

I could not be more proud to have stood with the Premier and the Minister for Disability on the day of our budget, when we announced a record investment in disability inclusion. Wherever I move around the school system, everyone talks about how we are addressing some of the most vulnerable kids and their needs. We are a government that has upgraded every specialist school across the state. But more than that, with the work we are doing inside the classroom we are identifying students that need tutor learning support and interventions to help them catch up and stay up and be with the rest of their class. We know the federal government is embarking on a whole reform agenda around the national disability insurance scheme. I think what they are doing is an important thing that they need to go on with. But when you look around Australia, there is no more of a gold standard in supporting young people with autism in schools than in Victoria. I know the Minister for Disability in the other place, with me, the Premier and the Treasurer, is working very hard to make sure that when Thriving Kids comes on board, as it will one day, Victoria is a national leader on how we support more speech pathologists, more early intervention and more support for our schoolkids in the classroom.

That leads me to also talk a little bit about some of the work we are doing in mental health. The mental health in schools initiative – it is great to see the Albanese government putting more support to that as well. But again, we have had the public sector leading on that, and it is wonderful. I was with the member for Footscray just recently at one of her local Catholic schools. That is now being widened out to all schools across our state, and that is something we are very proud of.

In terms of capital investment – everyone has heard me talk about this regularly – one in two schools built across the nation is built right here in Victoria, and there is a substantial upgrade program. But more than that, we are opening them up for community use. We know we need to do everything we can. When we are building these new schools with new auditoriums, with basketball and netball courts and with ovals, we need to open them up for community use. A lot of the members of the government are very proud and very engaged in this, particularly out in Melbourne's west, where I am from. The member for Point Cook has been a strong advocate where they play cricket all year round, the great, strong Indian diaspora. Making sure all those ovals are open for community use has been a game changer for that local community.

Finally, I want to give credit to the Department of Education for the work they have done in preparing this groundbreaking legislation. As I said at the outset, it is about more than words, it is about deeds. But I also want to just give them credit for the work they are doing inside the classroom through the rollout of the Victorian teaching and learning model 2.0, the VTLM. That is a game changer. It is going to feature very strongly at the *Age* education summit coming up. I know the shadow minister will be there with me. We are seeing the science of learning – world's best practice – being rolled out in every single classroom across our great state. I often will say that Victoria's future is written in our classrooms. Our students are our most important resource. Cures for cancer, combating climate change – it will all be on their shoulders and something this legislation will help them achieve.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (17:51): There is nothing like a bill contribution at 10 to 6 while juggling a toddler to make you appreciate the work our teachers do. I might lead, before I get into the bill, with a shout-out to our teachers and also the amazing work that they do in our lives raising our children. As the Minister for Education and Shadow Minister for Education said, really the future of our state is in their hands. It is a lot on their shoulders, but they are pretty remarkable people, aren't they? In our shadow minister's contribution he made it clear that we will not be opposing this. Extending mobile phone restrictions to non-government schools is sensible policy, and the Victorian

Institute of Teaching reforms to strengthen child safety protections are also welcome, and we support those measures.

But I might take this chance to speak about education on a local level and some of the issues that are not in this bill. I recently had the opportunity to meet with Benalla P–12 students and their leadership class, speaking about what they think leadership opportunities are within their school. Many MPs get the chance to do civics classes and leadership classes and assemblies, where they get to speak to our students, and it is one of the highlights of this job. I often think out of the mouths of babes comes the truth, because ask a student what is important to their community and I reckon half the time they are more on the money than most adults in our community and they are more passionate about the future of our communities as well. I also got the chance to meet with a Broadford political leadership class, and boy oh boy, did they really lead the advocacy for our community. They spoke about the road conditions and the need for an extension at their secondary school. They spoke about the impact not having a secondary school in Kilmore is having on their local community – on the opportunities in the whole region of such a significant growth corridor when you do not have access to an education that is convenient, that is achievable and that your family can afford as well.

I will take this chance to speak about the Kilmore secondary college and the work that Corey Walker – I have to do a shout-out to him – and a group of passionate locals are doing in our community. They were absolutely heartbroken – not angry, heartbroken – because their children cannot access a public secondary school in their community. Kilmore is one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria and its population, based on a target of this government, is set to increase by 300 per cent, and yet it does not have access to a public secondary. As of a couple of months ago the education zoning cut straight through the community and divided families and friendship groups, and there was no school of choice. A bit of a silencing approach meant the Allan Labor government has removed that zoning under the condition the neighbouring schools can actually accommodate that extra amount of students.

Broadford was promised support for an increase to their specialist classes, because otherwise they cannot deliver the Victorian curriculum next year. There was a planning oversight – I hope it was a planning oversight – because next year they are going to be accepting potentially an extra 100-odd students from Kilmore and they cannot deliver the curriculum in Victoria to those students. I have some of that evidence here. Right now – these are Department of Education figures, by the way – when it comes to the arts, the school is 705 square metres under entitlement; technology, 320 square metres under entitlement; science, 430 square metres under entitlement; and performing arts, 900 square metres under entitlement.

What that means for the kids at school at Broadford is very creative planning by the school, I have got to say. It means classes in corridors and classes in a wellbeing portable that has got asbestos. When the Department of Education came to fix the asbestos, they fixed it on the wrong building. They went to the wrong one because the facilities are so deteriorated. It means they have got more than eight classrooms, portable classrooms, running off a generator. In fact they have 22 relocatable buildings and another eight coming next year to accommodate the extra students, but they do not have enough space to deliver the curriculum because they do not have space for specialist classes. The Treasurer called – I heard this from multiple sources – the principal and the school committee in and told them $16 million was coming: 'Be quiet for six months, and $16 million is coming.' Then the budget arrived. They got a call the week prior, and they are going to get two Mod 10s without toilets and without a sink for a staffroom, and they are going to be running off a generator. Tell me this is not where the Education State has slipped to. This is concerning, because as the minister and shadow minister said, the kids are our future. Invest in education. People should not be disadvantaged based on where they live.

I heard the closing remarks from the Minister for Education about the focus on tutor learning and support. Right now Broadford Secondary are offering that through donations and through community fundraising, because they do not have it in their budget. This is the reality of my community when it comes to education. Seymour College has to fundraise to get electricity upgraded to run an air

conditioner on a new building. This is where we are at with planning in Victoria. I am concerned about the relationship the Treasurer has had with the Broadford school committee as well as the principal, because they are there to offer our kids stable, supportive educational opportunities, and they were misled. I am being polite because of the time of the day and the ears in our presence, but this is their future. I know of one senior teacher that is going to quit next year because she knows where it is going. This is a great school of choice, yet they do not have the facilities to deliver the Victorian curriculum. That is incredibly concerning.

I also want to talk about the impact of removing the education zoning. A lot of the comments from the community have been, 'Is this to kick the school down the road?' Labor have been in government for over a decade. If they wanted to support a public secondary school in Kilmore, they would have done it by now. The land has been offered. It is there waiting. There are three primary schools, on top of two that already exist, that have been approved. Five primary schools and not a public secondary school in one of the highest growth regions in Victoria is deeply concerning.

How did we get here? I want you to ask me: how did we get here? We got here because of a figure called 12 per cent. We got here because when you look at new infrastructure spending in Victoria, regional Victoria gets 12 per cent. We are sick of fighting for the bare minimum. We are sick of fighting for an air conditioner at a school that has gone through a heatwave in summer. We are sick of fighting for black mould to be removed from our portable classrooms. We are sick of fighting for electricity that powers classrooms. We are sick of fighting for teachers that are leaving in droves because of the facilities they are forced to work in in regional Victoria, and we are sick and tired of forcing our kids onto buses outside our region.

That is why the Nationals and Liberals, if elected in November, are committing to a fair share guarantee. We do not want to fight for this. Our kids do not want to fight for this. It is a fair share guarantee that will make sure our kids get the education and the facilities that they deserve. One thing I forgot to say is that right now, throughout my region, an analysis of our school buses shows they are currently oversubscribed by about 35 per cent. That means that at the start of every term my office is inundated with kids left behind because they cannot get on a school bus. Not only is there not a school in their community, they cannot get on a bus to get to a school. That is what we are dealing with. That is the bill that should be in front of us: a fair share guarantee for regional Victorians and fair share guarantee for the kids in regional Victoria to get the education that they deserve. Labor have had a chance to govern and they have not delivered for regional Victoria. The Nationals will deliver a fair share guarantee.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:01): I am very pleased to speak on this bill, noting that the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026 will make improvements to our education system across the board. If you think more broadly, our state has led the way with treaty, and so it is consistent that we would make appropriate amendments particularly when it comes to Aboriginal recognition. We are strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the education, including early childhood education, and training systems to improve cultural safety and responsiveness and support improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations learners. I will just note that this aligns with the key elements of recommendation 48 made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2025 and is part of our recognition of First Peoples as our first educators. I am really, really proud of these reforms, and they are certainly most welcome and, as I say, consistent with advancing self-determination for Aboriginal people in our state.

A further reform that we led the way on with our public schools is introducing a new prescribed minimum standard for school registration, requiring that all Victorian schools, both public and non-government, have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices – mobile phones, wearable devices and audio devices – during school hours. I know that these changes have already made a significant impact in terms of the ability for students to actually learn and to focus in the classroom. Having taught a little in another life, for a little portion of my life – nothing on many here who have had longer careers in teaching – it can take sometimes seven commands to get one step or

one element of the class process through, so to speak. Adding 20 or 30 devices around the classroom, I can only imagine, because when I taught there was no such thing as a mobile phone. You did not have to worry about it. No, you were just worried about making sure eyes were forward and focused and that the directive was taken on board. I can only imagine what it must have been like to date for teachers to have to not only manage the class, keep everyone focused and make sure that they are actively learning but then contend with these very distractive devices – not only for students, I might add, but for adults as well. I think we all know how distracting mobile devices can be. So it is absolutely fantastic that there will be unison for all schools in Victoria.

I will also acknowledge that the member for Sandringham did say that there were a number of non-government schools that have already embraced this. That is absolutely fantastic. It just shows that there really is a solid recognition of the significant impacts and benefits that are derived from taking away unnecessary distractions in the classroom, not only the distractive element – is there such a word, 'distractive'? I am going to use that word for now – but also the impact on mental health and self-esteem of social media. It is well documented now. Hence the national reforms, which we also are very much embracing here in Victoria, when it comes to social media. It is really about calming that space in the classroom, not providing the unnecessary and perhaps quite destructive impact of a smartphone and all that comes with that. This is a really welcome reform, and I am really pleased that all school students will now be adhering to these changes.

We are also improving the teacher registration framework. It is obviously critical work that the Victorian Institute of Teaching undertake in terms of regulating the teaching profession in our state. I remember duly going through those processes, as is appropriate. Ensuring that there is even more efficiency and actually enhancing their ability to attend to those real, high-risk regulatory matters has got to be a good thing as well.

I do just want to note – because I noticed there were a couple of issues raised in the chamber by one of the Nationals members – that the Liberals and Nationals have made a commitment to cut funding in regional schools, and we need to make sure that the broader community knows about this. We know that recently the Leader of the Opposition announced they would commit 25 per cent of school infrastructure funding to the regions. The problem with that, though, is that this would mean a cut from more than 30; I have actually been told it is 31 per cent that Labor is delivering right now. That is probably just a perspective to be taken on board when you are looking at the infrastructure spend in regional Victoria by our government. These are the choices that people will be able to make. I just think that might need to be factored in when we are having discussions about investment in our schools, and I might take that discussion a little bit further. Our record does speak for itself when it comes to building the Education State. Since coming into government we have invested $20.1 billion, noting that last time the coalition were in and when they had the chance, they slashed more than a billion from education – just noting that. We have choices. That is a comparison – just putting it out there.

Anyway, we are delivering on our commitment to build 100 new schools by 2026, including 19 new schools opened this year, which is absolutely fantastic, and Narrarrang Primary School is certainly one of those in my area. It is an absolutely fantastic school. It has a kinder onsite – I have spoken about this before – that will be opening in 2027. That is virtually built now, as we speak. Also there is going to be a multipurpose community hub. That is really well developed as well, and shortly we will have a formal acknowledgement for the whole community. Further to points that were made by the Minister for Education, school grounds can be used in many ways that can benefit the whole community. Certainly, I think that many people have reached out locally. I do not think it only applies to the inner areas; it is growth suburbs as well. On the one hand it is preventing the double drop-off, because if you have one child at kinder and one child at school, you can drop them both off and pick them both up at the same time, but it is making a better use of those fantastic gyms and multipurpose facilities outside school hours as well. We have funded over 2400 school upgrades at more than 1250 government schools, we have $294.8 million to upgrade and modernise 31 existing schools and

we are building schools faster than ever before. So if there are those wanting to query our investment, query our prioritisation, I think the record stands for itself.

Just for a bit of a further perspective, if you are looking at Victoria versus the rest of Australia, 50 per cent of the schools that have been built across the whole of Australia in the past 10 years have been built right here in Victoria by our government. I think when we are looking at comparisons certainly you can see that there is strength in the numbers, and it is hard to argue with those numbers – 50 per cent in Victoria versus the rest of the country. It is just something, I think, to be factored in as well.

I think it would be difficult to question the prioritisation that we offer. I want to take up the member for Sandringham. Calling Victoria the Education State – I think we can proudly stand by that. We have brilliant schools. We have the best teachers in the country in Victoria, and we most certainly are backing them in. We have recently reached an in-principle agreement with the Australian Education Union that will see teacher and principal salaries rise by at least 28.3 per cent over the next four years, starting with an increase of 12 per cent by October 2026. I will note that the agreement recognises the significant value and expertise education support staff bring to our classrooms, with all education support staff accessing allowances and the introduction of qualification requirements for higher salary classifications. On that note, Victoria is the Education State. Let us say it loud and proud.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (18:11): I rise to speak in support of this bill, which reforms Victoria's education system by embedding Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the curriculum and mandating cultural training for educators. In doing so it answers the Yoorrook Justice Commission's call to genuinely acknowledge Aboriginal people's rights, cultures, histories and perspectives within our education system and its curriculum. While our schools are critical to the future of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria, especially our public schools, Yoorrook made it clear that:

> First Peoples children are being failed by the Victorian schooling system.

In recent years Aboriginal students in Victoria have seen higher kindergarten attendance, better literacy rates and more year 12 completions, but wide gaps remain for many educational outcomes compared to other Victorians. Yoorrook found that educational inequality for First Peoples in Victoria stretches back to colonisation itself. Successive discriminatory laws, the forced concentration of communities onto missions and reserves and the sweeping powers wielded by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines deliberately denied First Peoples access to meaningful education. The state of Victoria embedded disadvantaged by decree, and this legacy of educational inequality continues to the present day. Victoria is not on track to meet half of the education targets in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It is also deeply concerning that Yoorrook found that schools are too often culturally hostile places for Aboriginal children, contributing to high levels of student disengagement, absenteeism and suspension. Similarly, a 2023 Commission for Children and Young People inquiry heard that for Aboriginal students:

> … a culture of low expectations is compounded by racist attitudes. For those living in care, these experiences can be exacerbated because of their removal from family and community and culture.

So it is heartening to see this bill, which embeds Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the curriculum and mandates cultural training for educators.

About four out of five Aboriginal students in Victoria attend a public school, so funding our schools properly is critical to supporting Aboriginal kids to thrive at school. But I do not see how you can close the gap for Aboriginal students in Victoria while grossly underfunding the schools they attend. Victoria currently sits dead last in per-student public school funding compared to every other state, and our teachers remain the lowest paid in the country – hopefully not for long. Last month I met with staff and school council members at Brunswick South Primary School. They told me that they only receive $1700 of funding per year per Aboriginal student to provide them with 32 hours of additional literacy and numeracy support and that many Aboriginal kids miss out on this support because they are not testing low enough. These minimal supports do not cover what these students actually need,

so the school is funding extra supports out of its own funds for its Aboriginal students and for other students with disability and neurodiversity who get no additional funding. The result is a staffing budget deficit of around $200,000 for this small primary school. Recognition of the distinct rights and histories of Aboriginal students in our schools will have little meaning if it is not matched by properly funding the public schools where the vast majority of Aboriginal kids go.

On another note, before I finish, I also want to flag the Greens' concern that this bill seeks to remove the requirement that the chair of the Victorian Institute of Teaching council be a registered teacher. The primary function of the VIT is to 'regulate members of the teaching profession to ensure quality teaching'. Our view is that this independent organisation should be chaired by someone with teaching experience. I understand that any decision to fill this position with a non-teacher bureaucrat would not be well received by the teaching community.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (18:16): I am delighted to rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026 – such an important bill, I think. Certainly all of my colleagues in this place understand the absolute importance – more than importance, the great leveller – of education. It is the way that we bring all of the community along with us. I know that there has been an enormous amount of work done in this space, and we quite rightfully are the Education State. It is a bill that speaks to everybody across Victoria. When you talk to parents at a school gate, teachers in a staffroom or young people in regional Victoria trying to build their life, they all want the same thing. They want a strong educational system that helps every child succeed, and of course that is what this is all about.

I would also back in the comments from the previous speaker from our side in response to the member for Euroa's contribution. To suggest that in some way regional Victoria does not get the support in the education system is just a nonsense. As she also pointed out, in this budget alone, 31 per cent of the budget funding for school upgrades is going into regional Victoria. So if anyone is out there thinking that the Nats' commitment of 25 per cent is a good deal, I would suggest that it is nothing less than a cut and that the 31 per cent that we are investing into regional schools is as it should be. We should be backing our regional schools.

Within my own electorate you see it on the ground. Woodmans Hill college in the previous budget received $10 million for a year 7 centre, which is a really important centre. When you are coming through from primary school into high school, it is a big adjustment, and to have a hub for the year 7 students is incredibly important in that transition. So that was a $10 million commitment a couple of years ago, and it is now open and operating, which is wonderful. In this current budget there is $19 million for Bacchus Marsh college. Bacchus Marsh, of course, is growing at an absolute pace. We on this side are absolutely committed to making sure that the supports are there for all of our families and wonderful students. So I was really delighted to see that commitment from the Treasurer in the budget for $19 million for Bacchus Marsh, and it will go a long way to really supporting that school. I think it gives it the capacity to support more than 300 students. Across the electorate I look at what we have done over the years. Darley Primary School had a $10 million rebuild; Mount Clear saw investment in the early days – a $15 million build there; $10 million at Woodmans Hill; and the list goes on.

What I love most about our side of the house is that innovative thinking. Something that I think has been extraordinary is the commitment to kinders in schools. Particularly in the regions it makes a really big difference. In my electorate alone we are about to open the Teesdale kinder in school. The Ballan kinder in school is up and running, and the Gordon kinder in school, and the list goes on. Any kind of suggestion that regional Victoria in any way misses out on the education spend is, as I say, nothing short of an absolute nonsense. On this side of the house we understand that education is a continuum. It is everything from those wonderful little learners at the kinders in schools right through to the investment that I have reeled off in my electorate, and I know that there are many more across our regional cohorts. Then there is our commitment to TAFE and all of that brings for people in the regions. It is an incredibly important part.

Turning to the bill itself and strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination, it is really important to understand that Ballarat had many orphanages and, very sadly, a lot of the stolen generation were sent to Ballarat. That means we have a really broad First Nations constituency in Ballarat, because a lot of those people stayed on. We have some extraordinary people, not only the Wadawurrung, the traditional owners, but the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, which is an Aboriginal corporation there, and just extraordinary programs. What I was really delighted about was that the Gordon kinder in school is in fact run by BADAC. They are the first Aboriginal community controlled organisation to run a kinder in a government school like that. I am really, really proud of the work they do. It is wonderful to visit. They also have a couple of other kinders in Ballarat and Ballan, and it is wonderful to visit them because of the First Nations culture that they give to every student. I will make the point that it is not just for First Nations kids – all of our kids get to experience the beautiful culture that our First Nations people bring. I give a big shout-out to those wonderful kinders run by BADAC.

Education is all about looking to support students and their families. I was so delighted that the Minister for Education this year acknowledged that kids in Ballan feel much more akin to Daylesford College. It is about the small regional communities, so the Minister for Education rezoned Ballan to include Daylesford College. I understand he is in the chamber, and I would, through you, Deputy Speaker, like to say that he has made an enormous amount of families in Ballan very, very happy. It is their chosen school, and it was just a wonderful piece of work. Through you, I extend my great thanks for that.

The bill goes to a variety of things, including reducing distractions in the classroom. I have got two boys. They are now well out of school, but I know what ratbags they were with their phones. This policy is just so important. It has obviously worked in state schools, and that is why we would like to see that benefit extended out to kids all across Victoria. I want to give a particular shout-out to our teachers, and there is a little bit of personal indulgence here. My youngest son Sam is now an education support worker.

Martha Haylett interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: Yes, onya, Sam! This is his second year. He went through in a traineeship; he has his cert III. He fell in love with it, like all of our wonderful teachers do. I think it is one of those jobs that really is a vocation. He is looking at going off and doing his full teaching degree, and that is because he knows that it is a really valued profession. In all of the negotiations through the EBA it has been really clear that we value all that teachers do for our kids. To see that negotiation come to a point where they were recognised for all that they do through a much-deserved pay rise was just a wonderful thing. I know that my son Sam loves his work, and all of the teachers at Rosanna Primary School, where he is an education support, are just so committed to the kids in their care. I am delighted that we have been able to acknowledge that through this most recent EBA.

To the bill, in closing, it is a wonderful bill and so important. What a fantastic education minister we have. I commend the bill to the house.

John LISTER (Werribee) (18:26): In the short time available before the break I want to speak about this bill and this amendment to the Education and Training and Reform Act 2006 in which we are strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in education; requiring that schools have a prescribed minimum standard for registration and a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices, such as mobile phones; improving the teacher registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching – something I know very well, still being a registered teacher – and enabling country of birth data and other information specified to be part of the Victorian student register so they can be assigned a unique student identifier.

Some of you may have heard this before, but I used to be a teacher – in fact I am still registered and I am going to keep that going. The issues addressed in this bill are things I have had a lot to do with,

and tonight I want to go to a few of these reforms in more detail. The bill introduces a new prescribed minimum standard for school registration – every school is registered through the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority – requiring that all Victorian schools, public and non-government, have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices. By making this a requirement through the VRQA, it means all schools need to implement this important wellbeing policy.

In discussing the mobile phone ban and extending it in law, I would like to take this moment of parliamentary privilege to express my grievance with the following former students who would never get off their phones in class: Brody; Max; the other Max; Luke; Indi; Jamie; Xander; Michael, who was renowned for watching local footy replays when he should have been doing English; Shania; Tiah; Brandy; Imogen; Amelia – actually this is unfair, she did always listen to me when I told her off for being on her phone; Tanika; Chloe; Bailey; and Jaynaha – I do not know what Jaynaha was listening to on her phone, but it was probably trash. This list is not exhaustive. If I caught you now, you would be breaking the law, not just doing my head in.

I know they will not be watching Parliament closely; they will probably be on their TikToks or their Snapchats, whatever the kids are on these days if they are over 16. But if they were, I would want them to know that the time lost to mobile phone use at school is destructive. Not only are kids not learning to regulate or practice patience with their instant gratification machines in their hands but mobile phones are a safety risk. I cannot tell you the number of times something kicked off in the schoolyard where it was provoked through a messaging app. Teachers used to be able to sense and see escalating tension between students, but with the proliferation of phones at school this disappeared. This ban is having a positive effect in our schools, and I thank families and students for continuing to cooperate with this policy.

In continuing to explore this bill, I want to turn to how we are strengthening our First Nations focus in schools. The bill will introduce a statement of recognition into the act that acknowledges the unique status of First Nations people and outlines historical and ongoing factors that impact First Nations learning. It will also confirm Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives forming part of the learning areas that are subject to that free instruction. It will also introduce a new duty on the responsible departmental secretaries to ensure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training will be made available to anyone. I appreciate this particularly because I have done a lot of PD in my time on these topics, especially as a humanities teacher. In National Reconciliation Week I think this is so vital. I will always recall the words of a lecturer from my teacher training talking about the importance of First Nations knowledge.

Sitting suspended 6:30 pm until 7:31 pm.

John LISTER: Unlike the kid that has rocked up to class and has not read the English text before he got there, I have gone through the bill. I was, before the break, speaking about the idea of embodying First Nations cultural knowledge in the Education and Training Reform Act. Earlier this evening I know the minister mentioned that the Education Act 1872 is one of our oldest pieces of legislation and also mentioned the history that sits behind it, with the principle of free instruction being enshrined in that act all those years ago. But it is important to make sure that it is a dynamic document and that it reflects the era of treaty that we are in now in Victoria. We are introducing that statement of recognition through the bill but also having that responsibility on departmental secretaries to make sure that that Aboriginal cultural understanding and professional development is made available to people who work in our system.

I want to briefly reflect on one of the most outstanding professional development opportunities I had in this space, which was called 'Koorie English in the classroom'. Secondary English teachers were encouraged to do this course, run by Matt Lillyst in the Department of Education, and it was all about Koorie understandings of language and how you incorporate that into an English classroom, because while an English class is about learning the language of English, having an understanding of different

systems of language – and particularly systems of language that are indigenous to the place that we live in – is so important. We made the decision a few years ago to make sure that our new schools carried names from First Nations communities in the places where we are building them – names like Walcom Ngarrwa in Wyndham and Laa Yulta as well, names from the Wadawurrung language – recognising this long history and connection to the land where we are teaching our kids. In reconciliation week this is vital.

Before the break, I recall I was talking about a lecturer I had when I was at teachers college talking about the importance of First Nations knowledge. He mourned not just for the dispossession of so much understanding about our country from First Nations people – that dispossession of their own knowledge – but also for the generations of migrants to this country being denied this same history and understanding. Our First Nations people were our first scientists. They understood the landscape. The Wadawurrung people had ways of being able to tell the time of year using what we believe to be stone circles out the back near Mount Rothwell in what we call Wurdi Youang – and I could be corrected by Aunty Judy on that. I do not know if she is watching tonight, but she would definitely pick me up on that.

In talking about that, I would like to recognise the amazing work of our Koorie engagement support officers in our schools, particularly people like Aunty Judy – Judith Dalton-Walsh – who is a champion for our kids in the Wyndham South collection of schools where she works as a KESO. She is a proud Wadawurrung elder. I did pay tribute to her in my inaugural speech, and it is always good to get her advice on these matters, particularly when it comes to education. Her words still ring in my ears all the time – 'Make sure you look after our kids' – and that is what this bill is about. It is about looking at how we continue to look after the next generations in our schools. I am also proud to have worked at a school which was one of the first secondary settings to have established a reconciliation action plan, and they are going through the renewal of that plan at the moment in consultation with community.

Before I conclude tonight I want to reinforce how proud I am to work in a Labor government that has invested heavily in education in Werribee. This list is exhaustive on my side of the Werribee River: seven new schools and dozens of upgrades coming out of the ground right now at Walcom Ngarrwa, Manorvale and Riverwalk. A new high school – I am psyched to have got funding for a new high school in Wyndham Vale in this budget. Kindergartens built on our primary schools were mentioned before by the member for Eureka, this idea of getting rid of the double drop-off, and for communities, particularly communities in the regions or in the outer suburbs, how important it is to have those facilities in one place.

We have had more funding for disability inclusion in this budget, which is particularly important; tuition-free teacher degrees; and support for more teachers being recruited into our region, which I know is particularly important; breakfast clubs; affordable uniforms; the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund – all things that have benefited my community – and a pay deal for teachers on the table that will make them the best paid in the country and recognise the professionalism of education support staff through eventually having that qualification framework.

Tonight has been a bit of fun, and I have rinsed a few of my former students. We do need to make it clear that we take the education of our kids across Victoria seriously. We will continue to back our teachers, our school staff, our families and most importantly our students. I hope when I send a copy of this to my former students they see it in a good light, because that is what it is. I commend the bill to the house.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (19:37): It is an absolute pleasure to be standing here tonight and speaking on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. We have heard from a couple of former educators. I am a former educator, and it was a time in my life that I feel very, very proud of, to be able to be in schools and –

John Lister interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I was a pretty good teacher actually, thanks, member for Werribee. It is a time when you can make an amazing amount of change – a change in direction or a change in fortune for kids, get them on the right track and get them to a point where they can actually achieve their potential. That starts in primary schools and high schools, and I would really like to just put on record my appreciation for my local schools, whether that be Andrew Batchelor, the principal of Frankston High School and the team there – one of my sons recently graduated from Frankston High School, which is still one of Victoria's leading public schools; McClelland College with Laura Spence there; or the Frankston North education plan, with Monterey Secondary College, Aldercourt Primary School and Mahogany Rise Primary School. Jack Mazurek and Raelene Harvey are just amazing people who dedicate their whole lives to making a change in the lives of not just children but their families as well. We have seen that in the Frankston North education precinct project with Our Place and Berry Street there as well.

I just want to shout out to Peita Cooper at Ballam Park Primary School, who does an amazing job. But also we have recently had a principal retire at Overport Primary School. Julie Gleeson was just an amazing, passionate, committed principal who wanted the best for students and wanted the best for families. It was very moving to see on their Facebook page recently her lead the whole school in song like she was John Farnham or something like that. I did not know she could sing, but wow, she has got a voice.

The bill before us today proposes a package of fairly important amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, and the key features of this bill include long-overdue recognition of First Nations people. It has been great tonight to hear some of the members on the other side of the chamber take part in that respectful tenor, because it has not always been like that. This bill includes provisions to ensure that the act effectively supports our system to become more inclusive and responsive to the needs of First Nations learners. The bill also includes measures to bolster student learning, engagement and mental health by restricting personal electronic devices in our schools, which I will speak about in one moment, and it makes important updates to improve the operation of the teacher registration framework and the Victorian student register as well. There have been plenty of people who have spoken about Aboriginal recognition and self-determination, and as much as I would like to speak about that, I do want to make sure we have got a fair spread in our discussion across this bill tonight, so I do just want to touch on restricting personal mobile devices in schools.

Most people who have been playing along at home will recognise that in 2020 it was this government, the now Allan Labor government, that was the first in the country to introduce a new requirement in government schools that student mobile phones must be switched off and safely and securely stored during the day. I know that was a change, and the thing about change often is not the principle of the change, it is that something is being taken away. In this case, a lot of our youth who were used to communicating using their devices, listening to things while they were studying – that was taken away. I admit that that can be hard on people, but I think we have seen the fruits of this change come to light in the NAPLAN results in Victoria. I do not think many people have made that connection. Our NAPLAN results have gone up. That is primarily because of the great work of our teachers and our students and our support teams in the schools, but also it comes at a time when we have made that change, so it would be very, very interesting to get some more data on that too. As a former teacher I can say, though, anecdotally, that without a doubt this policy has improved student focus on learning and increased student socialisation as well and physical activity during breaks. I say this anecdotally, but the example I will use is my own son. He loves his devices – no doubt about that. He has been more physical to the point where he just had basically a knee reconstruction from the basketball field –

Gabrielle Williams interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: Sorry, basketball court – thank you, Minister. But he has been more physical. I believe his focus on learning has increased, and I have seen that. His concentration has also increased

without a doubt. I am not saying it was bad before, but it has increased. I think the socialisation amongst the students at that school has also, in my observation when I visited that school, definitely not been bad; let us just put it that way.

As technology has developed, of course we have seen other devices come into classrooms, whether that be Apple Watches, whether that be the glasses that people wear now – things that can also be dangerous, things that can capture images of people, things that can be used in AI, things that can be used to create lists that we have heard about, things that can create footage and carry really, really significant risks to people in a mental health sense and also legal repercussions as well. So with all this in mind, this bill proposes to require that all Victorian schools, both government and non-government, have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices – including phones, wearable devices and personal audio devices – during school hours as a prescribed minimum standard for registration.

I know – and I see it when I drive students home that are friends of my kids – everyone has got their Dr Dre's Beats on, but off one ear so they can hear what is going on. They have got their music on as well. They might have their AirPods in. At least in my house the fashion was to grow your hair a little bit so you actually could not see the AirPod when it was in. I do not think it was his emo period; I think it was that he just flipped his hair over so the teachers could not see. But this will effectively prescribe a minimum standard that that is no longer acceptable. I would argue with anyone – as much as I like to have an AirPod in almost all the time when I am not working or when I am studying; I do not mind doing two or three things at once – that in a classroom this is something that will absolutely benefit children and will benefit students. They would have to listen to me –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: or indeed you, member for South-West Coast – in the classroom and pay a little bit more attention.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: You are a distraction. Stop it. There is a harmful effect of these devices, and if I can just quickly tie that into the portfolio of men and boys, these devices are the gateway to what we are seeing can be something that is influential on young boys who are becoming men. It can lead to a pathway where we have boys going off the rails and becoming unhealthy men who make unhealthy decisions about the law, about the way they treat others, about the way they treat women and men, about their sexual practices, about consent and about what we expect from others and expect from ourselves. Certainly a lot is coming out about that, but these devices are indeed the gateway to that world where we do have people who are influencers – they call themselves influencers – but really, as one South African influencer came out and admitted the other night, the young men and sometimes older men that follow him through the internet and through their devices and phones, possibly in schools, are customers. They are his customers and nothing more. They buy his bitcoin; they buy all his trinkets, T-shirts, all this rubbish, and he feeds them rubbish. He openly admitted that.

What this part of the bill does is make sure that we are extending the benefits of the mobile phone policy for government schools and reducing the harmful effect of some other devices. That goes the full spectrum of being able to learn in a classroom, not having people tempted to record people or make footage of people, AI things, lists – things that are potentially very, very offensive – and on the other end, being exposed to some of these influencers on the internet. We want our education system to be able to operate without these kinds of distractions, these dangerous distractions, and that for me is a really significant part of the bill. That is why I commend this bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:47): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. This is basically a bill that combines a wide range of unrelated reforms under a single piece of legislation and includes provisions dealing with Aboriginal recognition and self-determination, restrictions on students' personal electronic devices, teacher registration reforms,

student data collection and a range of administrative changes. Whilst the opposition will not oppose this bill, there are several aspects that warrant close scrutiny.

I do not disagree with the legislative changes that extend restrictions on personal electronic devices across registered schools, although I do think we need to adapt to the times and assist children to understand how to work with the technologies that we have today. Having four children and watching the transition for each one as more and more technology –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: I have got 100 kids, Paul. And the challenges – I remember the one who I had to say, 'No, that's not staying in your bedroom tonight,' to and the fights that we would have. I remember my daughter conning the school beautifully with her false phones. I get the challenge. You know, hand one in and have another – it is not hard to figure it out. It is about working with the technology rather than just banning things, often, so there is a challenge there but getting that balance right is not easy. However, it is disappointing that once again the government has chosen to bundle broadly supported reforms in with a range of symbolic and poorly defined measures that create uncertainty without delivering clear outcomes. I speak of the government providing very little detail about how some of these provisions will operate in practice and how consultation requirements will be applied or to what extent expectations will ultimately be placed on schools and educators.

The legislation creates a broad obligation for decision-makers to consider self-determination principles within the Aboriginal community while offering very little guidance about how these principles should be interpreted. I have seen in practice the importance of self-determination. I know it works. I know you can get outcomes, and that should not be undermined. But just wrapping it up in a bill like this and not giving the clear guidance and understanding actually I find a little bit tokenistic and a little bit offensive, to be honest, because I know how well self-determination within the Aboriginal community does work, particularly in community controlled settings.

The bill also expands on the Victorian student register and increases the amount of personal information collected on students. Given the recent data breaches affecting education systems, parents have every right to be concerned about whether the Allan Labor government has the ability to adequately safeguard information. Over the last decade I have seen enormous breaches by this government who have tried to control some information but lost control, and there have been some incredibly unfortunate situations as a result of that. There are also concerns that the expanded Victorian Institute of Teaching powers and additional compliance requirements could further increase the administrative burden on teachers and school leaders. At a time when the workforce shortages remain such a challenge, the government should be focused on reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, not adding to it. I have a teacher who has been sharing my accommodation for the last eight months, and I listen every night to the bureaucracy that they are faced with. The level of reporting and the things they are doing are not actually helping the educational outcomes of the students who need their attention.

When discussing education policy, it is important that we do not lose sight of what is actually happening in the schools. Warrnambool College, in the electorate of South-West Coast, which I represent, is a wonderful school with a strong community of dedicated teachers and staff who work tirelessly to support young people and who help them reach their full potential. I was visiting recently, and they have put an indigenous garden together. The kids were proudly showing me the work that they have been doing setting up irrigation systems and learning all about science and technology with the set-up of that technological irrigation system. Every day these teachers are making an incredible difference in the lives of students while facing increased challenges with limited resources. It is probably worth recognising here the $2.4 billion which the state Allan Labor government have cut from education. It is another example, and I can pull many examples out, of how this government has cruelly cut funding to education.

One program at Warrnambool College which deserves particular recognition is the Stars Foundation program. We have got the Clontarf program for the Aboriginal boys, and we have got the Stars Foundation, which took over at Warrnambool College and Brauer College in the last couple of years from the previous locally named programs, which is the girls program. These are really holistically supported programs that support Indigenous girls to attend school, remain engaged in their education, complete year 12 and transition into employment and further study. This program delivers real outcomes. Year 12 completion for kids in these programs is up at around 90 per cent. That is against 68 per cent where the kids are not participating in Stars. But, guess what, instead of the Allan Labor government supporting this – which is what this bill tells us, that they have got great supports for the Aboriginal community – they have cut their contribution to the funding. It was a third funded by the schools, a third funded by the foundation and a third by the state government, and they have cut that funding to Warrnambool's Brauer's and Warrnambool College's Stars Foundation programs. Does that tell you we have got a government sitting here opposite us who cares about the Indigenous community, or does that tell you it is very tokenistic, just like what is in this bill? They talk about self-determination, but if they really want to see self-determination, then they should put in for these girls at school who want to complete their education and who are actually engaging in school really well because they love this program. You tell us you are going to do it, and then under the guise of secrecy, because the schools are too scared to speak up, you whip the funding out. That is the truth of what is happening on the ground.

The decision that highlights a broader problem in education is that the government continues to focus on symbolic reforms, and it is frankly insulting. Schools are being asked to do more with less. As I said, $2 billion is being cut from the recent state budget, and it just another cut that this arrogant government will continue to deny. Anyway, teachers continue to carry enormous workloads, yet workforce shortages persist. Parents and school communities are increasingly concerned about safety and student wellbeing. Meanwhile, basic infrastructure remains unresolved.

Warrnambool College, again, has been waiting for far too long for a gymnasium roof to be repaired so they have a gymnasium that they can actually work in and gather in as a school. It is actually dangerous. On days like today I will guarantee you they would not be in there, because the roof would be leaking and kids would be falling over and hitting their heads. The school's parents association has been trying to work with the government – silence; they have been trying to work with the local Labor member – silence, absolutely nothing. They have been led along, been told they are being listened to, been told there will be funding – nothing; years of nothing. The situation at Terang Primary School is another example where the government has walked away from a campus. Yes, it is now consolidated on another site, but they just walked away and left the small township of Terang with no understanding of what is going to happen with that campus. Is it just going to be left there? It has been for the last three years. A historical society are in part of it, but they are getting no guidance and no solution. It is a small town. It deserves support.

One last thing I want to raise about the schools is how, when the schools want to go on a school camp, they cannot get a booking on the train. St Joseph's School has come to me today with an entirely unreasonable situation around the school wanting to plan for a journey to Melbourne to do a school camp, but they cannot book the train. They cannot book it unless it is within 90 days, and schools plan years ahead. I had Merrivale school contact me in April, and I am still waiting for a response from the minister. I had this problem last year with many schools. I had it the year before with this particular school, St Joseph's School. And yet the transport system – and I have got the Minister for Public and Active Transport at the table – will not allow these schools to book. For this school to book a bus, it costs $7000. The school has been told to book one group, 59 students, at 7:30 in the morning, and the other students at 10:30. Can you imagine how difficult it is to get enough parents and enough teachers for supervision? I would be too scared to take kids on a trip without having them all grouped together, but trying to split them up – this is just such a disadvantage to regional kids. It makes a very unfair situation for regional communities. So I beg the minister at the table to listen to the fact that it is unreasonable for schools to not be able to book safe trips together in groups and to not be able to book

in advance. I am sure everyone in this room who has got children or been at school themselves, which is everyone, knows that you just cannot book something within a month when you are living 3½ hours away and you have got 100 kids to book accommodation for. I urge the minister to look into this. I have already got a representation to the minister for the Merrivale School, and this is now St Joseph's that is coming to me – just change it so they can make a booking, get on the train and take the kids for an experience to come and visit the Parliament or other things that they will not see otherwise. I will not oppose the bill.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (19:57): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening and make a contribution in favour of the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, an incredibly urgent bill, which is why we are here this evening, obviously, debating it. At the outset I would like to touch broadly on education and schools and schooling in Victoria. We came to government in 2014, and we said that we were going to be the Education State. We did so on the back of four years of neglect of Victorian schools, of neglect of Victoria's training system, in particular TAFE. To use a local context for schools in Wyndham, I have said many times before in this place that in the four years between 2010 and 2014, when we had a Baillieu and then a Napthine government, the population in Tarneit was exploding. It was one of the real growth periods in Tarneit. I mean, it has been growing ever since, let us be honest, and it still is. But the population of Tarneit was absolutely exploding, and the former Liberal government, in response to that, did not build one new school in Tarneit or in Wyndham, and it did not upgrade one school in places like Hoppers Crossing and Werribee and Wyndham Vale, which had been there and had been established for some time. It took an Andrews Labor government to get elected to make capital works upgrades to schools like the Grange in Hoppers Crossing; to build the second stage of Tarneit Senior College, which was neglected by the previous Liberal government; to make capital works upgrades to Hoppers Crossing Secondary College and to Mossfiel Primary School; and indeed to build 14 brand new schools just in the LGA of Wyndham.

Can we sit here with a straight face and say that those opposite would do the same? Can we sit here with a straight face and say that those opposite will do anything like that if elected at the end of this year? We cannot. It would be nothing but a cruel joke to say that they would. Schools under a previous government – and the member for South-West Coast just spoke at length at the end of her contribution about neglect of schools in the western districts. We could reel off schools in and around her electorate that have been upgraded, including schools in Terang and Warrnambool, including schools in Geelong and Ballarat. Regional schools throughout the term of this government have been given more money than any government has given ever before. In fact under the Andrews and Allan Labor governments there have been more schools built in Victoria than in any other state combined in Australia.

Like I said, we came to government saying that we would make Victoria the Education State, and that is exactly what we have done. With early childhood, we have made kinder free for three- and four-year-olds, because all the research says to us that those early childhood years are absolutely critical in kids' development. The member for Dandenong, who is at the table, knows exactly that, having a young child herself. We have made kinder free for three- and four-year-olds to make sure that kids have the best start in life, regardless of their parents' bank balance, which is also obviously a fantastic cost-of-living measure at the same time.

The member for South-West Coast also, because it is important to correct the record for *Hansard*, stood up at the dispatch box – actually, there is no box there, so stood up at the table – and made her contribution and said that this government in its recent budget had pulled $2 billion out of education, had made a $2 billion cut to education. It is just false. Like, it is trash. I cannot say that she lied, but she just did not tell the truth. There has been a real-time increase in education funding year on year since we came to government. We can contrast that with previous Liberal governments that closed schools and sacked teachers. But they get upset when we talk about Jeff – 'You know, that was so long ago, everyone. What do you mean?' They love Jeff. They still want to be Jeff. It is in their DNA to do this. They have already announced $40 billion worth of cuts to the public service. They have already announced that they will be sacking public servants. You cannot cut that deep and you cannot

make those levels of savings without cutting frontline services. They have not come out and announced that they would close schools or they would sack teachers, but they have got form, and that is really all we can go by. Really all we can go by is history and the past and what they are made up of and what is in their DNA, and that is that they do not respect teachers' work. They will go to war with teachers, most certainly on their pay. I think there is a pretty good chance that they will sack teachers. I think that there is a pretty good chance that they will close schools, not just across metropolitan Melbourne but in the regions as well, which is what they did last time.

Chris Couzens interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Correct. The Swanston Street school in your electorate, member for Geelong – they shut it. They closed it. It ended up being bought by Barwon Health, from memory.

Chris Couzens interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: North Geelong. They have a long history of this, and what we know is that history repeats itself. An incredibly important component of this bill is strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination. It is interesting that the member for South-West Coast spoke about the fact that self-determination works. It is one of the underpinning principles of treaty – the first treaty to be passed by any Parliament in Australia. Australian parliaments are late to the party on this, but we have the first treaty passed by any Parliament anywhere in Australia, with self-determination being one of the underpinning principles of that legislation. Yet we have the member for South-West Coast standing here and talking about how self-determination works, whilst being part of a party that walked away from their commitment to the Victorian Indigenous community and voted against treaty – one of the more shameful acts that this Parliament has seen, at least in recent years.

We know as a government that self-determination works. We know as a government that when you consult the Indigenous community about the affairs that affect them most, about the affairs that affect them and their children – whether that be education, whether that be health care or whether that be land – everybody gets better outcomes. We know in particular that our Aboriginal community gets better outcomes. That is why we went on a journey for six or seven years to go through the process –

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Ten? Sorry, I have only been here for 3½ years. We went through that journey with Victoria's Aboriginal community to negotiate treaty, for them to elect a First Nations assembly and for us ultimately to bring a piece of legislation to this Parliament that will fundamentally make the lives of Indigenous people in Victoria better. We did so because for generations people in this place legislated and told Aboriginal people how they were going to make things better for them without consultation and without including them in the process. For the member for South-West Coast to stand here and talk about how self-determination works and how she has seen it work and yet be happy to be part of a party that has committed to tearing treaty down if elected, is for me a little bit odd – equally as odd as a party making a commitment that one of their first acts in government is going to be to tear away treaty and to stop consulting with Indigenous people about issues that affect them.

Another important piece of the bill – I am nearly done – is the restriction on personal devices in Victorian schools. As the father of a 10-year-old and a 12-year-old who I am consistently dragging away from their iPads to get outdoors and play sports, to read and to write, I know how incredibly important this provision in this bill is, and we need to continue this reform as technology advances. It is an amazing bill, and I commend it to the house.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (20:07): I am very pleased to rise to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I also want to outline the impact of the previous Liberal government, as the member for Tarneit did – the impact that that had on our schools in Geelong. Coming to government in 2014 we found those schools in a state of absolute disrepair. Since 2014 we have put an unprecedented amount of funding into rebuilding our schools, repairing the damage and

making sure that they are state-of-the-art facilities for our young people – our students – to attend. In fact, as the member for Tarneit mentioned, a number of our schools were closed by the former government.

But I do want to focus on the strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination part of this bill. We are now in the era of treaty. I know all of us on this side of the house are really proud of that fact. We know that the opposition have promised to tear up treaty in the first 100 days, but I think we should be really proud of the work that we have done over the last 10 years. Gellung Warl is now in place. Aboriginal people across Victoria voted recently and appointed Gellung Warl, the new First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, to continue the really important work that we have to do but also under treaty, which is so significant for the state. This bill is part of that journey, and I do want to thank the minister for his work and commitment on this. It is really significant because we do need First Nations people to be doctors, nurses, teachers – to be in those roles – and education is at the very heart of that.

I hear often around our state people talking about the fact that we do not have enough Aboriginal people to go into those roles. Well, there is a reason for that: systemic racism. That is the reason. There is no generational wealth within Aboriginal communities. There are no opportunities like there have been for non-Aboriginal people. We know that. I think the fact that we do not have that highly skilled Aboriginal workforce reflects what has occurred over the last 200-odd years – that systemic racism has been a prevention to them all of this time.

This bill will strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. It will introduce a statement of recognition that acknowledges the unique status of First Nations people in Victoria and outlines historical and ongoing factors that impact First Nations learning and wellbeing outcomes. It will also confirm Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives, forming part of the learning areas that are subject to free instruction in schools. In my community and when I move around the state, people are pretty clear that they do want to learn. They do want to understand First Peoples culture. They want to be involved in the celebration of that culture, and we have seen that throughout National Reconciliation Week this past week. There have been many events right across the state, and to see the hundreds or thousands of people that come out in support of reconciliation week and that will come out in support in July during NAIDOC Week is really significant. That tells me that people do want to engage. They do want to understand First Nations culture and the impact colonisation has had on First Nations people.

Here in Victoria not only have we got treaty, but we also went through the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which has recorded through evidence and through the archives what has occurred over the last 200-odd years for First Nations people. This is really important work. I know some schools in our communities do a really good job of teaching young people or students about our history and the truth and about the oldest living culture in the world, but it is not consistent and not everybody gets the same level of learning that they should. The Yoorrook Justice Commission truth-telling lays it out in the evidence and describes the harm and the systemic racism. It is all there for everyone to read now. I do want to make a point on the Yoorrook Justice Commission's findings on education, in that:

> The State systematically imposed substandard and limited education on First Peoples through oppressive laws, missions and reserves, and the total control of First Peoples' lives. Education was also a tool of attempted assimilation. This pattern of educational inequity continues to the present day.
>
> First Peoples students face structural impediments not experienced by others, with racism and lack of cultural safety undermining their educational success.
>
> The Victorian school curriculum does not tell the full story of Victoria's history, and many educators remain ill-equipped to teach compulsory curriculum to the required standard. First Peoples' school experiences in Victoria are also negatively impacted by the critical under-representation of First Peoples educators, leaders and public servants in the education system.
>
> Despite increased involvement in tertiary education, significant barriers to First Peoples' achievement and to Victorian universities fulfilling their obligations to First Peoples remain. These include historical and continuing exclusion of appropriate First Peoples content and knowledges in university curricula, lack of

> engagement with First Peoples communities and Traditional Owner groups, and failure to deliver appropriate training to frontline professionals to enable them to provide culturally appropriate services to First Peoples.
>
> Equality in education requires a foundational commitment to ensuring that the experiences of First Peoples students are meaningful, empowering, culturally safe and reflective of First Peoples' culture, history and perspectives. This cannot be achieved through the production of even more policies and strategies that have either meaningless targets or no effective means to enforce them.

That is directly from the Yoorrook Justice Commission. And I think it is quite profound, in those words, that we as a state are now recognising that, acknowledging that, and this is what this bill is all about or is a pathway to.

The bill also introduces a new duty of the responsible department secretaries to ensure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training will be made available to anyone working to support learning or wellbeing in or across early childhood, schools, TAFEs and adult community and further education providers as well as state-funded registered training organisations. This aligns with the key elements of recommendation 48 made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2025 and is part of our recognition of First Peoples as our first educators, so I think we all have a significant role in ensuring that legislation like this continues to go through this house. I know all of us on this side of the house support this bill. The impact for First Peoples is really significant, and we rely on these bills to ensure that we deliver. The Gellung Warl will obviously play a greater role in the First People's Assembly and pieces like the education piece.

Truth-telling and self-determination are what will close the gap, and we know that. As I think the member for Tarneit mentioned earlier, self-determination is at the heart of the work that we have been doing, but so is truth-telling – having truth-telling in our schools but also having the educators delivering truth-telling in the most culturally appropriate ways – and ensuring that Aboriginal people have the same opportunities that all others have, that they are able to have that educational pathway. I commend the bill to the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (20:17): I too rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, and it is such a pleasure to follow the member for Geelong, who speaks so passionately and eloquently about First Nations and the work that this Labor government has done over a very extended period of time, over the 12 years, to get us to where we are: Australia's first and only treaty. It is extraordinary.

I will start my contribution by following the same sentiment as that of the member for Geelong in terms of the importance of closing the gap and the truth-telling happening at our schools. I had the pleasure, I think it was just last week, National Reconciliation Week, of a flurry of invites coming in for events at my local schools across the board – primary schools, Catholic primary schools, high schools, independent schools – to celebrate and acknowledge National Reconciliation Week. I took up the opportunity to attend just one event, which was indeed a week-long celebration of different events at St Peter's Catholic Primary School, which is a primary school that sits within the most gorgeous suburb of Sunshine West. It sits within a pocket that is doing it tough; it is a bit of a disadvantaged sort of area. St Peter's is headed up by an incredible principal, Miss Grace. Everyone knows her as Miss Grace. She is an incredible woman who in a previous career was a social worker, I think in one of our youth justice centres. She left that because she wanted to work with children to prevent them from even being within the youth justice system in the first place, and she said, 'Where can I do that?' And that meant going and re-educating herself and going to work in a primary school, and now she is heading up this great local Catholic primary school.

I attended a luncheon on Thursday, at the end of the week, which was the closure of National Reconciliation Week, and the events there at the school. It was a celebration lunch. I am not sure if any First Nations Indigenous food was on offer, but I will say it is an incredibly multicultural school. The diversity in the school hall was just extraordinary on the day. Every child, the parents, the teachers and the support staff were there, and they celebrated it with a multicultural luncheon. It was such an incredible celebration of diversity. Speeches were made in relation to First Nations people – the

importance of the truth-telling, remembering and talking about the past and what happened, telling the truth to kids as they learn the truth about Australia's history. Some of it is heartbreakingly horrific and grossly unfair. I actually had this moment when Miss Grace said, 'Do you want to get up and speak?' And I said, 'Oh, yes, yes, fine.' And I thought, 'What do I want to tell these kids?' Immediately I wanted to tell them about treaty, because they did not know about it – it was not something that the school sort of talked about – and all of that sort of thing. I was able to get up and talk about treaty and it being an Australian first and how proud the Labor government is of having worked on it and having worked with our First Nations people here in Victoria – and we passed it here in this house.

When I sat down, the kids were really excited and they had lots of questions after and we ate lots and lots of beautiful multicultural food after and had quite a feast for lunch. The kids asked me a lot of questions, and there was a sense of sadness for me, knowing that the fight ahead of us in the next six months was just so important to win this election, because, as the member for Tarneit said, one of the first actions of a Liberal–One Nation–Nationals coalition, if they won government, would be to repeal and kill off treaty, which is just extraordinary. Of all the things that they would want to do, they put that in there. We know why they put that in there. You could never explain and have the kids there at St Peter's Catholic Primary School understand that, because those kids, through talking about even the difficult past that Australia has had and learning about First Nations people and their incredible and longstanding culture and civilisation here in Australia, would not understand why a political party would want to take something else away that our First Nations fought for and worked with the government of the day for so long to implement here in Victoria. What a sad story to tell children, and shame on those opposite.

In the second part of my contribution tonight, I do want to give a big shout-out. Over the past eight years I have met some incredible principals, teachers and teaching support staff, as I think everyone across all sides of the chamber could readily stand here and say, but I do want to give them a big shout-out. We have had many conversations with many, many different principals and teaching and support staff over the years, but those in the western suburbs are particularly passionate about making sure that kids of all ages in Melbourne's west get a fair deal, because they know the education that they will get at that local school, whether it is the primary school or the high school, will be life changing. The teachers in Melbourne's west – I do not know what they are like in other parts of Melbourne, but you guys are amazing, and you have done an incredible job in helping raise our young kids in Melbourne's west. It is something that I feel so proud of and you should absolutely feel proud of, and you do not get thanked enough.

I also want to give a very special shout-out – it is not talked about enough here in this place – and it is because I have quite a few special developmental schools in my electorate. I have Jennings Street, Sunshine Special Developmental, Western Autistic – I feel like I am going to forget one.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Warringa. That is right, member for Point Cook.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Multicampus, yes. The teachers, the principals and the teaching support staff at that school are absolutely incredible, and the support that they provide and the education, passion, dedication and commitment to the children at those schools is absolutely extraordinary – and also to the families. Many of those families are doing it really tough, and the teachers end up becoming just like family, particularly for the parents, as their children bond with the teachers and teaching support staff. I remember the moment that we announced that we would upgrade every single special developmental school here in this state. I remember when we made that announcement. Each of those schools, as I have just mentioned, in my electorate that I attended as we cut a ribbon and celebrated the opening of new school buildings and facilities has been such a special moment for me, because we have not just upgraded schools that really needed upgrading but we have made fit-for-purpose facilities

for children with many diverse and special needs. The children in those schools will be so much better off. The education and the facilities where they are going to learn many different skills, lifelong skills that they will need, are just extraordinary. I talk to a lot of the parents on the school council that come to those openings. They feel really emotional because they have had a lot of input into the design based on the needs of their children. Not only have the Victorian School Building Authority and this government listened and taken on board that feedback, they have translated it into the architectural designs. What we get to cut a ribbon at and open on the day is absolutely extraordinary.

This is certainly a government that has built well over 100 schools here in this state. I was just saying to the member for Werribee, 'How many schools have we built in Wyndham?' In honest fact, I have lost count. He thinks it maybe is 16, but he is bragging about seven in his own electorate. I think it is over 20. Someone is going to watch this and tell me the number, but that is extraordinary. That is an extraordinary achievement of a long-term Labor government. That is why Labor governments here in Victoria matter. That is why long-term Labor governments here in Victoria matter most to people in the western suburbs, and that is why long-term Labor governments matter in outer suburban growth areas. We will always have the backs of parents and have the backs of teachers and families and kids in this state.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (20:28): I follow on from the member for Laverton, and I am very pleased to do so, because she expressed some of the views that I hope to express across the course of my contribution as well, which are just how much educators and education matter to Melbourne's west. So many people in my community come to Point Cook, the electorate that I represent, for the great education delivered by great education leaders.

I will come back to that in a second, because as the Labor Party and as a party who firmly believe that Victoria is the Education State, we are chock-full of educators and former educators. One is right in front of me right now, the most recent teacher to join the Labor Party ranks in this caucus room. The member for Werribee is doing a fine job in this place and in making sure that the Education State is a priority for everybody in this Labor government and in this Parliament in general. I want to just also acknowledge the member for Werribee and his other role, the other hat that he wears and continues to wear as a CFA member and the real challenges that have gone on in Werribee over the last week and just acknowledge how difficult that is. I had another CFA member in with me over the course of today, and we were just discussing what a tragedy it is in those circumstances. I just want to acknowledge that and thank him and all those members of the CFA and FRV who have had a really difficult time in the last week.

The member for Laverton was preceded by the member for Geelong. I always feel like I am more knowledgeable at the end of the member for Geelong's contributions, because they are so well understood and put in such an understandable way. The Minister for Education always talks about the Indigenous people of this state as being our first educators – the longest living culture the world has ever seen.

What a proud thing that we have in this place. When I welcome people to the Parliament of Victoria I talk about the Wurundjeri people and their long history with this specific part of the land, a place of treaty for them, a place of ceremony. I remember a NAIDOC Week where Aunty Joy, one of the elders of the Wurundjeri people, stood in Queens Hall, and she said some really profound things about wanting the members of this Parliament, of this place, to continue to make laws to the benefit of Victorians and Aboriginal people. What an enormous amount of generosity the Wurundjeri people and their leadership were showing to us that day, what a gift to present to us. This was before the treaty was passed in Victoria, and they were inviting us to make decisions in this place. It was so generous because this place has been the home to colonisation and to so many pieces of legislation that have been passed that have not been to the benefit of Aboriginal people. I thank them for that spirit of generosity that is brought forward by the elders of the Wurundjeri people on the land where we are right now.

The member for Laverton and the member for Geelong both talked about the education that is going on through our education system about our First Peoples. It is a sea change from when I went through primary school and through early childhood education settings, and we are so much better for it. Uncle Mark, one of the Bunurong people, whose lands I reside and work on, speaks of the word 'wominjeka' and the dual meaning of it, and I really love that there is a dual meaning to it. As he says, there is 'welcome' but also 'come with purpose'. I think we have been coming with purpose in this place in terms of treaty for some time now. It is a real effort that needs to be made. It is a shame that not everyone in this Parliament has come with that same sense of purpose. They come with a very different purpose in their ambitions around treaty. Treaty should not be a difficult or novel or unique thing. It is unique in Australia. The first time that treaty has been done with Indigenous people is in Victoria, but of course it is not very novel for many Commonwealth nations. In fact I understand we are really at the end of the list when it comes to treaty.

Chris Couzens: We're last.

Mathew HILAKARI: That is right. We should be proud and redouble our effort in Victoria, because we know that we have got so much further to go.

One of the matters that the member for Laverton went to was the wonderful leadership of the principals and the educators out in Melbourne's west. I know that will be the case for other parts of the state, including the northern suburbs and many places across Victoria, but leadership really matters in any organisation. I remember my own school – we were a relatively middling school, a state school, my high school. A change in principal and the school really struggled; it really did struggle for a while. With another change in principal the school became one of those lead schools across the state, something that other schools emulated. I know the leadership of the schools in the electorate of Point Cook is what really sets them apart.

We have the largest state school in Victoria, Alamanda K–9 College, and it is absolutely sought after. I get emails and correspondence almost every week from parents who would like to see their children enrolled in that school. They have got some hard zoning there because it is such a sought-after school, because the leadership, the educators and the support staff all make a world of difference in the education at that place. I always say of the schools across the community that I represent that I would trade buildings and facilities any day of the week for leadership, because it is the leadership of our teachers, of our educators, of our principals and of our assistant principals that really matters. We are doing some of those things that really matter in terms of the facilities as well. At Alamanda, which I mentioned a few moments ago, we are on a couple of rounds of upgrades there. Their senior school facility for the year 9s is probably the best building I have ever seen in any school. State or private, it does not matter: it is the best that I have seen.

Saltwater has some further facilities under construction at the moment, and we just announced in this budget some more facilities for Homestead. We have a huge amount of effort going into schools in the electorate of Point Cook. We opened two schools just this year as well: Yurran P–9 College as well as Ngurraga specialist school, right next door to each other. There will be a kindergarten that opens up onsite next year, and the full P–9 facilities will be open at the start of the term next year. These are really big deals for a growing community like the one that I represent and like the ones the member for Werribee and the member for Laverton, who are sitting around me, represent. But there is also an effort to go into those schools that are more established, like those in Altona Meadows in the community that I represent, and particularly I look forward to working more with Altona Green and some of the planning efforts that they are going through –

A member interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: Is that your old school? Oh, there you go – Altona Green and some of the efforts that they are doing. Some of those facilities might have been in place when you were in place there, but we are hoping to see a bit of effort on the facilities there.

I always go back to the leadership being the thing that matters, but I can say to every school in the community that I represent: when you take $40 billion out of the infrastructure program ahead of you, do not expect anything anytime soon. I think for the western suburbs there is a truism, which is – not that they are maybe going to be the biggest party in the opposition after this election – that the Liberal Party have never made a commitment to the western suburbs. They have never made a commitment to our growing communities. The only commitment, actually, that they have made is to putting more housing in without the infrastructure and the resources and the facilities and supports that we need. So they are a real risk for the community that I represent.

I do want to take us back to the bill a little bit as well and talk about some of those important matters that are contained in this bill, and I appreciate that the opposition is not opposing this. I would like to see in the Education State more of them talking on it, and I might even see that in a few moments. But this bill contains some really important elements around Aboriginal recognition and self-determination, and that is a flow-on from the efforts that have been underway around treaty. We have talked, and particularly the member for Tarneit talked, around the restriction of student use of personal electronic devices at school, and we know how important this is in terms of a focus on learning and a focus on positive behaviours inside the school. We also have heard speakers talk on the improvements to the teacher registration framework at the Victorian Institute of Teaching. There is a lot contained in this bill that is easy to support, and I am so glad that those opposite have found that ease of support as well on this occasion. I commend this bill to the house.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (20:38): Wominjeka. It means 'welcome' in Wurundjeri language, the language of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, custodians of the lands encompassing the Northcote electorate, and when you walk up Hutton Street on your way to Thornbury Primary School, 'Wominjeka' is written in giant letters on the fence of the school, artfully and lovingly created by the school community, who have tied small pieces of fabric through the gaps in the fence to create the word along Hutton Street. If you walk into this school, you will hear the word 'wominjeka', a warm and welcoming greeting offered across every classroom and at every assembly. At Thornbury Primary students learn Woi-wurrung language with pride. They practise greetings, farewells and introductions. They identify local plants and animal names. They name the seasons and the landmarks and family members, and they develop a deep understanding and respect for First Nations history and culture. It is a beautiful thing to witness our youngest Victorians practising Woi-wurrung in their local public school, and this deep learning and recognition of Aboriginal histories and cultures and contributions is happening right across my community in the inner north.

At early learning centres and at public and private schools – primary and secondary – it is a feature of our community that First Nations recognition has been embedded in a very tangible way across curriculums, and that is no accident. With our deep connections to Aboriginal rights movements in the inner north, we are proud to have led the way with this, so it gives me immense heart to see this element of the bill and know that in Victoria, the state of treaty, we will be strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination within the education system in a more formalised way. It is a stark contrast to the Liberal Party, who to their shame have said that they will dissolve the historic Victorian treaty in their first 100 days if they ever are re-elected. As the Deputy Premier rightfully noted, First Nations people were the first students and the first teachers on this land, and we have so much to learn from them yet. I am glad that when my daughters come home from school they have that learning included in their curriculum.

I want to turn to the element of the bill about restricting student use of personal electronic devices at all schools, because this is something that I think as a parent I am not alone in feeling quite viscerally. I am a mum to a seven-year-old and an eight-year-old, and they are in grades 2 and 3. I can confess that, despite our best efforts – mine and my husband's – keeping them off the screens is a daily challenge. It is really hard. We see the impact it has on their behaviour. We see how it fragments their thinking and dilutes their concentration, and we see them act out in ways that do not seem normal, do not seem like their usual character. We kind of mourn the days of the 1990s that we grew up in, when

having fun as a kid was not playing some mindless game app on a screen with ads every 30 seconds, but it was taking our bikes out along the Darebin Creek in Alphington or trapping lizards in the backyard. I know that is a bit nostalgic. I am a 90s kid. I am allowed to be nostalgic, and maybe it is that time of the night that we are getting like that.

The evidence is clear, though. Screens really do impact a lot of things. They impact relationship building. They contribute to loneliness and to mental health issues. They disrupt concentration and brain development. They lead to behavioural issues. I see this even with the limits that we place on our kids' screen time. So knowing that as a Labor government we are now legislating to expand that ban to restrict devices in all Victorian schools, I cannot support this enough, to be honest – mobile phones, wearable devices, audio devices like EarPods. I know that many schools already do this, but having it prescribed across all schools is that extra step that schools and educators and families have been calling for. Removing those distractions, letting kids engage in their learning alongside that federal ban on social media is progressive Labor policy at its best.

The bill also strengthens teacher registration frameworks administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching. That is all about increasing the efficiency of the institute's processes and making that back-end system work better for everyone.

I also, though, want to speak about our proud Education State and all that we have built here in Victoria under a long-term Labor government, a government that has spent the time and done the work and made the investment to deliver some of the best education outcomes that our state has seen. That includes Victorian students having the best NAPLAN results in the country, better than any other time on record. It includes our historic investment in our nation-leading disability inclusion program, and this is something that I speak to schools a lot about. My husband is an education support worker, and I know the effort that goes on in classrooms to give kids that best start, to give kids that may be struggling or that have neurodiversity the additional support and the care and the empathy and the time and the patience that they deserve to get ahead and to reach their potential. Phonics has been embedded – that evidence-based teaching style – and I had the pleasure of being at Wales Street Primary School recently with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. We went into a grade 3 class and the kids showed us their phonics lesson, and it was just incredible to see them mouthing the sounds, understanding and being so engaged in that lesson. It was incredible to see.

It is hard to count it at this point, but I think we have made over $140 million of investment into our local schools and kinders in Northcote over the last eight years. It represents the biggest transformation of our local school network that we have seen in decades. The impact that that has for families, for kids and for the next generation of young people in our community is phenomenal, and it would not happen under any other government but a Labor government. That is new gyms, it is new classrooms, it is opportunities, it is hope, it is our Labor government investing in education, and I commend this bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (20:48): I am pleased to be able to rise this evening. I probably –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Eildon, before I give you the call again, if members can be mindful of the background noise and show respect for the member on her feet.

Cindy McLEISH: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I am very pleased to have that ruling by you at this early stage when I have so many important things that I need to impart as part of my contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. It was said earlier that the opposition are not opposing this bill, and there are a number of elements that I do want to talk about as we work through it, because we have got strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination through the education system and requiring schools to implement policies restricting use of personal electronic devices during school hours. These are things that I am really quite passionate about. I am not going to spend much time talking about the other areas.

I am going to start with the use of personal electronic devices during school hours. I could not be more in favour of this being implemented. I was listening earlier to the member for Werribee, who listed a whole bunch of kids who in his classrooms were addicted to their phones. What that said to me, rather than the addictions to their phones, was the fact that his classes must have been so boring that he had so many students that were willing to disengage with English. I must say, I too was a teacher at some point, and I would be very confident in saying not one student during my time was on the phone ever during my classes.

I am sure there are members in this place who could attest to the behaviour of the kids during my time teaching. But seriously, it is a concern, the level of addiction that children have to screens. It has been well documented about screen time and the negative impacts that it can have, not just physically, watching with your eyes and the stresses that that puts on your eyes, but also mentally and that stimulation that people get from continually having to hook in at what is going on. They are doing things that are perhaps inappropriate during school time and not concentrating on what they need to. It concerns me greatly, some of the things that kids are watching. There has been a pronounced increase in pornographic material being watched by young children, including in the schoolyard and things like that. So banning and restricting the use of these devices, I think, is particularly good.

I refer to a story that was told to me a number of years ago by a secondary school principal about a number of year 8 kids where they had actually got kids off Facebook in the evenings. Kids were going into their rooms, and they were on Facebook quite late. They kept responding to each other, building the stories as they go, and it was really impacting their sleep. Kids were turning up to school, and they were tired and grumpy and could not concentrate properly. They did a trial to get kids away from their social media, and it made incredible differences in the classroom. The kids were less grumpy, they were more engaged. I think that something like that just needs to be commended. Taking these restrictions further can only benefit children. I do worry still about the complete reliance on laptops and computers in the classrooms rather than having kids read and learn to write and have manual dexterity. That seems to be becoming less and less important. But that is something that I certainly agree with.

I want to talk about strengthening Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the education system. I have listened to over the years a number of debates around education and what we have learned about the Aboriginals. When I was at primary school we did quite a lot of work understanding different parts of their culture and the ways that they lived. We had a number of Aboriginal families in the town, so people knew those families. They certainly did not live like the traditional owners had way back, but we did have that understanding, and I think it is really important that people do know a lot more about the Aboriginal culture than perhaps many currently do. That means the good, the bad and the ugly. We certainly know that there were many ugly things that did happen. In my electorate the great divide is a separation between the Taungurung in the north and the Wurundjeri in the south. Some of the things that happened to both the Wurundjeri and Taungurung and tribes further north of moving them down onto the Coranderrk settlement in Healesville were atrocious. Certainly the schools in and around Healesville have a very strong Indigenous presence within their classrooms, and a lot of work is done in those rooms about language and learning some of the arts and things, and that has been terrific. But that is in Healesville because that is very strong in that area. I think that there is a lot of work that can be done more broadly.

Some of the things that I would be very keen to see included in this would be things about what happened when people died – how did they deal with people who were dying? I go to events every now and again where they have a lot of the medicines laid out, the different plants that they used for different conditions. I think that is really quite interesting. It is probably a bit like the ancient Chinese medicine. They had things that were in place. I think it would do kids a lot of benefit to think really broadly about how things can be different. Things do not just have to be popping a pill out of a jar like we might do; there are different ways of doing things. Which Aboriginal tribes were nomads, which ones stayed put a little bit more and where did people meet? I know in my electorate there were

meeting places, not unlike Parliament House here was a meeting place. Just out of Yea at Ghin Ghin there was a property called Doogallook. Doogallook is an area where tribes came from different spots and met and would have their big corroborees. Now in the main street of Yea there is a sculpture, that rusted iron type of sculpture, that depicts Aboriginals sitting around a fire. At night when the light is on it looks as though it is a corroboree, and that is exactly what it is intended to do.

My friend Angela ten Buuren was absolutely instrumental. She is a Taungurung member, and she was instrumental in getting that and another sculpture up in Yea so that people can see and understand some of the history. Also there is a lot of language that I think could be embedded, and some of this could be embedded at local levels, because we have different things that happen in different areas. For example, in the Murrindindi shire, the word 'Murrindindi' means 'mist of the mountains'. Let us go back 60,000 years and probably it was misty and foggy way back then, just like it is a lot of the time now. It is really quite an apt word. Nillumbik means 'red earth' or 'shallow earth'. These are Aboriginal words, and these are words of areas that we live in. I mentioned Doogallook before, the area where people come together. That means 'croaking frog'. It is just near the Goulburn River, and I imagine there were quite a lot of billabongs along the river there.

Some of the other towns in and around Murrindindi shire – Toolangi is 'stringybark tree', and there are stringybark forests there. I went on a cultural burn up in that area, and we listened to the wildlife in that stringybark forest. Victor Steffensen, who is one of the experts in Australia and is from northern Queensland, talked to us about how that stringybark forest was dying and was sick because there was nothing for birds to eat. You could not hear the birds. There were no seeds; they were covered up by mulch and things like that, and the new forest was not coming in. He talked about how sick that forest was, and it was really quite alarming.

Narbethong is 'cheerful place'. That is quite a nice one. And Taggerty is 'blue-grey clay'. We all have words in our area, and I think it would not hurt children to know and understand where some of these meanings come from. Also what is particularly important is that it was 20 years ago, in 2006, that Aboriginals who went to the war were recognised for their war service. People who had been in the Boer War, the First World War, the Second World War and beyond – and who currently served – were not recognised up until 20 years ago. It was the late Aunty Dot Peters of Healesville who fought for that, because her father was killed on the Thai–Burma railway in the Second World War and was not recognised for his war service – that was just wrong. I am so pleased to know Sam Halim, who worked with Aunty Dot at the Healesville RSL to bring this about. Now there is an enormous event at the shrine on 31 May every year, and Aunty Dot's son Andrew, one of my mates, leads that. I am really proud to see him being actively involved in it. These are things that must be taught so that people know that history.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (20:58): I rise to support the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, a very important bill. It builds on the ongoing investments, reforms, policy measures and initiatives that we have been introducing continuously since 2014 to continue building the Education State here in Victoria. This bill, as we have heard from previous speakers, contains a number of reforms and changes, but there are three particular provisions on which I do want to focus. The first is around the changes when it comes to First Nations communities: recognising our First Nations communities in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. The second is around devices in schools, and the third goes to the teacher registration program and framework.

When it comes to First Nations, we have so much to be proud of here in Victoria. We are the first state that has fulfilled every major pillar of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* through voice, treaty and truth. We have introduced the First Peoples' Assembly, which is essentially the voice for First Peoples here in Victoria, which has evolved through the treaty legislation we moved some months ago now into what will become Gellung Warl. That is a First Nations term meaning 'tip of the spear', and it will continue to be the body that will guide and provide advice to government and indeed this Parliament as well.

The second element in our reforms when it comes to First Nations relates to the pillar of truth. In Victoria we established the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which was all about the Indigenous request for a truth-telling process to look at the whole history of Australia, which goes back pre the First Fleet and before colonial settlement from 1788 – the entire history going back 60,000-odd years of traditional custodianship of these lands in the hands of First Peoples communities. I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the traditional custodians of this part of our land and the traditional custodians for my community in my electorate.

The other element is the landmark treaty. The first treaty bill that was passed here in Australia was passed here in Victoria just recently by the Victorian Labor government. A key element of treaty is the principle of self-determination, because what First Nations communities have said, what all the evidence has said and what even the Productivity Commission from an economic point of view has said is that embedding self-determination through a whole-of-government approach is absolutely fundamental if we are going to start working towards and making genuine strides towards reconciliation and closing the gap, not just on socio-economic data, whether it is health, mental health or unemployment, but particularly when it comes to education.

I am really pleased that this bill amends the Education Act 1872. As we heard from the lead speaker, the Minister for Education and Deputy Premier, just earlier, the Education Act is actually one of the oldest acts on the Victorian statute books. Victoria was established as a colony way back in 1851. This building was built in 1856. It is almost as old as Pentridge in my community. In 1856 we had this Parliament of Victoria. For all those years after the Education Act was passed a couple of decades later, there was no mention at all of First Nations people as being the first teachers on the land on which we meet. So it is important that we recognise that now in a modern Education Act, and it is even more important that we look to start embedding the notion of self-determination through the education system for First Nations communities as well to support their educational outcomes.

The second part of the bill that contains some substantive reforms goes to devices in schools. We as a government were one of the first – if not the first, I believe – in Australia to basically ban personal electronic devices through public schools. We are now looking to extend that to non-government schools. The evidence is very clear around the benefits. We introduced our mobile phone ban in government schools in 2020, requiring mobile phones to be switched off and stored securely during the school day. The policy was designed to improve learning, student wellbeing and safety. The research and the data, I believe, is quite clear. I also speak from the perspective of a parent. I am a parent of two beautiful young daughters who are in grade 5 and grade 3 respectively. I can certainly attest to, like many other parents in this chamber and beyond in our communities, the noticeable difference of when a child is on a device as opposed to when they are off it. The data is very clear in that regard. It has shown that it is helping improve classroom focus and learning, it is reducing distractions during lessons, more student engagement is being experienced in classrooms and teachers are spending less time managing phone-related issues. A 2024 survey of nearly a thousand New South Wales principals found that 87 per cent said students were less distracted and 81 per cent said student learning had improved. It also improves social interaction. They are more likely to talk face to face at recess and at lunch with other students. It has increased participation in sport and physical activity during breaks and improved peer relationships and social connectedness. There is a correlation with reduced cyberbullying and online conflict as well.

We know the risks that are involved with social media, which has frankly been the Wild West ever since it first came into being in the early 2000s and beyond. I grew up in the 1980s, 1990s era. They were very much pre-internet and pre–social media days, where we were lucky. We were the generation of the Nokia 3210 where you were lucky to be able to send a text at best and maybe play a bit of a game of *Snake* if you had a bit of time, but nothing along the lines of social media posting or TikToking or anything like that. We have to change the legislation to reflect the challenges we are dealing with now with evolving technology. This is an important step through this bill as we continue to enforce

and tighten regulations around the usage of personal technological devices in public and non-government schools as well.

The third key element of the bill is around the teacher registration program and framework, and resourcing as well. In that regard, I want to acknowledge the important role of all of our teachers. I want to acknowledge the very strong pay offer that has been put forward by this government which will see Victorian teachers the best paid in the nation, with pay rises between 28 per cent and 32 per cent and substantial increases for educational support staff. It also goes right through to our kinder and early years teachers receiving substantial pay offers. Our teachers and our education staff deserve nothing less. They are the heartbeat of our education system. They bring to life the curriculum and all of the new facilities and buildings that we have been delivering as a state government. Supporting our teachers and recognising their important work is absolutely essential.

It is a bill that really goes to the heart of the labour movement, the Labor government and who we are as a Labor Party as well, because education of course is in our DNA not just at a state level, where we have literally put on our numberplates 'The Education State' and put it as the number one priority from a whole-of-government perspective, but going back many, many decades. Look at the tremendous reforms of Gough Whitlam and his opening up of the university sector so that it was not about how much money your family had; you actually had access to go to university for the first time. That was seen through by Bob Hawke through the introduction of HECS to allow even more students to access university and higher education than ever before. Paul Keating continued that on, as did Kevin Rudd with the building education revolution and Julia Gillard as Prime Minister through the introduction of the Gonski funding formula and NAPLAN, which still remains the benchmark for how we continue to support and understand where we need to continue resourcing our education system.

As a state government we have invested $38.6 billion in the education system since coming to government over 120 new schools. Fifty per cent of new schools built across this country are built right here in Victoria. We have got the best NAPLAN results. It is not just about the facilities. It is also about the programs: free glasses in schools; free dental in schools with Smile Squad; free public transport for kids; free mental health and wellbeing in schools to support our growing number of neurodiverse families, particularly in my community; the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund; the free breakfast clubs program; the affordable uniform program; and so much more.

Particularly for my local community we have invested in the order of between $150 million to $200 million to improve virtually all or most of our school facilities: $22.5 million to build a brand new Coburg Special Development School, over $21 million for a new STEAM centre at Strathmore Secondary, $20 million for new facilities at Newlands Primary School, $17.8 million for a new tech hub at Coburg High School, $18 million for new facilities that we have opened at Pascoe Vale Primary School, $11.9 million for a new STEAM centre at Pascoe Vale Girls College, a $10 million upgrade at Glenroy College and a further $1 million in this year's budget and $14.5 million for John Fawkner secondary college. We just announced in the recent budget $6.1 million towards delivering the concept master plan at the Merri-bek Primary School, $6 million for Coburg North Primary School upgrades, $5 million previously for Pascoe Vale South, which we need to continue to invest in, and of course Coburg Primary School planning funding. There is more to do for West Spring Primary, Pascoe Vale North Primary, Coburg West Primary – my old school – and so many other schools. I commend this bill to the chamber.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (21:08): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Working from home

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this house condemns the opposition leader for failing to:

(a) stop the Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for mandatory five-day office return;

(b) condemn the Shadow Treasurer for spreading misinformation on working from home; and

(c) commit to Labor's plan to legislate working from home as a right for Victorians.

And Tim Richardson's amendment:

That the word 'former' be inserted before the word 'Shadow' wherever occurring.

And James Newbury's amendment to amendment:

That after the word 'occurring' insert 'and after the word "Victorians" insert "and that this house notes how stale and political this sledge motion is"'.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (21:09): Only the Allan Labor government will protect and legislate for Victorian workers' right to work from home two days a week to make sure that Victorian workers can save money on transport costs, not having to get on the train or indeed get in the car and fill up at the petrol station to get their way into the city or wherever else it is that their workplace is, and to help Victorians who in particular have caring responsibilities to complete their work at home, closer to where their kids may be going to school, closer to perhaps where their parents may be in care and closer to where the things that they need to do straight after work are. We know that time lost in the car or on the train is horrendous for productivity in Victoria, is horrendous for the hip pocket and is horrendous for workers' mental health.

The pandemic in Australia was horrendous, but it was also a defining moment. It changed many things. It changed the way that we do many things here in Victoria and around Australia. One of the things that became clear through those years is that many Victorian workers both in the private sector and the public sector are able to productively complete their work from home. Of course there are some workers in the economy, Acting Speaker Cameron, that are unable to work from home – the job that you undertook as a plumber, for instance, is one of those. We have heard some ridiculous commentary from some corners of the Victorian public, from some business leaders, on these work-from-home provisions, but they only apply to those who can undertake this kind of work.

It is only the Allan Labor government, as I said, that will protect your right to work from home but also enshrine that in legislation for years to come. It is only the Allan Labor government that will protect Victorian workers. To pick up some of the commentary from the opposition on these working-from-home provisions, we know that deep in their hearts they do not support them. A little over 12 months ago we made this announcement, I believe at a Labor state conference, that we were going to legislate working-from-home provisions.

The Liberal Party have kind of had a buck each way: 'We're not sure. Maybe. We'll review it. We'll have a look. We're not 100 per cent sure.' But you know who has not had a buck each way? The member for Brighton. He was the Shadow Treasurer at the time, but not anymore – the Leader of the Opposition has decided to keep that all for herself. The member for Brighton was pretty direct on his view of working from home. You could even say that he may have stepped outside what the party's talking points are. I have spoken a few times this week in relation to the member for Brighton and how he conducted himself in certain negotiations, and I may have made the suggestion that the Leader of the Opposition and indeed his party office find it hard to control him. He is kind of a freelancer, the member for Brighton. He came out quite bizarrely and gave his views on working from home very clearly. He was the Shadow Treasurer at the time, so he thought it was in his remit, with an economic portfolio, to do so. He said that there should be a policy to mandate that all workers go back to the office five days a week regardless of whether they have the capacity to work from home.

Think about what that would do on day one of making sure that every single Victorian worker has to come back to the office. This would be mandated, so maybe their employer does not want them to come back to the office but is happy for them to work from home. But under the member for Brighton's mandate we would have tens of thousands of workers, more workers than we already do, having to get onto public transport to get into the city, the next suburb or somewhere else to go to work. Tens of thousands of Victorian workers would have to get in their car, get on freeways and get on public roads to come into the city, to get to the next suburb or to get somewhere else to go to work, jamming up Victoria's public transport system, jamming up Victoria's roads and also costing every single Victorian worker that did have the capacity to work from home more money either at the petrol pump or through having to put more money on their Myki. His words exactly were that 'hundreds of thousands of dollars' are being spent for these bureaucrats to work from home. It was Peter Dutton–esque.

Basically what he was intimating was that work from home is some amazing benefit that only Victorian public servants are able to access. Firstly, that is just fundamentally incorrect. The amount of people who work from home in my electorate of Tarneit who work for private technology companies or indeed in other industries in Tarneit, Point Cook and Truganina is enormous. Working from home and legislating the right to work from home will be a benefit of no end to those workers. But it also gives you a pretty good understanding of what the Liberal Party and the member for Brighton in particular think of public servants in this state. We have already seen what the Liberal Party's plans are for public servants in Victoria: $40 billion cut out of the Victorian economy and 7500 public service jobs ripped out of the Victorian economy – 7500 workers, a lot of them with families, that will go home one day without a job. They say it is only back office. You cannot take 7500 jobs out of the Victorian economy without cutting frontline services. To be more direct about the comments from our friend the member for Brighton:

> Every public servant should be turning up to work.

He said that to the *Herald Sun* on 1 February 2025, as if working from home is not turning up to work and as if public servants are sitting there at home doing nothing and should be dragged back to the office, putting pressure on our public transport system, putting pressure on our local roads and putting pressure on those workers' hip pockets. He went further, saying:

> We should be requiring all public servants to work from the office.

Regardless of who is in government, regardless of who the secretary of the department is, regardless of the work that they are undertaking, regardless of their caring responsibilities and regardless of the fact that they can work from home productively, the view of I assume the entire Victorian Liberal Party and the entire opposition – because one of their senior members, the member for Brighton, is saying it – is that we should be mandating all of those workers to come back into the office five days a week. This party, whenever they have the chance to govern, have a long history of waging wars with Victorian workers, whether they be frontline workers like firefighters, paramedics, teachers and nurses; closing schools; closing hospitals; going to war with ambulance workers; going to war with firefighters; or making ridiculous comments like that about people's capacity to work from home. They have got history here. It is in their DNA. If we have a situation where we have a Wilson–Pauline Hanson Liberal–One Nation government here in Victoria, we know exactly what they will do, and that is rip rights from Victorian workers.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (21:19): We are a bit of a double act, but I am afraid I must disagree horrendously with my learned friend from Tarneit because I do not think we are going to have a Wilson–One Nation opposition. It will be a One Nation–Wilson opposition. There is no chance, on the polling that we see in front of us, that the Liberal government will be anything near where One Nation will be. One Nation will be over the top. I am sorry to say that, unfortunately, I do not think the Nationals will be at party status at that point. I think that is a real disappointment, because there are people who make good contributions on behalf of regional Victoria. Unfortunately, the only

Nationals in here will be One Nation party members, and they will be leading the coalition. In fact I am more interested in what they have got to say about working from home than what the Liberal Party and the coalition on the opposition benches have to say, because One Nation are going to be the opposition that we will have to deal with in the next Parliament. Each Labor member is going to work hard to make sure they come back, but One Nation is going to rule the roost in those Liberal and formerly National Party seats.

This working-from-home government motion goes to the heart of what we think is important, and that is giving people time with their families and that opportunity to be with them. We know that working from home delivers a workplace which is friendly for families, for both women and men, to be engaged with their children. We do not work for work's sake, and we do not work to build someone else's economic wealth or our own; we work so that we can build a great family and a great community, and without work from home, particularly for places like the ones I represent, that is a real struggle. If you are in the car 1½ hours each way each day, you are adding two days a week to your work week. Where does that leave opportunities for you with your family, to build those sporting clubs, to build that great life together? You do not get it without working from home. That is why it is incredibly popular in the communities that I represent, some of the most popular areas for work from home.

We took to the community some consultation – it was a huge consultation, with 36,770 survey responses from workers across this state. So many of them were from the community I represent because it is such a benefit for them. When I speak to people at the doors about work from home, it is always couched in the phrase 'If you can and if you want to'. Not everyone wants to work from home, I get that. Lots of people enjoy working from the office. They find it provides them with a space. But so many people work from home in the community that I represent. Businesses know how good it is, because they put it in their ads when they seek to employ people. They get the best employees when they offer flexible work arrangements. We know that some people cannot work from home. The member for Melton, when he was on the tools as an ambo, could not be working from home. We get it. So many drivers, people who run our economy, cannot work from home. We get it. But everyone benefits from it. The police of course – many cannot. But they all benefit. Everyone in our community benefits. Your partner might be able to work from home. They might be able to do it and provide some of that support for the family to make the family work. When there are less cars on the road, the ambos, the police and the truckies all get around easier too. That is something important for everyone across our community.

The member for Tarneit did mention the Shadow Treasurer and that we needed to make an amendment to refer to a former Shadow Treasurer, and that is fair enough. I have never seen a leader of a party so unwilling to trust those around them that they would take on both the senior roles – very unwilling to trust those around. I feel a bit sorry sometimes for the member for Brighton. He keeps trying to insert himself and get back in the game, and good on him. He will keep trying all the way up until the election when the relevancy of the Liberal Party will be just that bit less.

But I take us back to the 36,770 survey responses. What did the community have to say? They were pretty clear on what needed to happen. Seventy-four per cent of employees surveyed said the right to work from home is extremely important to them. I hear that every day in the community that I represent. 3200 people told us they do not feel they can even ask their current employer for the option to work from home, out of fear that it will be denied or held against them. That says some really difficult things about workplaces, but it also says that good governments need to intervene, to step in. I often get the refrain from some that this is something that should be left to the employer and employee, but we know what the power imbalance is. The power imbalance is huge.

These might be the same people who think we should leave it up to the employer and employee to negotiate minimum wages. That is the sort of thing that people like that would like to see. Some people would like to see workplace safety left up to the employer and employee. I know Acting Speaker Cameron knows exactly how important workplace safety is. Without legislation, without the

intervention of government, people do not get paid properly, people are not safe at work and people are not able to have a good work–life balance with so many people working.

Part of the reason we are seeing record numbers of people participating in the labour market is exactly because of work from home. Work from home has enabled more people to participate in our economy. Work from home means that you can balance your family responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities to the workplace. Of those who cannot work from home but want to, the majority had requested it and were refused by their employer. Nearly all of those who were refused felt the refusal was unreasonable and said that it created extra challenges for them at work or at home. It just means a worse working life, a worse family life.

I speak to many people across the community, in community organisations, and they say there are real challenges because people are working so much, but also commuting so much, and that commuting is a real drag on our economic prospects, on our productivity. Because if you are spending two days extra a week in the car getting to work, on public transport getting to work, of course that is going to be a massive drag on productivity if you are not fresh, if you are not able to concentrate, if you are not able to engage with your fellow employees and employers. That is a real challenge. If we talk about productivity, productivity was demonstrated in the period of COVID, which was a real challenge. There were some real challenges – we talked about teachers earlier on tonight, and we know how much of a challenge it was for teachers and for parents during that work-from-home period. But there have also been some real benefits. It was demonstrated in a live action way that work from home can work and does work and keeps that productivity.

People who participated in the survey talked about some of the biggest benefits. The top benefit, and I have talked a little bit about it already, more than a third of respondents said was that the one-way commute takes over an hour. That is true of the community that I represent. So working even a couple of days a week gives them hours of their life back, and it means that they can spend that time with their family in their community. The second most cited benefit was saving money. 9200 people reported that commuting costs them between $25 and $49 a week. In the current cost-of-living crisis, in the current oil crisis, an oil crisis not of the making of this Parliament, not of the making of the federal government of this country, something that has been done in foreign places by foreign leaders, well, of course, it is even more vital than when this survey was undertaken.

The third biggest benefit was focus without distractions: a quiet home environment, not a noisy open office space. Isn't that something that goes to some of the productivity that we would like to see, that maybe those opposite who do bang on about productivity just endlessly, might want to reflect and dwell on that for a little while? The loud member for Brighton might be of the view that being loud is productive. I have never felt that that was the case.

Notably, the most common arrangement that people want is two days a week working from home. When we legislate this and we bring this to the Parliament in July, and we legislate it from 1 September, we will see that people are entitled to that two days a week where they can, where they want to, and negotiate with their employer for the remaining three days, as is appropriate. In my previous job before here, my employer asked me, 'Matt, would you like to work from the city, a place which is chock-a-block full of people? The Lord Mayor will have a look at the stats most recently.' He said, 'Do you want an office in town?' I said, 'Absolutely not. I'll work from a desk from home and I'll enjoy my new family.' And it made my work life so much better and so much more productive. I commend this motion to the house, and I look forward to hearing from the opposition, surely.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (21:29): I am surprised that those opposite are not speaking on this motion, but it gives me an opportunity to speak straight after my good friend the member for Point Cook. This motion cuts to the absolute heart of the ideological divide in this state. On one side we have an Allan Labor government that looks at working people and asks, 'How can we give you more control over your life, more time with your kids, your family, and less stress on your budget?' And on the other side we have an opposition who are so out of touch with everyday Victorians that they want

to drag us back to the 1980s, before we had the internet in homes and when we were using typewriters and still had the good old rotary telephone.

This house must condemn the Leader of the Opposition for her profound failure of leadership. She has failed to stop the former Shadow Treasurer, the member for Brighton, from executing a reckless campaign for a mandatory, rigid five-day office return – absolutely shameful. She has failed to call out the blatant misinformation spread by her front bench regarding flexible work and failed to support Labor's progressive world-first plan to legislate working from home as a right for Victorians. The member for Brighton has shown he is completely out of touch with the realities of modern working life and the needs of working families. He seems to genuinely despise work-from-home arrangements despite their proven benefits. Last year he went so far as to demand that the government force public servants back to the office full time. He claimed the government was paying 'hundreds of thousands of dollars to back office bureaucrats' on some kind of 'sweetheart deal' by letting them work from home, and accused those dedicated staff of not delivering for Victorians. He stated 'Every public servant should be turning up to work,' as if the thousands of public servants who work from home are not working hard for Victorians every single day.

This rhetoric reminds me of what my mum experienced in the early 1980s. She too was a public servant, juggling life as a working single mum, living in Springvale and travelling to the city for work every day, needing flexible hours to be home in time for me to be dropped off after day care. When she asked for flexibility she was told to choose between her job and her family, and that is exactly what those opposite are telling hardworking parents to do today. They are telling those parents who can actually work from home to choose between spending more time with their kids and spending more time commuting to and from work. They are telling single parents who could work from home to choose between spending more money on travelling to and from work and spending that money to put food on the table and pay for bills.

I think it is pretty clear who is listening to everyday Victorians, and it certainly is not those opposite or their allies in Canberra. Need I remind everyone in the chamber what the federal member for Goldstein said about working from home. He outrageously called it 'professional apartheid'. This is the shocking mentality we are dealing with. They simply do not get it on that side. They do not understand what flexible work means to people. They do not understand that flexible work is here to stay under an Allan Labor government, because we know it works for people and it works for the economy.

Before I entered this place, you might recall, my professional life was dedicated to psychology and mental health. I worked with families, young people and school communities. I know what burnout looks like. I know what chronic stress does to a family unit and the heavy, exhausting toll that is demanded when a parent has to choose between an extra 2 hours sitting on the Monash Freeway and sitting at the dinner table with their children. For the people I represent in Mulgrave flexibility is not a luxury, it is a survival mechanism for modern life. The opposition wants to paint a picture of a lazy workforce, but our government actually went out and asked Victorians what they thought. We conducted extensive public consultations on the future of flexible work, receiving over 36,000 survey responses from workers across the state. The message was crystal clear: 74 per cent of employees surveyed said the right to work from home is extremely important to them. I am hearing it on the doors as well when I talk to residents in Mulgrave. Being able to spend more time with their family, the reduced cost of driving to and from work and the reduced stress of the work–life juggle are important for them, and that is what working from home helps to deliver.

The data completely refutes the opposition's fearmongering about productivity. Many workers find they accomplish more in a quiet home environment than in a noisy open-plan office. In fact more than 28,000 respondents told us they are more productive when working from home. Over a third of Australian workers, including 60 per cent of professionals, now work from home regularly. So when those opposite attack working from home, they are not just attacking a policy, they are attacking the wellbeing of workers. I can tell you, as a psychologist, that autonomy is one of the single greatest

buffers against workplace stress. But right now, every day, unions are hearing from workers who are being denied reasonable work-from-home requests. Over 3200 people told our survey they do not feel they can even ask their current employer for the option to work from home, often out of fear it will be denied or held against them. Of those who cannot work from home but want to, the majority had requested it and were refused. Nearly all of those who were refused felt the refusal was unreasonable, creating extra challenges for them at work and at home. Do not get me wrong, most employers are open to their staff having that flexibility, but there are some out there that are not, and we are protecting that right for those who can work from home to be able to work from home.

Let us look at what work from home means for family budgets and the economy. By working from home just a couple of days a week, the average Victorian family saves about $110 a week in reduced commuting and childcare costs. That adds up to roughly $5300 a year back in the household budget. At a time of intense cost-of-living pressures, that amount is not trivial – it means the groceries, it means bills, it means kids' school expenses. When asked about the biggest benefits, over 13,000 respondents said their one-way commute takes over an hour, meaning working from home gives them hours back in their life – back with their kids, their family, maybe their elderly parents, back to just being able to live life and do those things that reduce that stress just that little bit. Fewer commuters also mean less traffic and crowding for those who do need to travel, for those who do not have the option of working from home. It results in fewer cars on the road and less strain on public transport during peak hours. Over 9200 people reported that commuting costs them between $25 and $49 a week in fuel, and probably more now as the cost of fuel goes up as well. These costs are a burden to many Victorians, and we are helping them with flexible work options.

Our government understands that flexibility is the new reality of work. It is about moving with the times and supporting working families. Those opposite, on the other hand, want to drag us back to a one-size-fits-all notion of work life. Their hostility to something that clearly benefits so many working people just shows how entirely out of touch they are with modern Victoria. While we are looking for solutions that benefit workers, families and businesses, they are looking for someone to blame and something to ban. Only Labor is supporting workers and supporting families, and only Labor will enshrine these crucial protections into law. I call on the house to overwhelmingly support this motion. I also challenge those opposite to talk to this motion. Talk to Victorian families about why you oppose this, because it is so important. It is so important to people in my community who may have that option of working from home perhaps ripped away from them if those opposite come into power. I commend this motion to the house.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (21:39): I rise to speak in support of this motion in condemnation of the Leader of the Opposition, who has not stopped the former Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for a mandatory five-day office return. I will just unwind a little bit and reflect upon where we have arrived as a society and an economy. I would posit that the modern Australian economy was built by giants like Paul Keating, who liberalised the Australian economy, who brought down the tariff barriers, who set Australia up for a generation of prosperity and, in doing so, created an economy that exists in a really dynamic way in this day and age.

I see this every day in my own community, where the manufacturing base that formerly employed tens of thousands of people no longer exists in quite the same way. Employers like Ford are no longer there as a consequence of some deliberate policy decisions of the Abbott–Hockey government in 2014. There are still many people employed in manufacturing, but that entire supply chain has been lost. There are people working in manufacturing firms, but it is often at a smaller scale, not in that sort of heavy industry model.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Iwan WALTERS: As the member for Pascoe Vale rightfully says, it is a more niche, boutique setting. Tens of thousands of jobs and that sort of heavy industry in the north were lost. The member for Pascoe Vale would see the consequences of that in his own electorate. Those jobs were lost. I

talked in my first speech about how there is a need for government to work to support communities through economic transition and how if we approach life through something of a Rawlsian veil of ignorance, not knowing how we would want to be treated, there is the need for government to be there to support people who have lost significant amounts and have lost their livelihoods through no fault of their own but because of the buffeting effects of international economic change, technological change and also policy decisions by government. It is therefore incumbent upon governments to support people into new jobs. That is why this government's work in investing in TAFE, transforming and uplifting the TAFE system in this state, is so important – so it can provide that transition for people into new and emerging jobs.

As I was coming to, the collapse, or the retreat, of heavy industry like the Ford factory, Nabisco and other big manufacturers in the north impacted a lot of people. But jobs have been created in their stead – new jobs, different jobs, jobs in emerging sectors of our economy. I see these every day. I knock on doors, talking to my constituents and hearing about the issues that matter to them. Very often there are people who are at home, and I am a little bit concerned that I am disrupting their workday when I knock on their door. But because they are there, they are happy to have a chat. And they tell me how important a flexible, dynamic, modern economy is for them – that capacity to work from home. I think it is worth also putting on record that this does not necessarily work for every workplace – that has always been very clear in the Premier's and this government's declarations about the importance of working from home – but for many people it does.

I think we saw at the 2025 federal election that many people value that right and that capacity to work from home if and where they can. The spectre of the former federal opposition leader withdrawing that right was something quite totemic for many people who, as I see in my electorate and I suspect the member for Pascoe Vale does in his, formerly would have simply had to turn up at a workplace, irrespective of whether in doing so they created additional value, created additional productivity benefit or created any form of additional economic benefit for either them or the firm for which they might work. They can now work from home. They can save on a potentially very long commute, something that at the moment, in the context of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, is expensive for people, notwithstanding the fact that this government has provided a rebate on people's registration as of Monday 1 June. Well over 1 million people have already availed themselves of that rebate.

But in addition to ensuring that where we can we are supporting people with cost of living through things like rego rebates and half-price public transport fares until the end of the year – notwithstanding those supports, it is still expensive for people to get to work. It is still time consuming, and I know this certainly from speaking with constituents who are living in growing areas of our city like Greenvale and Roxburgh Park who rely upon arterial roads like Somerton Road, Pascoe Vale Road and Mickleham Road to get to work. If people can avoid unnecessary journeys while still adding significant value for their employer, saving on potentially 90 minutes either way at the end of the day, that is in itself a good thing. It is a productivity-enhancing thing. It enables people to potentially actually work for longer while still getting a significant benefit to their recreational life, to their family life and to their capacity to collect children from school at the end of the day or indeed drop them off at day care at the beginning of the day.

It is that sort of dynamic flexibility that I see in this government's commitment to ensuring people's right to work from home where possible. It builds on the tradition of Keating and others who liberalised the Australian economy in the 1980s, when the technology did not exist to enable work from home in the way that it does now. But when we have an NBN and a digital economy that is ubiquitous and people have the capacity to use platforms such as Zoom, Teams and others to access the workplace and to still collaborate with colleagues, there is the capacity to do that in a way that would have been unimaginable in the 1980s when other significant landmark economic reforms were taking place. But there is an alternative to this approach. The alternative would be to needlessly mandate for people who could potentially valuably work from home to be in the office. That sort of blunt presenteeism, for want of a better phrase, does not add value. It does not necessarily render somebody's work more

productive. All it does is necessitate journeys which could be avoided and chew up time in people's day.

There is undoubtedly, I would argue, a value in people being able to collaborate in person, and that capacity is in no way lost as a consequence of these important reforms to enshrine people's right to work from home. There is a collaborative benefit and dividend that comes from people working in teams, working face to face. I certainly embrace that in the context of working with my own staff. But equally that is not lost in the capacity of being able to work from home for two days a week where it is possible to do so, where people have a format of job or an economic sector in which they are employed where they can do that. The hybrid model has proven itself to be valuable both to employers and employees. There have been manifold examples that I have heard the Premier, the Treasurer and others in this government talk about in their engagement with Victorians across our economy, but industry leaders have also asserted the benefit of this kind of hybrid approach for their own workplaces and their own sectors.

It also works for employees. People who can save that time, who can save that cost of unnecessary journeys, free up capacity on our roads and our public transport network for those for whom going into an office or going to a workplace or going to a factory is a necessity. We know that congestion and those types of hindrances to people are really determined by very marginal changes in road usage. If at the margin you can lessen the demand for fixed infrastructure like arterial roads or railways and the carriages and so forth that travel on them, that creates significant benefit for all of the users of that network.

I am very mindful of the conversations that I have with people in my electorate when I am out and about knocking on doors during the workday. They are telling me how valuable it is for them to have that capacity to work from home without any diminution in their economic output. In fact I would contend that there is an enhancement of their productivity as a consequence of being able to work in a way that best suits them and their employer while also obviously saving on that commute either way, which in areas of Melbourne's outer north like Greenvale can be 90 minutes in some instances for people going to the city. I commend the motion.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (21:49): I rise very happily to speak on this motion, because I think that it is important for us to explore the differences in philosophical approach here. On one side you have got a party that believes in the collective. You have got a party that believes in the right of workers to have some power about their working life and to have some power about their choices. On the other hand you have got opposition parties who believe in restricting those rights.

What I have seen from my own community in the outer suburbs is how incredibly important the ability to work from home is. I recognise that predominantly my community is middle class and that there are a number of white-collar workers who do have the privilege of being able to work from home. But what is important about where I live – to go to the point from the member who just spoke – is we are some distance from the city. We are some distance from workplaces. When it comes to where I live in the Shire of Nillumbik, for example, only 30 per cent of people work within the municipality, and in Banyule it is only slightly higher. Where I live people have to commute to get to work. And what that means is time lost. It means there is time spent. Whether it is commuting to the city, whether it is commuting to the south-east, whether it is commuting to the western suburbs or whether it is commuting to industrial precincts, people spend time commuting. That means they are not spending time at home. It means they are not spending time in their communities. It means they are not spending time volunteering. It means they are not spending time interacting with, building and belonging to the community in which they live. What we want to do is give power to employees to work with their employers to ensure that where it is possible they can work from home two days a week. What that means is people get more time back. Time is valuable. Time is important to people, and I do not understand why we have an opposition who think that it is okay to dictate to people how they spend their time. I do not understand how a party that prioritises the rights of the individual so highly, as I

know the Liberal Party say they do, should then impinge on the rights of individuals around how they choose to spend their time. It is for the employers to ensure that workers are productive. Employers can do that no matter where their employee is located. If they cannot, then they are not a good manager, and that is on them. It is not on the worker.

In my own community I have done a survey and I have had panels where I have spoken to people to understand how important it is to work from home, to have that flexibility and to have that choice. It has been overwhelming. I have got women who are not just caring for children but caring for older parents. Adding a commute to their caring responsibilities is causing them so much distress. It is taking away so much of their time. It is exhausting them. They can do their job at home. They do not need to be at work. They can do it and they can be productive, but it means they can also manage their other responsibilities. Why would any party want to make their life harder? I have got other women in my community who do not manage crowds well, who have got challenges. That means they can work incredibly productively at home, but they find being out in big, noisy environments challenging. They can do the work from home. Why would you prevent them from being participants in the workforce solely because of the principle that you think you need to have your worker visible to you to ensure they do their work? You see the quality of their work. You see what is produced from their work. If you are a good manager, you do not need to have full visibility of them for the whole time that they are paid in their employment.

I have got dads who are dropping their kids off at school because their house is around the corner from the school, and they can do that because they are working from home. I have got dads engaging in their kids' lives as they have never done before. They are dropping kids off, they are picking kids up, they are taking kids to footy training – because they are home. They are clocking off and they are off at 5:30 to go to footy training, and they can do that because they are not stuck on a train, they are not stuck on the Western Ring Road, they are not stuck on the Eastern Freeway. They are home in their communities. They are able to volunteer in their communities. They are able to participate in the sporting clubs because they are there at 5:30, because they have not spent 45 minutes to an hour or more commuting. They have more energy because they are not so tired because they are not commuting as much. It is extraordinary that that freedom of the individual, that freedom of people to move around in their community is wanting to be restricted by those opposite. It really talks to core values. It talks to the fact that the Labor Party has always been a party that intrinsically cares about the rights of workers, that intrinsically cares about ensuring that workers have the power to make choices and have the power to ensure that they have a healthy work environment, and a healthy work environment for many people includes the option to be able to work from home.

What we have on the other side is a party that has absolutely zero care for the rights of workers, that does not care about healthy work environments, that does not care about workers rights and that does not care about making sure that people can have the optimal opportunities in their lives. If they did care about equality of opportunity, if they did care about people having optimal opportunities in their lives and access to that, they would support the right to work from home for only two days a week. All that is being asked is that where it is possible people have the option to work from home, and how that has become such a point of division, how that has become such a point of friction, is really quite astonishing. The federal Liberal Party, the federal coalition, decided that they would force public servants back, which we then knew would mean everybody back to work five days a week face to face. The backlash that they had from that decision was extraordinary, and they back-pedalled from that incredibly quickly. Why? Because it is not what people want. If you are off the noise vacuum that is Facebook, if you are actually out in community, if you are actually out talking to people rather than banging on with bots, you will find out that that is exactly what people want. People want flexibility; they want to be able to engage with their families, they want to be able to engage with their communities and they want to have the right to work from home when it is possible to do so. It is extraordinary that the right of the individual to make that choice is something that is opposed by those opposite.

What I also find extraordinary is one of the repeated refrains or mantras that has gone on for decades from those opposite, which is, 'The market will decide. Let the market decide. Let us have a free market. The market will tell us the way things should be.' The market has voted with its feet. The market tossed the Liberal and National parties to the kerb at the federal election and said, 'We want to be able to have the right to work from home.' That is what the market said, because that is what people want. People want to be in their communities. People want to be with their families. People want to have choice. When you have got the party of Menzies, which is supposed to be all about choice, wanting to deny people choice, mandating how people should live their lives, forcing people to live their lives in a certain way, I think is quite extraordinary. What it tells you is that there is a value on this side of the house which is people-focused, people-centric, which is about workers and their rights at work and ensuring that they are living the best life they can with the best opportunities they can and a party over here that wants to confine people, that wants to box people in and that only wants to talk about profit and not people.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (21:59): I rise in support of our plan for every Victorian who can work from home to work from home and have the right to do this two days a week. But to begin I want to thank all the workers that cannot work from home, those workers who turn up every day in our hospitals, in our schools, in our kinders, in our aged care centres, in our factories, on our roads and in our cafes and shops, doing the essential work to keep our society and our economy running. We thank you.

I am really lucky that many of the jobs I have had over the years have enabled me to work from home occasionally, and this flexibility has worked really well for my family. It certainly helped when Dad became a paraplegic 20 years ago and as a councillor I could work from home during the day and attend council meetings at night when Mum got home from work, so it enabled her to continue working. Flexibility has been necessary ever since. There have been times when I have been able to get my mum or aunties to appointments during the time she could not drive, and I have made that time up at night. You know how often I am working late into the night, Acting Speaker De Martino, and the hours we do on the weekends as well. That flexibility works in my job. It is one of those jobs where the flexibility can work, and I am very lucky for that. Unfortunately my daughter has been quite unwell at times, and flexibility has been absolutely necessary for Joe and me to be able to work from home at times. And we know that is the case for the vast majority of the 750,000 unpaid carers in Victoria, who contribute over $19 billion to the economy every year. Seventy per cent of these carers are women, and we know that the majority of the work caring for children also continues to be done by women.

We know that flexibility works for them. That is a story you hear over and over again. It is a story that we heard when the Premier came out to Oak Park to talk about working from home. It is the story of my friends, my family and my colleagues. It is a story of every family you speak to. They like flexibility. They do not like being told what to do. Mandating five days in the office – I just cannot understand who that works for, so I cannot understand why the opposition would want to consider that. I cannot understand who it would work for. It is just completely out of touch with the millions of families, and particularly women, who juggle and juggle and juggle, trying to get the balance right on the demands of a very busy life, and it is certainly out of touch with the women who do most of the care work.

We know that care needs to be flexible, and we know that working from home at least a couple of days a week makes that care possible. Why on earth would we want to make their lives harder or the lives of anyone harder? If you took them out of the economy, the cost of that care to the economy would be extraordinary. It would be unaffordable. When I was the adviser for carers, I heard firsthand the difficulty many people had getting flexibility – this was prior to COVID – so they could continue their role while balancing their other responsibilities, flexibility so that they could continue to work and contribute to the economy and contribute to their families. Then we saw COVID turn all of this upside down, and work from home became the default, not the exception. We all pivoted. We made it work. It was not easy, but in the end it was possible for so many workers. We saw what was possible.

I thought it was going to be one of the only lasting benefits out of COVID that carers could have the flexibility to work from home, that you could continue to be productive, that you could contribute, that you could still be part of a team and that you could get your work done and balance your needs and the needs of your workplace. We saw this was possible during those years. It was not even really impossible or hard to accommodate reasonable requests from workers to work from home for those jobs that can be done at home. I thought it would all be a permanent change that would make carers' lives easier and their ability to participate in the workforce easier going forward. But what actually happened was there was this inflexible pivot back, where a lot of employers would make people come back to the office for no particular reason and a lot of people who had flexibility lost that flexibility. It was unfortunate. It went back, and I think that is why there is difficulty filling some positions now. We know that the workplaces that have kept flexibility get the best workers, get the most productive workers. Actually, why would you not want happy workers? We know they are more productive. For those carers in particular who fought really hard for those provisions, to then have them stripped back was just unfair and unfortunate, particularly when we had proven that it was so easy to actually make life flexible and that you could still do your work, contribute, be part of a team and do all that, and you could do it flexibly.

There were some workplaces that did it really well after COVID was finished. You would all come in on the same day a week so you could have those team-building exercises; there would be flexibility on different days and different teams would come in. My husband has still got very flexible working arrangements, and his team comes in two days a week, when they are there. He goes in most of the other days as well, but they know the team is all together, and it works. It is his choice, and it works for him and it certainly works for us. It means that I can do this job, and it would not be possible without him having flexibility.

We know the employers who kept the flexibility are the ones that are thriving, as well as their employees. Those that have decided reasonable flexibility is not worth it have paid the price and now struggle to attract and retain workers who know there is a better way. We know that working from home at least two days a week works for everyone, not just women. There are the added benefits of less cars on the road, less congestion, less demand at the pump. Yet the member for Brighton seems to want to make all employers unreasonable to their workers. I just do not even know how they would feel about that. Why would you make life harder when it does not need to be and put more cars back on the road, especially when petrol costs are so high at the moment? With the mandate for public servants, it just seems quite offensive to say that public servants are not doing their job unless they are in an office. I do not think he knows these public servants. When I was an adviser in aged care during the COVID times, we were working 16 and 17 hours a day from home. I could not have fitted in a commute. There were public servants who were working that and more, and we would be on the phone to each other at 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock at night when the restrictions were changing the next day. You could not doubt their dedication to their jobs, their dedication to Victoria and their dedication to the work that they did every day.

We did some surveys, and the government found that for the biggest benefit of working from home, the top answer was 'saving time'. More than 13,000 respondents said that their one-way commute takes over an hour, so working from home even a couple of days a week gives them hours of their life back. That is hours they can spend helping their kids with homework, cooking or volunteering. We know that especially in the emergency services, if you have done a night shift at the –

Vicki Ward: The SES and CFA – working from home at the station.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD: That is right. At our local SES at Fawkner I know on busy, stormy days a lot of them will take their computers in and work from the station, and it is a beautiful station. You have been there, Minister. It is one of the best we have got in the state.

Vicki Ward: And when they work from the unit, fast response times.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD: Exactly, they are right there. They are ready to go; they are in their uniforms. They are working productively, and they can respond better to our community, doing the important work they do. That means that they are happy at work because they know their employer values them, values what they do outside their work, values their time with their family and values the important role that they play in our communities. We know that it works for employers too because they are keeping these incredibly dedicated people. The people who give of their time to our state emergency services are the best in the state, and who would not want them to be their employees? Who would not want to make their lives easier and make sure that they hold onto those employees? So I just think it is madness. And you look at the city at night – it is thriving. They need to pivot. You look at the businesses out in the suburbs. The cafes I go to – they love it. They absolutely love it, and why shouldn't those businesses thrive? I just do not know why you would stick cars on the road and mandate things that people do not want. I cannot quite understand it. You do not care about people. You do not care about flexibility. You do not understand the role of carers, the importance of the role of carers. You do not understand working parents.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I know it is getting very late and everything else, but if the member could please direct her contribution through the Acting Speaker, because there is a lot of 'you don't care about people, you don't care about this' –

Vicki Ward interjected.

David Southwick: There is protocol here, Minister. Let us be real. Let us be fair.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): The point is accepted, and the member will speak through the Chair, please – and yes, when giving a point of order, direct comments through the Chair. The member's time has concluded.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (22:09): It is a pleasure to follow the fantastic member for Broadmeadows. I will perhaps begin as she did, I thought appropriately, by recognising that while we so strongly support work from home on our side of the chamber, we recognise first and foremost that many people of course cannot work from home. We are very grateful for the work they do, and we note that many of those who cannot work from home are indeed employed by the Victorian government or deliver very important services for us. That includes our teachers and our school staff. It includes of course our Victoria Police teams. It includes our professional firefighters. It includes our early childhood professionals. Many of those fantastic people who we work with cannot work from home. And of course we have been through a process, a very necessary and important process I think, of negotiating and setting some higher wages and conditions through their EBAs for many of those staff. We on our side of the chamber believe they absolutely deserve it, in part because they do not have the fantastic opportunity that work from home provides to others. I was very pleased in fact to see in the discussions that are taking place with the AEU the minister and his team giving some further thought to whether we can provide some more flexible work to our teachers and school staff. We do hope, on that note, that we do get to a resolution. I know the minister at the table, the Minister for Emergency Services, hopes we will get to a resolution on some agreements taking place with our professional firefighters on that note as well.

We were very lucky in our part of the world to have the announcement about legislating work from home made at Tyler's Milkbar in Preston, which is a fantastic cafe for anyone who wants to get along there. A shout-out to Sam, Alli and Kim up there. I have actually given them a shout-out before, and in fact they got quite a bit of publicity from appearing on the Premier's Instagram account. I think, if I remember correctly, they did their second-biggest week of business ever after the Premier turned up there – very deserving, because they work very hard and it is a fantastic place, and I am sure many of the people who went there at that time keep going back, just as many who went there during the work-from-home period in COVID kept coming back. One of the things that Sam said when she spoke to the media on that occasion was just how vital work from home had been for them, particularly for getting them through that difficult COVID period and the way that, instead of that being a big negative

for them, it was in fact an increase in business for them and it is what set their business on the very successful path that it has gone on today.

Indeed there are many fantastic local businesses around Preston and Reservoir that benefit from the fact that people can now duck out of their homes and go down and grab lunch there instead of being in the city. If I can add another one to the list: Luke's Bakery. Confusingly in our part of the world there is Luke's Bakery in Reservoir and there are now two Luke's bakeries on High Street in Preston. I am not sure they are actually related, but specifically a shout-out to Jim at the one at 365 High Street, where I go to very regularly from the office – a great spot to grab either the Luke's Favourite or the Luke's Special with the betel leaf, some fantastic banh mis that you can get at Luke's Bakery. While I am at it actually, Subosh just a bit further up at Blue Lily Cafe does a great job. Although while I am talking about businesses that benefit, Don Guri was a fantastic cafe that was previously there, run by Fred Chih-Mao Kao, a Taiwanese Victorian who just did this fantastic Asian fusion cafe there.

I do not know if you have noticed this, but a thing that happens in life is that you expect that your favourite towns, your favourite tourist places and your favourite football club, most of these things, are pretty permanent and they do not disappear. But the thing I have noticed in life is that your favourite cafes sadly do disappear sometimes. Whatever your favourite restaurant is, it is not always a business where they are around forever. So it is sad that Don Guri has gone. And in fact a shout-out to Stefan Armentano, who used to run a place called Small French Bar, which was my favourite restaurant of all time, but sadly is also no longer with us. But while I am listing businesses local to our area that are benefiting from the Allan Labor government's work-from-home policies, I might just add Sardinas run by Brooke and Adam – a great spot just a bit further up from High Street to where I was referring before.

I am going to put a controversial proposition to the chamber, which is that I think the best coffee you can get anywhere in Reservoir is actually –

Vicki Ward interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: The minister challenges me. Possibly the best coffee anywhere in Melbourne is actually at Rick's Barber Shop up on Broadway in Reservoir, with Rizk Al'Douwaihy and George and the team there. After you get your haircut you get a coffee, and the coffee is so good that sometimes I go there just because I want the coffee and not because I need the haircut. Fortunately for me, because I need a regular haircut, the two things often coincide.

Vicki Ward interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: Ping's have got good dumplings. Indeed if you are working from home, get along to Ping's Dumpling Kitchen on High Street, just across from the second Luke's bakery, where you can also get some fantastic lunch – or dinner in fact later on in the day. While I am at it, actually Elia's Trend Café there – they are a wonderful spot. They have got a great menu. I normally just duck in in the morning.

Vicki Ward interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: The Preston Market is another. Thank you, Minister. Through you, Acting Speaker, Preston Market is a great place to get down to. You can grab a crepe from Chantelle and the team at the creperie or go across to Rhubarb Rhubarb, a business run by Sue and Haydn, who you, Acting Speaker De Martino, happen to know well. It is another wonderful chance for lunch or indeed to pick up some organic groceries, something of which you, Acting Speaker, have a very good professional understanding. That is just running through some of the great local businesses that have benefited from our work-from-home policy.

I had the opportunity on the weekend to talk to a young journalist. Louie Cina is his name. We were at the Preston Bullants Amateur Football Club game, and we were talking about the great game they had and the real sense of community they have got around that club. We were talking about a thing

that has happened in this world, for anyone who has ever read Robert Putnam: we have all got wealthier, incomes have gone up over a great period of time and people now have their own private, individualised entertainment and their own private transport. That is generally great – everyone likes that – but in all that we did lose a little bit of community. I think everyone knows this. A lot of the big sporting clubs and things like that are not quite as big as they used to be.

One of the great things about work from home is that we all thought that trend would just keep going and those local community institutions would continue to wither as people chose more and more to stay in their houses. Most families have now got two or three cars. The days when a family would have no car or maybe just one car that was taken to work and then they would just walk around the neighbourhood are long gone. But one of the great things about work from home is it has slightly reversed that trend now. People are hanging around their home and walking down to the local shops or indeed walking down to watch a local football game, as was the case when I was chatting to Louie Cina. That is another reason why it is just stunning to me that the opposition do not want to get on board and support legislating work from home.

On that note, I should just pick up on a suggestion. While we are dealing with this great community we do see a few more people driving down to their local shops, which we love to see. On behalf of Ray from Ray's Bikes – I was saying earlier that some of my favourite cafes are gone and, sadly, Ray has had to close up shop – who said to me before he closed up shop that he just wanted to see if Darebin council or indeed the state government could invent a new form of parking arrangement that was something we would all understand. We are used to the S and the P, but maybe this thing would be a Z or something, and what it would mean is that parking was free for people who wanted to visit local businesses during the day but after 6 pm or 5:30 pm it would become residents only. He wanted that because he was like, 'People need to be able to drive down and access Ray's Bikes,' as it was on High Street. I used to live near Ray's, on Pender Street, and there was a dance academy there, so the entirety of Pender Street would fill up when the dance academy had all the people there. I do have some sympathy for his argument, so I just thought I would take the opportunity tonight to pass on Ray's suggestion. I hope he is doing well wherever his business has gone to now.

In fact a shout-out to Nat Lupton and Sean Carroll, two fantastic locals from that part of the world, who I know have a similar challenge because of the CorePlus Pilates studio that is just there. A shout-out to Grace, who runs that Pilates studio, if you are looking for some reformer Pilates. Again, because it is so popular, some of those side streets just absolutely fill up, and then you do have that problem for local residents that they cannot get a park anywhere near their houses. As I say, that is just one of the things. Work from home is a great thing for bringing people back to those local neighbourhood activity centres, but it does just make us think a little bit about how we are handling parking and indeed road safety in those parts of the world. We probably could do with some 40-kilometre-per-hour zones on Pender, Wilcox and Youngman streets as well.

While I am there, just a shout-out to another local of that area, Travis Dowling, who is known to many people in this place for his great work as the CEO of the Victorian Fisheries Authority, which we were discussing in this chamber earlier this week. We look forward to him continuing to make a great contribution to the public service in this state. It is such a pity – I am just warming up on this fantastic and important topic of work from home. Work from home is a fantastic reform. It supports cost-of-living relief. It is great, as we know, particularly for people with young children. It is great for carers, as the minister said, and great for local areas in Preston and Reservoir. It deals with congestion and it lowers emissions. I could go on and on about the myriad benefits of work from home, and I only hope those in the opposition will take notice of tonight's debate and support it in future.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (22:19): What a hard act to follow that is. I think I know every single business in Preston. I am going to get down to Ray's Bikes – oh, no, Ray's Bikes is gone. But a bit of Pilates in the morning, Ping's dumplings – not as good as the dumplings in Glen Waverley, I must admit, though.

I rise to support this motion and to support the Allan Labor government's decision to protect the right of Victorians to work from home. This debate is about much more than where someone opens their laptop – it is about whether we trust working people, it is about whether we understand the pressures of modern families and what they face and it is about whether we embrace the future of work or try to drag Victoria backwards. Because make no mistake, that is exactly what the Liberal and National parties want to do. While Labor is legislating the right to work from home, the Liberals are campaigning against it. While Labor is listening to workers and families, the Liberals are listening to the loudest voices from the boardroom or from the *Australian Financial Review* or from the *Herald Sun* or from any of those rags that are out there. And while Labor is focused on making life easier and more affordable, the Liberals are focused on forcing people back into long commutes, higher costs and less flexibility.

When I go out doorknocking around my neighbourhoods, it is great to get out there on a Monday to Friday. I have got a tertiary-educated cohort of people that have moved to my electorate for education. They want the best education for their kids. What used to happen probably six, seven years ago was that you would doorknock, and in probably eight or nine doors you would get one person, probably someone over the age of 65 that would be retired. Now when you go out doorknocking, expect to spend an extra 3 or 4 hours out there because every second or third door you doorknock you have someone working from home. Whether it be male, female, whatever, they have that flexibility where they are able to look after their family, spend more time with their family, run the kids to the sports club and pick them up from school, which is something that Donna and I have as well. She gets to work two days from home, and it makes it easier for us to be able to coordinate our life, it gives more time back to us and it saves us money. All of these are the benefits that working from home gives us.

The opposition leader and the member for Brighton have shown repeatedly that they are completely out of touch with the realities of modern working life. Last year the member for Brighton launched a crusade against working from home. He demanded that public servants be forced back into the office for five days a week. He claimed hardworking public servants were somehow on a sweetheart deal. He accused them of not delivering –

A member: They want to sack them anyway.

John MULLAHY: Yes, well, one in seven. He accused them of not delivering for Victorians. He declared that every public servant should be turning up to work. Think about that for a moment. The nurses administrating programs, the planners delivering infrastructure projects, the child protection workers supporting vulnerable children, the disability workers helping Victorians access services, the people who kept government functioning through some of the most difficult years in our state's history – apparently none of that counted. Apparently they were not sitting in an office building in Melbourne's CBD five days a week and therefore were not working. It was insulting, it was disrespectful and it showed just how disconnected the Liberal Party has become from the reality of modern workplaces.

What made it even worse was that he launched this attack without even consulting his own colleagues. Even as businesses across Victoria were successfully adopting flexible work arrangements, even as workers demonstrated they could be productive from home, even as families benefited from greater flexibility, the Liberals wanted to take it away with the stroke of a pen. Then, when even the federal Liberal Party realised that they had backed the wrong horse and abandoned their own anti-working-from-home position, the Victorian Liberals still refused to rule out forcing tens of thousands of public servants back into the office five days a week – what will be left of them. They still refuse to learn that lesson, because they simply do not get it. They do not understand that the world has changed. They do not understand that work has changed and they do not understand that Victorian families have changed. Their instinct is always the same: if working people gain flexibility, they want to take it away; if workers gain rights, they want to wind them back; if families gain more control over their lives, they look for ways to remove it.

The Allan Labor government takes a very different view. We trust Victorian workers, we trust Victorian families and we trust employers and employees to make modern workplaces work. That is why from 1 September this year Victorians whose jobs can reasonably be performed from home will have the legal right to work from home two days per week. This is a world-leading reform. It recognises something that millions of workers already know. Working from home is not an experiment, it is not a temporary arrangement and it is not a pandemic-era novelty. It is now a permanent feature of modern working life. It delivers enormous benefits.

The biggest benefit workers told us about was time – time with their children, time with their partners, time caring for their elderly parents, time participating in their local community and time simply living their lives. More than 13,000 Victorians told the government that their commute takes more than an hour each way. That means 2 hours each day spent sitting on trains, trams, buses or roads. Working from home even a couple of days each week gives people hours of their lives back. That matters, particularly for working parents, particularly for carers and particularly for people who are trying to balance the competing demands of work and family.

The second major benefit is with the cost of living. We know families are under pressure. We know every dollar matters. The evidence shows that working from home can save the average household around $110 a week. That is more than $5000 each year. That is not pocket change; that is the groceries, that is the school uniforms, that is the utility bills and that is the mortgage repayments. That is money staying in family budgets instead of being spent on fuel, parking, public transport fares and childcare costs. At a time when families are looking for relief wherever they can find it, the Liberal Party's answer is apparently to increase their costs, to force them back onto crowded roads, to force them back onto crowded trains and to force them to spend more of their money and more of their time commuting. That is not a cost-of-living policy, it is the exact opposite.

The third major benefit is productivity. The Liberals love to pretend that people working from home are somehow less productive. The evidence says otherwise. More than 28,000 Victorians told the government that they are more productive working from home – not less productive, more productive. I know in the instance of my partner Donna when she is working from home that she does not have the interruptions of the phone and she does not have the interruptions of people coming up to her desk. She can literally focus on the work that she has in front of her. She can still beam into the Teams meetings and still get all of those updates, but she has a quiet household where she can focus on the job that she needs to get done. These are the benefits of working from home. People can structure their workday more effectively and can produce better outcomes, and the facts simply do not support the scare campaign being run by the opposition.

But perhaps the most important aspect of this reform is fairness. At the moment, whether you can work from home or not often depends on who your employer is. Large corporations often provide flexibility; many smaller workplaces do not. That means workers doing similar jobs can have vastly different rights depending entirely on where they work. Labor does not think that is fair. That is why these rights will apply regardless of the workplace size, while allowing additional time for smaller businesses to prepare, because flexibility should not be reserved for a lucky few, it should be available to everyone whose job can reasonably be performed from home.

There is another reason this debate matters. The attack on working from home is part of a broader attack on the public sector. The Liberals are not just talking about ending flexible work arrangements, they are also talking about $40 billion in cuts – $40 billion, an extraordinary figure. The vast majority of the Victorian budget is health and education. There is simply no credible way to cut $40 billion without cutting hospitals, schools and frontline services. At the same time they are talking about cutting one in every seven public service jobs. That means fewer child protection workers, fewer disability support workers, fewer people supporting our hospitals and fewer people supporting our schools. They will tell Victorians that it is only the back office jobs, but we have heard this before. Victorians know how Liberal cuts work. The cuts always start somewhere else, but they never end somewhere else. Eventually frontline services suffer, eventually communities pay the price and

eventually working people are left worse off. Cuts are not an unfortunate side effect of Liberal governments, cuts are a defining feature. It is part of their DNA, and that is why their position on working from home is so revealing. They are not interested in helping workers, they are not interested in helping families and they are not interested in modernising workplaces; they are looking for someone to blame and something to cut. Labor, on the other hand, is looking for solutions – solutions that help families, solutions that help workers, solutions that improve workforce participation, solutions that strengthen our economy and solutions that recognise the realities of modern life.

Victoria's workforce participation rate is now significantly higher than what it was before the pandemic. Flexible work has played an important role in that success. It has enabled more parents to remain in the workforce, it has enabled carers to stay connected to employment and it has enabled people with disability and chronic illness to participate more fully in our economy. I could go on and on, but I do not have the time. That is why I am proud to support this motion, and that is why I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (22:29): I would love to hear the previous member go on and on, because as with the member before him, it was a very important contribution and a contribution that goes to, I think, an understanding of working people in this state and a contribution that looks at the changes to workplaces within Victoria, within the country and across the globe, and a recognition of the work-from-home policy and an understanding around the changes that have resulted in what is before us this evening as we debate this motion. It is an opportunity for a recognition particularly of a change to family circumstance but also a change to the way that the economy works. We saw through the pandemic through 2020 and 2021 both here and abroad that there were such significant changes to the way that the economy and business and community interacted. What I think is really important that my good friend the previous member spoke about in his contribution is the change to the home environment. For people within my electorate, about an hour from here, to understand and know that the opportunity for flexibility and that choice to be able to do those tasks around the home whilst being able to do your job is just so very important.

Vicki Ward interjected.

Josh BULL: Indeed, Minister. What we see from those opposite time and time and time again when we come into this place is an outfit that is driven by ideology, not practicality, and an outfit that is driven by, in so many ways, punishing those within our community that want to do their best, that want to work incredibly hard, but most importantly, that want to support their family in a work–life setting that enables them to live their very best life. What we see from those opposite, whether it is on this policy or so many others, is a shameful reflection of a mentality that is stuck in decades gone by. What we do on this side of the house is deal with the practicality of circumstance, the changing global politics, the changing local politics and a practicality that revolves around investment and support and making sure we are standing for working people. To have the opportunity to be able to listen to this motion and to hear the contributions that have been made by my friends on this side of the house is, I think, a real reflection on what this government stands for, both from a policy setting but, more important than that, from a setting of values and a setting of understanding what works for those within local communities.

Growing up in the outer suburbs as I did and as my family did – my folks moved to Sunbury in the 1970s, and at that time the town's population, and I have spoken about this before in the house, was about 7000 or 7500; we now stand at about 41,000 or 42,000, projected to go to 80,000 by 2045 – we know and understand just what communities rely on when it comes to interacting with a workplace and that a flexible working arrangement has so many benefits that we can indeed measure from an economic sense but, more importantly than that, from a social sense. Those things that we cannot measure are just so critically important. When I move around my terrific local community, and not reflecting on you in the chair, Acting Speaker De Martino, but when you move around your local community as somebody who is really engaged with that community, we know and understand the importance of time spent perhaps in traffic, time spent away from family and the frustrations that might

come when you do not get the opportunity to make that additional appointment. You do not get the opportunity to be home for bedtime. You do not get the opportunity to be there for the commute to sport. All of these things matter, and they matter in a sense of the time, the connection, the investment and the value from a family sense. They matter in a way that in so many instances, as I mentioned before, are really hard to quantify.

We have got an opportunity through this place and through legislation and through the framework that the government has put in place to be able to change that. I think that is a really important and powerful thing to do. We have got to be nimble, we have got to be responsive and we have got to be practical in the way that we address these matters. I think the framework that is before us, the work of the Premier, the announcements that have been made by the Premier and of course the whole cabinet and the team are really important. It stands in stark contrast, as I mentioned earlier, to the outfit that is over the other side of the chamber. We remain focused on listening to and supporting local communities. We understand that this state has considerable population growth and the minister at the table, the Minister for Emergency Services, as a member of the government that is in the outer suburbs as well, knows and understands that puts pressure on local families, both from a cost perspective and a time perspective. What this framework does is it gives back those opportunities. I, on balance, in listening to the really important contributions from those on this side of the house, understand that we have got an opportunity to do something that changes that dynamic. When you move around your local community you hear this in many different shapes and forms, but most importantly, when you are at a footy club, when you are down the street in the local community or when you are speaking to people on the doors or on the phones, I think this is a really powerful and important societal shift, and it is an opportunity to use technology in a really important and powerful way.

There is no doubt that changes to technology have had a really significant impact on communities. I think all of us in this place, no matter which side of politics you are on and no matter where you come from, know and understand the damage that technology can do when used in the wrong way. What this opportunity gives us from a work-from-home sense is an opportunity to use that in a good way. Perhaps if we are able to, as a government and as a society and as a community, craft and shape our energy and efforts in a way that makes for technology to be used in a good way, as per this motion and as per the work-from-home provisions, then this is a really important and powerful thing. We spend a lot of time speaking about and reflecting on the way that those circumstances can do damage, but what this motion before the house looks at and what this opportunity gives us from a work-from-home perspective is the ability to use that in the best possible way. To be able to have the Teams meeting or the Zoom meeting, the opportunity to have that phone call, to do the things that you need to do from home, to do school pick-up and school drop-off, to take the kids to footy training and do all those things I think is really important, particularly for communities like Sunbury, Gladdy, Tullamarine, Diggers Rest and about seven homes in Keilor – those people within my electorate. I think that is a really important and really powerful thing.

I want to take the opportunity to remind those opposite that as they sit there and craft up their ideological message about what they think works for working families, maybe they should talk to working families. Imagine that. Imagine if they sat there and actually talked to working families in Sunbury or Broadmeadows or Cranbourne or Eltham. Imagine if they did that. But, no, they know best. They come in here, they rant and they rave and they carry on like pork chops. But this side of the house is committed to working people and to standing up for those people and making sure they have the best possible chance in life.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (22:39): In the last few weeks I have brought a few schools into this beautiful workplace of ours; I want to acknowledge Cranbourne East Secondary College, Cranbourne Secondary College, Casey Grammar and Wilandra Rise. I take them up to the caucus room, our party room. It is a beautiful room, and it is a room where we talk a little bit about what it means to have discussions. I talk a little bit about disagreeing agreeably. I ask them to have a look at the pictures on the wall. When they walk into the caucus room, usually it takes a couple of minutes to

settle down. I say, 'Can you have a look at the photos on the wall? I want you to start at the right, and I want you to have a look at those photos. What do you notice?' A couple of the kids will say, 'Oh, I see. They're all in black and white.' 'Yep, yep – what else do you notice?' And they start looking around and we start moving. All of those photos are the very first Labor caucus, the very first members of this Parliament from our side. I ask what they have in common – 'What do you see?' Usually a couple of minutes in they notice they are all blokes, they are all men. That was what this Parliament looked like. There was a whole Parliament of men. I ask them what life was like when this Parliament was represented by men. Then they start looking around, they move a little bit further around, and at that really important photo they start seeing for the first time women elected to the Parliament.

I talk to them about how that did not happen easily. We had to pull levers. It was not something we just talked about. Unlike those opposite, who freak out and oppose every opportunity for their party to introduce quotas, we had to make rules and we had to require that there be rules in place so that a proportion of those seats, Labor seats that would eventually form government, would be held by women. They start looking around – 'Oh, look, you can see the first women there.' And then in the next Parliament there are a few more and a few more. And of course being Cranbourne, they start noticing the diversity – people from different backgrounds. There are younger people as well, people from different parts of the state, people who have been born in different countries, people with different cultural heritage, but they always talk about the women.

That is what a workplace looks like. It changes, it evolves. How important it is that this place – this beautiful, amazing place that we have the privilege to work in and where we have the opportunity to represent our communities – is starting to really reflect our community. It is not perfect. We are definitely not perfect, but we are really starting to be representative of our community. As part of that, we start looking at what levers we have to support our communities. I have just got to say, I heard the member for Preston's tour through Preston, and I nearly got in the car there and then to drive to those extraordinary bakeries – a lot of them called Luke's Bakery, was it? There are some extraordinary places in Preston. There is an absolute parochial pride we have in where we live and where we represent and where we serve.

Josh Bull interjected.

Pauline RICHARDS: I hear that from the member for Sunbury.

Vicki Ward interjected.

Pauline RICHARDS: Absolutely, you are right, Minister – the relationships we develop with the places that we serve. What a sweet and important role we have as members of Parliament, and that means sometimes really looking at what we can do to strengthen our communities. That is at the heart of what this important motion is, because not only are we calling out the member for Brighton for that scaremongering role he has but we are also acknowledging that the Leader of the Opposition has taken a particular path. 'I'm in Kew. I'm in Spring Street. I have to go and duck into some of those other places' – places where One Nation and some of those other parts of the community are maybe listening to some of the slightly more right-wing commentators who have what I would have thought of as a view of the world that is perhaps represented by those photos of well-meaning people. I am going to be that optimist and say those well-meaning people thought they knew best. But I think what we have got now is a Parliament that represents the community, that serves the community and that is looking at what the needs of our community really are.

In Cranbourne, the community I represent, I am thinking and reflecting on the fact that it is a beautiful place to live. It used to be a country town, but it is not a country town anymore. I mean, we have got a great train line. It has been duplicated all the way out and you can go on Metro and you can get on at Cranbourne and you can get off at Parkville and you can go to Melbourne Uni. But actually I live in the community, and I am still 56 kilometres away from here. So what does that mean? It means getting up early and catching a train if you work in the city, and commuting. I have got this

extraordinarily diverse community, but I do have a lot of people who commute into the city. And when I spend that time that we all do out and about in our community, I am really pleased to be able to ask people what it is that matters most, and I know. I mean, I hear it every morning: the sound of children when I wake up in the morning is the sound that is so sweet, because it is the sound of optimism, it is the sound of altruism and it is the sound of why people have chosen to make Cranbourne home – probably similarly to the people who have chosen to make Sunbury home, and that is about opportunities for their children. So for our community, like so many – actually, it does not really matter if you live in Greenvale or Narre South or Macedon or Sunbury or Eltham or Broadmeadows or Glen Waverley – people want to be with their community and absolutely people have an optimism for the future. People want to be connected, and that means spending time with their children, and if you do not have kids, it is with your neighbours and your friends. I was reflecting – I have got an elderly mother; it is also caring. They call us the sandwich generation, caring for our parents as well.

I would like to spend the last few minutes reflecting on the role of volunteerism. I have these amazing sports clubs. I know we are all parochial, but there is nothing quite like the Casey Warriors. They are an extraordinary rugby league club with a focus on family and a focus on community. How many of those people commit their time to volunteering – not for themselves; this is about volunteering for their community. It is about their own children, but it is actually not about their own children only. It is about this perception that all of the children in Cranbourne are ours, and those volunteers, if they get the opportunity to work from home, are given the opportunity to volunteer at their rugby league club. I know that Minister Ward at the table has a bit of an affection for netball, and I have the Stallions, who are an amazing netball club run by extraordinary South Sudanese young women. Those women are coaching and leading the community and are the leaders of the future. If they are all commuting for all the hours it takes, despite an extraordinary, duplicated train line, it means they cannot get to netball to coach those other children. It means the kids cannot be at netball with their parents watching. Work from home is sensible. It is such a wholesome opportunity for us to do the things that we need to do.

The minister at the table came out to visit the SES. That is fantastic. It is going to be an amazing, sparkling new SES in Devon Meadows, and we got to spend time with the Cranbourne SES volunteers. People who work in paid jobs and volunteer at the SES, the more time they have working from home is more time to volunteer, so I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the role of volunteerism and the importance of working from home for those people who volunteer. They give so much back to our community. Whether it is the Stallions Netball Club, it is the Casey Warriors, it is the Cranbourne SES or it is my fantastic CFA, these people deserve to be able to volunteer, and working from home makes that possible. There is so much about our role in this place, this diverse, extraordinary role we have, that is important, but being able to use the levers of government, being able to legislate so that people have the opportunity to work from home, is an important and precious role.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (22:49): It is really terrific to get up here tonight to make a contribution to this motion. I would like to speak to the motion because working from home has really transformed the way many of us work. Over the past few years flexible work arrangements have moved from being that temporary solution that was there amidst a crisis to becoming a permanent and highly valued part of modern working life.

I was really fortunate to have spent some time recently in Canada and to see how the Canadian Parliament operates and how votes in the houses are taken. I find it extraordinary that Canada has taken this notion of working from home into its parliaments, where parliamentarians can vote electronically on their phones. Virtual voting, they call it. They all tune in to what is going on and then they log in and register to vote. They can even be physically present outside of the chamber and still put their vote in. But what they have done is they have taken this notion of working from home and asked where the possibilities are. What else can be done? It is not as though they are going, 'Hang on, let's go back to one-size-fits-all, let's go back to the 1950s and let's just think how landlords can enclose the economic rent,' because deep down that is what I think it is all about really. Let us just

keep it for the landlords, let us have people coming in so that there is a reason for the rent to be paid and for that money to be taken back in. That is really what is behind it.

But making work arrangements more flexible helps many people. It will help all employees to have it no longer considered a luxury or a workplace perk. It will be an essential part of achieving a healthy, productive and balanced life. The evidence clearly shows that Victorians value that sort of flexibility. But we do know that many employees still face barriers when seeking flexible work arrangements. Many fear that their request will be denied or that just making that request could negatively affect their career progression or their workplace relationships. What is even more concerning is that, among those who cannot currently work from home but would like to, the majority had already requested the option and were refused by their employer. Nearly all of these workers felt the refusal was unreasonable, and most reported that it created additional challenges in both their professional and their personal lives.

These findings highlight an important point: working from home is not simply about convenience. For many people, it is about having the flexibility needed to manage family responsibilities, reduce financial pressures, improve wellbeing and participate fully in the workforce. When workers were asked about the biggest benefits of working from home, the number one answer was saving time. Time is one of our most valuable resources, and commuting often consumes a significant portion of it. That means that many workers spend many hours in their one-way commute, over an hour for many, and that means workers spend more than 2 hours every day simply just travelling back and forth from work. By working from home, even one or two days a week, employees can reclaim several hours that would otherwise be spent sitting in traffic or on crowded public transport, and those extra hours can be used much more productively, whether that means completing work tasks, exercising caring responsibilities or exercising itself. They could be spent with family members, pursuing hobbies or simply getting more rest. How many times does someone ask you how you are going and you say, 'I'm good, but I am tired'? These are the sorts of benefits that can come, including greater productivity.

For many Australians, commuting is expensive. 9200 respondents to a survey said that their travel to work cost them between $25 and $49 every week in fuel, parking fees, tolls or public transport fares. Over the course of a year those costs can add up to thousands of dollars, and at a time when many households are facing significant cost-of-living pressures, every dollar counts. Working from home allows employees to reduce these expenses and keep more money in their pockets.

The third major benefit identified by workers was improved focus and productivity. Many find that they are able to concentrate better when they are working from home. Without the distractions that are often associated with busy, open-plan offices, employees can complete tasks more efficiently and maintain greater focus throughout the day. Many report that they are more productive when working from home. For some, this means getting more work completed during the day. For others, it means achieving more milestones, meeting deadlines more effectively or indeed producing higher quality work.

What Victorian Labor is proposing are the world's first work-from-home laws, which will come into effect on 1 September this year. Under the laws, Victorians who can work from home will have the legal right to do so two days a week. To make it happen, this government will introduce legislation to the Victorian Parliament later this year. The new right to work from home will be enshrined in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, and we announced earlier this year that the work-from-home rights will apply regardless of the size of your workplace.

Flexible workplace arrangements also play a really crucial role in increasing workforce participation. Many talented Australians face barriers to traditional workplace arrangements. Parents with younger children, for instance, carers looking after family members and people living with disabilities or chronic health conditions often struggle with rigid workplace requirements. Work-from-home options create opportunities for individuals to enter, remain in or return to the workforce. By removing unnecessary barriers, flexible work arrangements allow employers to access a larger and more diverse talent pool while enabling more Australians to contribute their skills and their expertise. This impact

can already be seen in Victoria, where workforce participation is now actually 4.4 per cent higher than it was before the pandemic. Flexible work arrangements have been a major contributor to this growth, helping people who may otherwise have been excluded from traditional employment settings. Working from home also delivers benefits to our communities and infrastructure, because when fewer people commute every day, roads of course become less congested and public transport systems experience less pressure during peak periods. This benefits not only the remote workers but of course those whose jobs require them to travel as well. While it is Labor who are looking for solutions that benefit workers, families and businesses, it is the Liberals who are looking for someone to blame and something to ban. Only Labor is supporting workers, only Labor is supporting families and only Labor will enshrine these protections into law.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (22:59): I am delighted to join my colleagues on this side to speak on this motion on working from home. We on this side of the house condemn the Leader of the Opposition, firstly, for failing to stop the Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for a mandatory return to five days in office. I listened keenly to the contributions on this side of the house, especially the contribution by the Minister for Emergency Services, who said working from home is all about family, it is all about community and it is all about engagement. On this side of the house, it is all about making it possible for those who want to be able to work two days a week if it is possible without interrupting or without reducing or affecting their productivity. I also listened keenly to the contribution by the member for Sunbury. He talked about the fact that the world has changed and the way the work–life balance and possibilities and flexibility in work have also changed.

This brings me to my trip to China not long ago with the whip and a few other members on this side of the house. On the last day of the trip, we visited one of what we call middle high schools. It was very interesting. The interesting part was that we saw how schools can be connected without teachers having to travel to the classroom at another school. That example gave me a lot of thought about the working-from-home possibilities we already have here back home. At that middle school in China you have one teacher teach in his room and then the technology makes it possible to connect not only to the classroom in his school but to the other schools, the regional schools that otherwise would not be able to have teachers at that moment. That gives a lot of benefits: work flexibility and also productivity.

Coming back to the present, I also heard the contributions from many of the speakers before me about the possibilities and the flexibilities that benefit our local community. I have been out doorknocking in my electorate, and it is interesting to talk to residents who work from home, not just after COVID-19 when we learned that there are so many ways that we can actually connect, that we can actually learn and we can make use of the technology that was already available, in terms of Zoom, in terms of connecting through the technology.

But one person – I do not remember his name, but he is in the marketing industry – I asked about what he thought about working from home and he looked at me with surprise. He had worked from home all his life, for more than 20 years. The beautiful thing was that not only did he get to work from home, but in front of his house is his work office. He has a caravan, and this is his mobile office. I thought that was wonderful. I asked him, 'How many days do you work, two days or three days?' He said, only when he needs to meet his team. Then he would hop on the train and come to the city, have a cup of coffee and have a meeting and go back. That is the nature of his work, and it is not only for the last couple of years, but for more than 20 years that has been the nature of his work. I thought how lucky and how wonderful it is, because it brought me to another resident I met during my doorknocking. She works as a bookkeeper and, again, she was happy to work from home. She has young kids just like mine, so she can drop off and pick up her kids after school and spend a lot more time with them without travelling to the city. She only needs to travel when she has meetings with her management or with her team as a bookkeeper. I thought this was fantastic. How wonderful it is to have that flexibility with an employer who understands that productivity is one thing and that connections with family and also with community are another thing.

From my experience, during my time at university I worked at SBS as a broadcaster. To produce a 1-hour live program each and every broadcaster needed to come to SBS at Fed Square, regardless of where they lived, whether it was half an hour or 1 hour from the city. You came to the studio, did the translation first and then prerecorded part of an interview with your prospective interviewee to prepare for that 1-hour live program. It needed to be done at that time. It was not long ago. It was only about 10 or 15 years ago that we had to come to the city, to Fed Square. In my case I had to, once again, hop on the train from Springvale. From time to time if I was late for my program I drove in and parked in the car park underneath Federation Square. At the time it cost a lot of money, and there was the time to travel. It was not only the inconvenience but it was, I would say, unnecessary. Not long ago I learned that my former colleague, who now works at SBS, does not have to do that. She just does the prerecording through her mobile phone at home, sends it across to the studio at SBS and then she goes on live. I thought that was fantastic – how wonderful it is.

I could go on and on, but I just would like to come back to the motion. On balance, this is a fantastic motion on working from home. It not only benefits the employer but also the employees – the workers. Also there are the local benefits that the member for Preston mentioned in his contribution – a whole long list of benefits for the local economy. Imagine mum and dad or a partner is working from home, and then the benefits to the local community, to the local businesses, to the cafes, to the restaurants and also to the takeaway food industry. One of my friends is working from home as a chef, where she can do the packaging and her husband can deliver the food to those who are working from home.

This is a fantastic motion, and it is fantastic to be able to work from home. It is without any adverse negative impacts on productivity, but most importantly there is the time to spend with family, the time to spend with the kids after school or being able to drop off the kids at school. Most important, I think, is the time that parents can have with their kids after school, which would not be possible if everybody needed to travel, let us say once again, from Springvale to Federation Square just to produce 1 hour of a live program when now you do not have to do that travelling. I commend the motion to the house.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (23:09): It is with great pleasure, verve and vigour that I rise to support this motion before the house today. Working from home works, quite simply. For many people I think there sometimes can be such an imbalance in their work and their home life, and I know that there has often been for me. I remember speaking to someone once and they said a really simple philosophy to live by, a healthy philosophy to live by, is that you should work to be able to live, you should not be living to work. I think this is what is underpinning all of this. It is not about not being productive, because we know that working from home is productive. In fact – and I have said this before here – it is the Productivity Commission themselves, hardly the bastion of progressive thinking, who have come out and said that they believe that hybrid working from home is actually more productive for society. So we are hardly talking about radical, far-left people here when we are talking about the Productivity Commission, who are actually saying that this is a really good thing for our society but it is also a really good thing for businesses out there.

Do you know who it is particularly good for? It is great for our communities. It is wonderful for my community, where for a long time there has been a real concern. A number of our old towns where we used to have potato farming – and back in the day there was the timber industry out in Gembrook – have turned into commuter towns over time. That is a concern for the people there, because when people live and work within their community the fabric of society is so much stronger. What has been great with working from home – and many others here, my beautiful colleagues who have been speaking so well about working from home and the positive benefits of this, have alluded to the fact or spoken quite directly about it – is that it benefits our local people.

My CFA captain and so many CFA captains have said to me, 'Working from home was great for us. We had resources ready to go. If we needed to call out, our times were the best they had ever been because people were so close nearby and many of them were ready to jump up and answer a call.' For those of us – and I am sure it is the same in your community as well, Acting Speaker O'Keeffe – up in Monbulk, we need our CFAs. We do not have professional firefighters who come to us for our call-

outs; we need our volunteers. For our volunteers to be able to turn out and help us out, they need to be there. They need to be able to turn out. Working from home actually keeps them so close to our stations, including our SES. Our unit in Emerald, my goodness, punch above their weight. I tell you, they are one of the busiest units in the state. Working from home has been an absolute godsend to them as well.

Working from home is a winner for so many. That is why we scratch our heads on this side of the chamber when we contemplate the position of the opposition on this. It is really hard to fathom what is bad about it. I am a former employer of many people – at least 30 at any given time in one business or the other. It was a very frontline place. It was retail. Basically the majority of my staff had to be there in the shop on the floor, but there were a couple of positions where staff could work from home, and that was in ordering, because we had automated our systems and we did not need a physical count to be able to work out what to order. I know it made such a difference to the staff who were able to work from home a little bit, because they told me.

I also know that because I was able to work from home just under 20 years ago when I injured myself. It was a job where I was meant to be in the office three days a week in the city. I used to commute all the way in. I would drop the kids off at child care or my parents, depending on who was watching them, and schlep all the way in. I did my work, and I did it well, I hope. Then I snapped my ACL, and I needed to recover at home. I realised my brain was still working pretty well once the strong pain medication was able to be dealt with, but I really could not commute because my leg was so sore. I was able to do some work from home. It was the first time ever that I had worked from home, and my productivity went through the roof. I was able to do so much intense work without interruption, without the phone ringing, without colleagues coming and chatting and talking to me. There was no way I wanted to do that three days a week or all my days, because I still needed to collaborate with my colleagues. That is why I think putting into law the capacity for people to have the right to two days a week is a really good balance.

I was listening to fabulous contributions in my hour in the chair prior to standing up now, and it was wonderful. We did get a tour of Preston's greatest cafes, that is for sure. We also heard about the beauty of Sunbury, and we heard the Minister for Emergency Services talking about how positive working from home is for emergency services as well. We also heard some other stories. I was listening to my dear friend the member for Broadmeadows, and she was talking about how much of a difference working from home has made for her and her family, because she has got a daughter who suffers with illness. I too have a child who has been quite unwell for quite some time at different stages, and being able to work from home, for my husband and for me, has helped us balance our lives. It has meant that we can be there as much as we possibly can for them. In fact the poor thing is incredibly sick at the moment with flu. Dad is at home with her. I cannot be, because here we are and who knows what time we are going to, but I know that tomorrow I will have some flexibility to be able to be home with her because she is so unwell. So to my daughter, I hope you are feeling better soon if you are actually watching this, but hopefully you are asleep in bed.

There are so many benefits to it, which, as I say, is why we do query why there is such opposition. I know it was mentioned several speakers ago, but it is still unfathomable to me that we had a federal member of the Liberal Party compare working from home with apartheid, which was an incredibly terrible thing to say. It was egregious, really. It was so offensive to so many people. But to be that strongly convinced that working from home is terrible that you compare it to apartheid is beyond offensive. I cannot understand why there was so much anger and vitriol coming out at the time. I am just delighted that people will, where it is reasonable, have enshrined in law that right to be able to work from home two days a week.

It is not for everyone. We know that not everyone can do this. We know that our incredibly hardworking emergency services, professional personnel, the police, the paid firefighters, our nurses, our doctors, our paramedics and our fabulous teachers do not really get the opportunity. They cannot really work from home, although I do note I was reflecting on the member for Preston, who was

discussing the fact that we are looking at ways potentially to be able to assist teachers to do some kind of work from home, and I think it is important, because people want it.

I am going to share some statistics with the chamber, which are very contemporary because I just confirmed them about 3 minutes ago. I went on to seek.com.au to have a look at the number of jobs requiring people to be onsite versus jobs allowing a hybrid situation where you can work from home. Nationally – and it was current about 15 minutes ago – there are 137,642 onsite positions available throughout the country and 24,186 hybrid. Now, quick maths tells me that 17.5 per cent of the jobs advertised on Seek are hybrid – or around thereabouts. In Victoria the figures are really interesting and telling: onsite, 28,544; hybrid, 7036. We are up at 24.6 per cent. We know it works in this state. But what we need to do is make sure that we are protecting employees to have this right ongoing so that their bosses cannot say, 'Do you know what, changed my mind. I think you should really be in the office, because I just want to always be watching you because I don't trust you enough.' That is a terrible relationship there as an employer. We should be able to trust our employees, because we know that people generally do the right thing. So making sure that they have the right to be able to work from home is an absolutely fantastic thing.

We know that already in Victoria we value this. We value it as employees, and I think most employers value it. Good employers know that if they want to keep good employees, wherever it is possible to give them the opportunity to work from home they absolutely should. But for those employees who might not have great bosses who are forward thinking, we are making sure that we are taking care of them, so that when they say 'No, I can reasonably work from home two days a week,' we are going to make sure that from 1 September they will have the legal right to be able to do so – and I celebrate that. I will end where I started. We should be able to work to live; we should not be living to work. Finding that balance in our lives – these busy, busy lives we lead – and being able to contribute to our communities is fundamental.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (23:19): I am very happy to stand and talk to this government motion on working from home:

> That this house condemns the opposition leader for failing to:
>
> (a) stop the Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for mandatory five-day office return;
>
> (b) condemn the Shadow Treasurer for spreading misinformation on working from home; and
>
> (c) commit to Labor's plan to legislate working from home as a right for Victorians.

I think it was in the first month or so of being a member and being in the chamber and being very green, not really knowing how it worked and all of those things, that I remember the member for Brighton talking. I am not sure what he was talking about, but he was obviously debating an issue and he brought up the fact that he worked really, really hard, so hard that he sacrificed time with his wife and sacrificed having time with his children. He talked about how that affected him. Being sort of green in this place, after he finished he left the chamber and I went out and had a chat to him and just said, 'You know, I heard what you said, and I'm really sad that is the case. I think it is really important. I've got kids and a wife and it is so important that we make sure we make time to be with our loved ones. Kids grow up and, before we know it, they have gone and they are living their own lives. They call you once a month and come home with the washing and all those sorts of things.' I thought the member for Brighton kind of took it on board. He seemed to understand what I was talking about.

Then maybe a week or two later in the chamber, he spoke about the same thing, spoke about the fact that he worked incredibly hard, that he sacrificed his time with his children and his family and he found that hard. So I guess I am a bit angry at the member for Brighton. I guess empathy is certainly not one of his strengths, and he is certainly showing that with wanting people to not work from home, but to make people sit in this same box as him, which is possibly to go to the office every day and resent it, sit there in the office, work hard and think about what you are missing at home and the time that you could be having with your wife and the time you are missing out on with your kids. It is very

disappointing that the member for Brighton would try and put the rest of the population in this sort of unhappy box that he seems to happily be unhappy living in.

I think too there have been a lot of wonderful things said in the chamber tonight, obviously only from this side of the chamber. One of the things I want to talk about, and one of the things I want to yell out loud, especially to the member for Brighton, is that working from home can be and is a lifeline for many people. I talk about my daughter with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and connective tissue disorder. I look at her working life. She is, and many people are like her, someone that desperately wants to have a meaningful life. She is someone who wants to work and I have watched her struggle. In our society, you go to work. And yes, as the member for Brighton says, you go to work from 9 to 5, or 9 to 8, or whatever it is. It does not matter how you feel, if you are unwell, but you stick at it and you work and ultimately what you end up doing is harming yourself because you are trying to fit into this box that everyone else says you need to.

I watched my daughter want to work, want to earn a living and want to have a meaningful life. But I watched her also harm herself and damage herself because physically she was not able to do that. She changed jobs a few times. She retrained. She wanted to be a dancer and an actor, and she could not do that. She was an au pair, but she could not carry babies because of her bad back. She became a bookkeeper and she had a job in a trucking company. That was quite good, except she was not able to sit for long and she was not able to stand for long. So she was not able to go to the office five days a week, and she changed it down from five days to four and then four to three. But unfortunately the attitude at the time was, 'Either you're in the office or you're not actually working for us.' So many people like my daughter had to leave that office and find another employer that had empathy, that would support someone that effectively had a disability. They did not see the disability as not being able to do the work and not being able to be passionate and committed and intelligent; they saw it as a disability that you were unable to sit in an office all day. So my daughter found a job where she could actually work from home and she went from one day or two days a week. But unfortunately, as connective tissue disorder took over her life more and more, she had to ask to work from home more often until eventually she started her own business. That way she could –

Richard Riordan: Acting Speaker, I call into question the state of the house.

Members interjecting.

Richard Riordan: I think on a night like this it is important that the right amount of people make a quorum.

Quorum formed.

Paul MERCURIO: I was talking about respect and integrity and saying that working from home is not just about choice. Working from home is actually a lifeline for some people. The lack of empathy and respect shown on that side to do that act then just shows that there are people that do not deserve to be sitting in this chamber and hopefully will not be sitting in this chamber next Parliament.

Working from home is more than just a simple idea. It gives people the ability to have a meaningful life. Not too many people have spoken about that today in the chamber, and that is okay – my lived experience is a little bit different. Working from home gives some people meaning, purpose and the ability to have an income, to be part of a team, to contribute and also to have a social life. You are stuck at home because you are unwell, but if you have a job, you are able to communicate and work within a team, and that is so very important. It is a side of this motion and this issue that I do not think we are looking at enough. It is about empathy and being considerate and kind to all of those people, not just people that can fulfil a full-time job but people that want to live a meaningful life. I might just finish by saying my wife does not like me working from home.

A member interjected.

Paul MERCURIO: You have seen the photo of me in the garage. I was in the garage because I was making phone calls and my wife did not want to listen. Sometimes I do not like working from home because my wife wants to come in and ask me about things and jobs around the house, but what an absolute pleasure it is to be able to sit in my house and work but also enjoy the love, warmth and company of my wife, so I support this motion.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (23:29): I join the motion:

> That this house condemns the opposition leader for failing to:
>
> (a) stop the Shadow Treasurer's reckless campaign for mandatory five-day office return;
>
> (b) condemn the Shadow Treasurer for spreading misinformation on working from home; and
>
> (c) commit to Labor's plan to legislate working from home as a right for Victorians.

I would say that I am a little bit flustered; I am a little bit shocked. I have just had a conversation with the member for Gippsland East, and working from home harks back to something that some of our diggers wanted to do. The member for Gippsland East and I were just talking about the Kokoda Trail. The member for Gippsland East is a scholar and a gentleman; he has done the Kokoda Trail quite a few times and enjoys the history of it. I said, 'This is my grandfather's service number,' and the member for Gippsland East used his doover – his iPhone – to look it up, and he brought up my grandfather's record. It turns out there are a couple of acronyms, and AWOL was one, which means absent without leave. While my grandfather was on the Kokoda Trail, he got a bit sick of the authorities – he got a bit sick of the malaria, he got a bit sick of the Japanese – and he decided he wanted to work from home. And I think he might have got there. I think they might have got him into hospital, and they might have sent some of the judiciary there, and they might have made a rule that he had to go home.

With that, this is not such a bad idea, and I think Victorians back it. The member for Brighton might be out of touch, but certainly we know that thousands and thousands and thousands of Victorians will benefit from Labor's world-first work-from-home laws, which will come into effect on 1 September 2026. I think under these laws Victorians will benefit greatly – Victorians who can work from home and who will have the legal right to do so at least two days a week. To make this happen we have to introduce legislation to the Victorian Parliament in July, which obviously is next month; it has come up pretty quick. The new right to work from home will be enshrined in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. We have seen that various stakeholders, certainly various members of the opposition, are quite passionate about their adversity to this policy. But what I am really interested in is what the workers are saying, and that is clear. It is transparent and it is black and white. Work-from-home arrangements are overwhelmingly popular and productive. In fact more than one-third of Australian workers, including 60 per cent of professionals, work from home regularly already.

Our government conducted extensive public consultations on the future of flexible work, receiving 36,770 survey responses from workers across our state, and the message was crystal clear. The message says that the opposition is out of touch. The opposition is totally out of touch. In that survey 74 per cent of employees surveyed said the right to work from home is extremely important to them. Seventy-four per cent of employees, over 3200 people, told us that they do not feel they can even ask their current employer for the option to work from home, often out of fear it will be denied or held against them – 3200 people. I think that might include my grandfather. He was afraid to ask, so he just took it. Of those who cannot work from home but want to, the majority had requested it and were refused by their employer. Nearly all of those who were refused felt the refusal was unreasonable, and most said it created extra challenges for them at work and at home.

When asked about the biggest benefits of working from home, the top answer was saving time, and if there is one thing I have learned as the member for Frankston and now the Minister for Cost of Living, it is people want to save not just money, but time. More than 13,300 respondents said that their one-way commute takes over an hour, so working from home even a couple of days a week gives them

hours of their life back. The second most cited benefit of working from home for Victorians was money, so time and money. Over 9200 people reported that commuting costs them between $25 and $49 a week in fuel, parking or public transport fares. That is real money saved when they work from home.

About this time of night – what is it, 25 to midnight – is a great time to talk about that 20 per cent off rego, the over 1 million Victorians that have applied for it and the more than $38 million that has been paid out already to more than 200,000 people. $186 in the back pocket, $372 in the back pocket with two cars – oh, what a feeling! That is money that is spent on car servicing. It is money that is spent putting food on the table. That is money that, if you are in a situation where you can work from home, will soon no longer be spent on fuel or public transport costs to get to work. Speaking of public transport, obviously two months of free public transport preceded public transport fares being half price, at $5.40 from $11.70, to get anywhere in Victoria, and that will be until the end of this year. That is helping. But what would help a lot of people as well would be working from home, where they do not actually have to incur even those half-price fares, as good as they are. Of those who could not work from home, in this review the majority had requested it and were refused by their employer, as I said, but 9200 people reported that commuting costs them $25 and $49 a week in fuel, parking and public transport fees. It was the member for Hastings that brought up parking fees, because parking fees can be an absolute killer. Again, it is real money they saved.

The third-largest benefit of working from home, according to the people that involved themselves in this questionnaire, was being able to focus without distractions. Many workers find they accomplish more in a quiet home environment than in a noisy open-plan office. In fact more than 28,700 respondents said they were more productive when working from home, whether in terms of getting more hours in or hitting more milestones. Notably, the most common arrangement people wanted was two days a week from home. That was the opinion of 10,207 respondents. That is exactly the kind of balanced approach our government supports: a mixed or hybrid approach of office and home that maintains team cohesion and supports the CBD while also giving families flexibility. I noticed the member for Monbulk talked a lot about her local community, where people working from home energise that local community. People are getting their lunch from the cafes, coffee from cafes and shopping in retail. It keeps those communities alive and economies charged. The benefits for families and the economy go on and on and on. We have heard so much about that point from members on this side of the chamber. Flexible work is not just some perk for a few. It is a game changer for families. It is a game changer for equality and participation in the economy as well.

One thing that is not often picked up in the area of special development schools is that we know accessibility can be an issue for young men and women. They are in the SDSs, and the world around them is designed to make sure they can thrive. It is purposely done that way. Once they get out into the workforce, often things are not that way. There are some amazing employers out there that provide accessibility, and they enjoy the fruits of working with people with different abilities and people who might be on the spectrum. I have heard so many stories about when you get someone who might be on the spectrum and they just do so much good work. When they have got their focus on something, you cannot take it off them. I have even heard that in some areas they can be the best workers for different businesses. Working with some of the autism spectrum organisations is certainly a privilege, but this is the kind of information that you might not necessarily hear out in the world, outside of being an MP or being in that community role. Certainly working from home helps this cohort.

Working from home helps people who might not necessarily have the accessibility to get on public transport to go to work or to get in the car to go to work, but they still can contribute meaningfully and at a level where employers value them and employers want them to work. Often getting to work is that barrier. Working from home is something that breaks that barrier, in that we now have enough technology. One thing I guess that came through COVID was an accelerated vision of what working from home looks like when you have computers where you can see your colleagues on the screen and

you can share documents. The world got a little bit smaller. I absolutely commend this government motion.

John LISTER (Werribee) (23:39): I first would like to apologise for what will become a little bit of a history lesson, in my contribution on this motion, that substantially condemns some of the comments by Liberal and National leaders but also commits to our plan for working from home to be as of right for Victorians. In reflecting on this motion, and I think I have referred to this before, working from home is our next industrial revolution. The ways that people are working are changing, and I reflect on some of the attitudes towards the changing nature of work from the start of the Industrial Revolution, often pinned to the invention of the power loom in 1790 by Edmund Cartwright, basically taking away –

Brad Rowswell interjected.

John LISTER: There is a link. It is not as tenuous as some of the question time links today, but it is definitely a link with the power loom. The power loom revolutionised that way of working, because traditionally weaving was done as a cottage industry, literally in cottages, mostly by women as well, as a way to have that independent income from their husbands, who would have been working as ploughmen or as part of a cooperative or for the landed gentry. It was a cottage industry – working from home, producing those goods – but the power loom came along and really disrupted that. With that came a lot of the issues that we have seen with work and work patterns for the last 200 or so years. In the 1830s we saw the proliferation of things like the power loom and other mechanised ways of producing goods. These inventions definitely substantially improved the quality of life for billions of people, but at the same time that came at great cost. As we remember, in parallel with the Industrial Revolution came lots of social upheaval where movements were formed, particularly the labour movement, to try and maintain that dignity of work and that dignity of the human.

In what is now the next industrial revolution, the next change in this pattern of working, we need to make sure that we are not returning to that factory-style office of having people lined up in rows, in weird cubicles, getting around that work when they can now do it from home, where we know there are social benefits that have been lost for 200 or so years from that time of cottage industry when people had the means of production in their homes to be able to earn a good wage and earn money for what they produced.

In these modern times, as we are reflecting on the changes that we are seeing and on working from home, this is something that is particularly important for communities like mine in the outer western suburbs. I have spoken about this on a couple of occasions in this chamber. Whenever I have been out doorknocking around Wyndham Vale or Manor Lakes – you go out at around lunchtime sometimes and see who is around – it is amazing. In nearly one in three or one in four houses there is someone working from home. There is that little front room that you see from the door, with a computer set up. They are working from home, and you knock on the door, and they politely say, 'Oh, sorry, I'm on a Teams call.' Or they have to stand there and wiggle the mouse a little bit because they have been reading a document and want to make sure their online status stays on on Teams.

A member interjected.

John LISTER: Yes, come back after work, that is true – stop interrupting me – which is fair enough, because it is legitimate work that they are doing. Quite often, when I reflect on the statistics in my community, this work is in fields like information technology and cybersecurity, as well as professional industries and financial services and the public service, which I will touch on in just a moment. It is particularly important for my community to protect that right to be able to work a portion of that week from home.

In protecting the right to work from home we are not necessarily saying to employers that they cannot have that conversation around how that work is done or how that can be done between locations. What we are saying really is that you cannot force your employees back to your factory-style office, your

panopticon in Collins Street, without necessarily considering their right to be able to do that job if they can from home. In a survey that was done through Engage Vic a lot of good data came out, particularly from the top 10 postcodes with the most participants in that engagement process. When this engagement process was running, I ran a little digital constituent cafe, as I call them, but it was online for those people who did work from home so they could engage with me just as I do with people down at the cafe every couple of weeks. This survey showed that the most responses were from Point Cook, which does not surprise me, and coming in second was Truganina – or Truga-nee-na, depending on who you ask. There is a bit of controversy out in my part of town. I just get away from the controversy by saying Trug. All the OGs say Trug. And then at number 4 is beautiful Wyndham Vale, so I think it is particularly important. We have many great bricks-and-mortar businesses like Kippers fish and chips and cafes like Tuckers. I know there has been a bit of a conversation about bricks-and-mortar businesses today, and this is not necessarily going to disrupt bricks-and-mortar. If anything, encouraging working from home will help those bricks-and-mortar businesses, those services, in our local communities to be able to better serve our community and get more business.

Returning to this idea and this principle behind working from home as being a disruptor to our patterns of work, not only is it disrupting the way that we are working but we are also disrupting those patterns of movement throughout the suburbs. We know that we cannot continue to sprawl the way that we have, although those opposite have said that they want to fast track more development in the western suburbs which I will continue to remind my community of. We want to have managed growth that builds our inner city while steadily growing our outer suburbs. Why is this important when it comes to working from home? Well, we are looking at around 20 or so per cent of people currently, according to the last census in 2021, who are working from home in Wyndham, which is 21 per cent or so that are not trying to commute. I know in my community getting people to and from Melbourne has been one of the biggest challenges. For a long time we only had one river crossing into Melbourne, and with the West Gate Tunnel that has obviously been alleviated quite significantly. But trying to move people around is one of the biggest challenges with urban sprawl, and that is why we need to think differently. We need to disrupt.

Unlike the previous industrial revolution, in which the power loom came in and saw cottage industries die and the Luddites going out and breaking those looms, we do not have to break these looms. We can take this new pattern of work and protect it and make sure it works for the workers, not necessarily just for business. But we do know working from home is good for productivity. We all know how annoying it is getting interrupted by a colleague when you are sitting in the bullpen at an office block, having them come over and try and talk to you. When I used to work in a big office area at a school, I used to put my noise-cancelling headphones on with a sticky note that said, 'Please do not disturb me, I am easily distracted.' Sometimes having that dedicated time to do the grunt work or to do that work that requires focus at home is really, really productive. But then also having that time to collaborate with your colleagues is also important as well.

I know I have taken us on a little bit of a history lesson this evening, but I think working from home and looking at those disruptions that we can do – and when I say disruptions, I am not talking about negative disruptions; I am talking about how we are getting ahead to the future, how we are offering that vision of the future for Victorian workers. That is something that Labor does: we offer the future. We do not turn back to the past. We are not the Tories trying to keep the factories running with their workers coming in 16 hours a day. We are here to try and be those disruptors and provide those new ways of working and protect those new ways of working. I commend this motion, very slowly, to the house.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (23:49): Work from home is a fantastic notion and so very worthy of debate, though it does not seem to have been much of a debate tonight. The Liberals, the Nationals and the Greens are nowhere to be seen – missing in action again. It has been hours, I think, and none of them have stood up, which is really disappointing. So clearly protecting work from home does not feature highly on their priority list. Perhaps they do not see it as an important part of our

modern way of life, or perhaps they do not see the pressures that households are under to balance their busy lives. Well, Victorians feel those pressures, and they sure as heck care about work from home.

The Northcote electorate has one of the highest proportions of people who do currently work from home in the state, and we are really proud of that. I see this when I knock on doors in our neighbourhoods. Time and again people will open the door and chat to me about how they are working from home that day. They are spending their time working from home, and they will tell me about how much easier it is to be able to do this, how much more productive they have been, how much money and time they have saved on travel and on child care. Fundamentally, they convey to me the importance of having choice in their lives. The Liberal Party wants to take away that choice. They are laying in wait, planning to end remote work and force thousands upon thousands of people back to the office. They have said it really explicitly, and why they do not have the guts to come out here and try and defend that position now is curious indeed.

This debate goes to the heart of what kind of workforce, what kind of economy and what kind of society we want to build in Victoria. Do we want a modern economy that recognises the realities of contemporary working life? Do we want to support working families and carers and people with disability to participate fully in the workforce? Do we want to give Victorians more flexibility, more choice and a better quality of life? Or do we want to drag workers backwards into a one-size-fits-all model that belongs in another era? That is exactly what those opposite are proposing. The member for Brighton has repeatedly demonstrated that he is completely out of touch with the realities facing modern workers and modern families. Last year he demanded that public servants be forced back into the office full time. He accused public servants of not delivering for Victorians, and he declared that every public servant should be turning up to work in the office. What an extraordinary thing to say, as though productivity is measured by where somebody sits rather than the work that they do.

The reality is that Victorian businesses and workers have embraced hybrid work arrangements. More than a third of Victorians already work from home regularly, and the data tells us that it improves workforce participation. It is not a perk. It is an essential part of adapting and evolving our modern economy into one that also enables livability, because we are not just economic units, we are people. We are people with lives and families, hobbies and passions, aspirations and hopes, commitments and burdens and complexities. What it means for people to have that time back cannot even be quantified. Think about what it means to give thousands upon thousands of Victorians the chance to see their kids in the morning rather than sneaking out the door before they wake up to take the train. What does it mean for the health and wellbeing of those families? I know how it has impacted my family when I have had to leave before being able to see the kids in the morning. It is hard. We cannot quite measure it. We do not yet have a measure for what that is, but I think that every single one of us feels that intuitively, and we know that it means a hell of a lot.

Our world-leading Labor reforms will protect the right to work from home. Under our plan Victorians whose jobs can reasonably be performed remotely will have a legal right to work from home two days a week. I know that people have questioned why this needs legislating. Why not just leave it to the market, leave it to the employers to offer? We see a problem with that, and Victorians do too. Our government undertook a really extensive survey on the future of flexible work. More than 36,000 Victorians participated, and the message could not have been clearer: 74 per cent of respondents said that the right to work from home was extremely important to them. More than 3200 people told us they did not feel comfortable asking their employer for that option, not because the arrangement was unreasonable, not because the work could not be done but because they feared the request would be rejected or held against them. Think about what that means. Thousands of workers feel unable to ask for flexibility that would improve their lives and their families' lives, because they fear negative consequences. That is precisely why legal protections matter.

The consultation also revealed the practical benefits of work from home: how it supports people to be in the workforce, particularly those with caring responsibilities, disability, neurodiversity or chronic illness. But the most commonly cited benefit was time. More than 13,000 respondents reported

commuting more than an hour each way. For those workers, even two days working from home each week means hours of their lives returned to them, hours that can be spent with children, hours that can be spent caring for ageing parents, hours participating in community life or simply hours that can be spent resting and maintaining their wellbeing. Then there are cost savings. The modelling says that the average Australian family can save about $5000 a year when you take into account commuting and parking and childcare expenses going back into people's household budgets. The other benefit was productivity. More than 28,000 respondents reported being more productive when they did work from home – not less productive, more. They told us they were able to focus better, avoid distractions and get more work done. Interestingly, we also heard that the most popular arrangement was not full-time remote work. It was not five days a week at home, it was two days a week – a balanced model, an arrangement that allows workers to enjoy flexibility while maintaining strong workplace connections, supporting businesses, supporting the CBD economy, spreading that to local economies like those in Northcote and recognising the realities of modern life.

We understand that not all workers can work from home. Our teachers, our nurses, our firefighters, police, ambos and the many hospitality workers in my community in Northcote – these people work incredibly hard, and we are deeply grateful to them. Although work from home may not be the arrangement that they personally have, work from home still benefits them. It may be their partner who can put the washing on at home to save everyone time in the evening. It may be their adult child who can drop in more often. It might be their neighbour who can mow their nature strip because they have got time on their hands. Or it might be none of those, and it is simply the fact that their climate has less emissions because less people need to travel to and from the CBD each day and there is less pressure on their transport network.

Work from home is overwhelmingly good – good for families, good for communities, good for wellbeing, good for our economy. It is honestly hard to fathom how the Liberal Party can oppose work from home or why they want to drag Victorians backwards. Labor wants to move Victoria forwards. We understand the realities and the pressures and the challenges facing modern families and modern working life arrangements. Only Labor stands up for working families. Only Labor is prepared to enshrine work from home in law. We will not force workers back into the office as though we are in the 1950s. That is another era. We are in this era now, and we support work from home. I commend this motion to the house. It is an important motion, and I encourage those opposite to get up and talk to it too.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (23:59): I am going to try and do this motion justice at midnight. I think this motion really is an incredible motion to speak about in this place. We have seen so many changes over the last decade in terms of workplace changes. Prepandemic there were a lot of us that maybe would have liked to work from home but were not sure how that was to be done or how to approach it with our employer and say, 'Do you think I could do one or two days at home?' It was an unusual conversation to have in the workplace. Then we had a pandemic, and lo and behold nearly everyone was working from home. We found Zoom and we found Teams and we found all this technology that would enable us to work from home. I do not think I have actually worked harder in my life. Working from home with two children who were being homeschooled, still trying to do a job and having caring responsibilities throughout the pandemic felt exhausting at times, but that did not mean my productivity went down; it actually went up. I found time to do my work, and I found time to do the things that I loved at home, but I found a balance too. I am someone who likes to throw themselves at their work, and I certainly did that still from home. Things have changed since then. I know a lot of people really enjoyed that flexibility throughout the pandemic, so as we have come out of that and our world looks different, this is certainly a motion that we need to be talking about. How do we get the balance right? How do we give families and working people the right balance?

I would like to talk a little bit about this motion and how it relates to the wonderful Bellarine communities. I meet a lot of people who have moved to the Bellarine in probably the last five years or so or less, and they say to me, 'I wish I'd moved to the Bellarine a lot earlier.' I am biased, but it is a

magical place to live. But a lot of them say, 'I've been able to move to the regions because I can now commute only a few days to Melbourne,' or, 'I can work from home.' They were looking for that lifestyle balance. They were wanting to have a smaller community. They wanted to have connection to their community. They wanted to live in a beautiful place like the Bellarine, but they were still connected to their job in Melbourne or their job maybe in a town like Geelong. The Bellarine gave them that balance, and that is what our Labor government is aiming to do: give people back a balance and give people back some time. It will also give people back some money. It is not about working less, it is about living better. That is what working from home is about.

Like I said, a while ago many people would be travelling up the highway from the Bellarine to maybe go to Melbourne or Geelong and they would be sitting in traffic or they would be sitting on trains. That is time away from their families. It may be time away from caring for parents or children. It is time away from volunteering in your community. It might be time away from even just looking after yourself and having time for yourself. I will acknowledge now that not everyone is going to be able to work from home – that is a given. As an ex-primary school teacher, I know that would be really difficult. We did do it in the pandemic, but it would be really challenging to do that now. We need to give thanks to those workers who actually keep our economy going – our nurses, our teachers, our police. We have very much a front line of workers that will not be able to work from home, but that does not mean it cannot benefit everyone and cannot benefit their community as well. It goes beyond individuals. It does strengthen your local community.

I just want to talk about how it looks for the Bellarine. I like to move around the Bellarine. I do not go to my office very often. I like to do meetings out and about in the Bellarine and meet people where they are at. I often see people with laptops in cafes doing their work or with laptops at the beach. They are still being productive and they are still doing their job, but what an office to have, the Ocean Grove main beach. You can sit there on a beautiful day, have a coffee and do your work. What that has done is generate and sustain our local economies for ourselves. They will go to the bakery, they will have lunch, they will shop locally and that money will stay in our local community. I have spoken to a lot of business owners across the Bellarine who tell me that often their busiest day is that Monday or Friday where people have paired it with a weekend obviously, but they do the working from home on the Monday, and they are busier on some particular days. Those customers obviously are locals, supporting our local economy.

When we talk about supporting regional Victoria here in this place I hear a lot from the other side to say that we do not support regional Victoria, which is absolute rubbish, particularly when we have many regional MPs on this side. We know that we continue to invest in regional Victoria. They do want to cut, and I grieve – this is not the grievance debate, but I do grieve – for what that would look like for our regions if the other side were to be in power. We want to make sure that our regions are thriving, and we continue to invest in that. Working from home helps achieve that as well – our regional economies can be boosted by working from home.

It helps families. I think about single-parent families. I have got a really great support network around me, but I am not sure how people do it when they are on their own and do not have a support network. To be able to work from home and have an option to do school drop-off – maybe you have a sick child and you have to race to the school to pick them up. You are already at home, you are working, you might be having to do the pick-up – these arrangements and these juggles that we have to do as parents. It really is about giving parents time and less stress in their lives. It is not just good social policy, this is good economic policy as well, particularly for women and particularly for people who may have a disability or are neurodivergent or have reasons why their productivity is better at home. I think about those who come to the Bellarine. Like I have said, they come for that lifestyle. They love their careers, but you should be able to buy a home in our beautiful Bellarine and still build a career. We want to attract those skilled workers. That is how we build our sustainable economies outside of Melbourne, and it is how we ensure the Bellarine continues to thrive.

As I have said, it is not for everyone, this motion. We know that not every job can be done from home, and we are really, really incredibly grateful for those people who continue to work on the front line. But this motion does say simply that when a job can be reasonably performed remotely workers should have the right to that flexibility.

I think about working from home, and it is about trust. I think the pandemic showed us that people can be really productive from home. Businesses can certainly adapt. Our technology is evolving. Our teams can stay connected. Many workplaces have found that their outcomes are better than simply sitting at a desk. The world has changed. The world of work has changed, and our laws should certainly recognise that reality. Not long ago there were proposals that required people to come back to the office five days a week. That was proposed by some on the other side and from the opposition at a federal level. It certainly was abandoned pretty quickly, because it highlighted the different views of how we will work going forward, and they basically wanted to take us backwards. They did not recognise the technology or the way that work has changed. And as I have talked about, regional communities such as the Bellarine can enormously benefit from this flexibility.

I have spoken to families, I have spoken to businesses and I have spoken to those even who will not be able to work from home. I have always had a really positive response to this type of legislation to give working families that flexibility. I really feel like this is a policy that will make sure that our families are stronger and they have more time and more money, and it really does create more healthy communities, and that is what we want to see, especially on the Bellarine.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (00:10): I rise after the clock has struck midnight on this fine new day to speak on a matter that goes to the heart of modern working life in Victoria: how we support people to live, work and thrive in a way that reflects the realities of our time. When we talk about work, we are not just talking about jobs or desks or buildings; we are talking about people, and we are talking about people trying to balance life, care and career. We are talking about people building a future and families trying to fit everything in. We are talking about outer metro and regional communities, such as the one in the electorate of Bass that I know very well, where opportunity must reach beyond the boundaries and tyrannies of distance. Today we are talking about something simple yet profound: giving people more control and flexibility over how they work, specifically, the right to work from home where it is possible and where it makes sense.

To be clear from the outset, this is not a radical idea. It is not a fringe or social experiment, and it is not a passing trend. Flexible work is a reality. It is a reality shaped by technology, by changing expectations, not by chocolates, and by the lived experiences of millions of workers who have shown us decisively that productivity, accountability and innovation do not depend on sitting in the same chair five days a week. Yet despite this, we continue to hear voices calling for a return to a one-size-fits-all model of work, a model that belongs to another era, dare I say a previous century. It was an era where the diversity of our workforce was not recognised, an era where care responsibilities were invisible and an era where the idea that someone could contribute meaningfully from outside a central office was dismissed outright. But Victoria is not that place any more.

Brad Rowswell: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Jordan CRUGNALE: We are a modern, dynamic state, and our government understands that. We understand that flexibility is not just a convenience; it is a necessity for a fair and productive society. That is why we are taking action to enshrine the right to work from home into law. From 1 September 2026, Victorians whose roles can be performed remotely will have a legal right to work from home two days a week. Not as a favour, not as something to be quietly negotiated behind closed doors, but as a right: clear, fair, legit and enforceable. This reform will be embedded in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 because, at its core, this is about fairness. It is about recognising that access to flexible work should not depend on your bargaining power, your industry or your willingness to take a risk by asking.

It is about ensuring that people can have a genuine, respectful conversation with their employer about what works best for them, without fear that the answer will be an automatic or unreasonable refusal.

The evidence in support of this approach is overwhelming. We have listened directly to Victorians, tens of thousands of them. Over 36,000 people shared their experiences, their challenges and their hopes for the future of work, and what they told us was remarkably consistent. Nearly three-quarters said that the right to work from home is extremely important to them, with three out of every four workers saying this matters deeply. This is not a niche issue. This is not a marginal concern. This is a mainstream expectation across our workforce. And when we asked about the benefits, the answers were clear: time, money, productivity, balance. More than 13,000 people told us that their commute takes over an hour each way. That is more than 2 hours a day – 10 hours a week lost to travel. Imagine what it means to give even part of that time back: time to spend with children, time to spend with loved ones, time to care for loved ones, time to invest in health, in community, in life. This is not abstract. It is tangible, meaningful change in people's daily lives. And it is not just about time, it is also about the cost of living.

There is an important dimension to this conversation and one that is often overlooked but has been iterated here in the contributions from this side. When people work closer to home, they do not just benefit individually, their whole community benefits. Local cafes see more morning coffees and lunchtime trade. Small retailers welcome more foot traffic throughout the day. Gyms, parks and recreation spaces become part of people's regular routines, not something squeezed into an already exhausting commute. The volunteers at our clubs, whether they be sporting, artistic, social, support groups, community groups, environmental groups, cultural organisations, food relief, our emergency services, lifesaving, CFA or SES – the list is elongated – and their commitment to having their community at heart means, when they are able to work from home, they can make it to their kids' training, attend call-outs and not have to navigate a long commute, dedicated as they are already. They have more time and space and that mental space as well. Working from home helps people coordinate their lives in a more human and sustainable way – grabbing a coffee from a local business, as I said, taking a walk along the local trail or supporting a nearby childcare centre or school pick-up without stress. This is how we strengthen local economies and build more connected, vibrant communities – by enabling people to live, work and participate right where they are.

Over 9000 people reported spending between $25 and $49 a week just getting to and from work, and that adds up. It adds up to groceries. It adds up to having more fuel in the car. It adds up to school expenses. It adds up to real pressure on household budgets. And when we talk about easing the cost of living, this is exactly the kind of practical measure that makes a difference. Far from reducing productivity, flexible work enhances it. More than 28,000 respondents told us they are more productive when working from home, more focused, more efficient and better able to meet targets and deliver outcomes. This should not surprise us. When people are trusted, when they have autonomy, when their lives are supported, they do better work. And that is not just good for individuals, it is good for businesses, it is good for our economy and it is great for our local communities. In fact flexible work has been a key driver of increased workforce participation in Victoria. More people, especially parents, carers and people with disabilities, are able to enter or stay in the workforce because of the flexibility that work-from-home arrangements provide, and that matters.

It is also about balance. The most common arrangement workers told us they want is not full-time remote work, it is two days a week, a hybrid model – a model that maintains connections with colleagues, supports our CBDs and local businesses and fosters collaboration while still providing the flexibility people need. That is exactly the balanced approach our government is delivering. And yet, despite all of this evidence, despite the voices of workers, despite the economic benefits, despite the clear and practical advantages, we still hear calls to roll this back, calls to mandate a five-day return to the office, calls that dismiss flexible work as somehow lesser or less real. These steps are out of step with modern Victoria. They ignore the lived reality of working people. They underestimate the

capacity and commitment of our workforce, and they risk dragging us backwards at a time when we should be moving forwards. It is not just a debate about where work happens, it is a debate about trust.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (00:20): Where else would we rather be at 20 past midnight on this wonderful Friday morning than with –

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Belinda WILSON: I am simply asking everybody in the chamber where else they would like to be, member for Sandringham, and I know there is nowhere else you would like to be rather than in this chamber. What a delight it is to have the member for Brighton finally join us in the chamber at this fantastic hour, after we have been talking about this motion. He has been busy entertaining the troops out of the chamber today, busy fundraising for his campaign. He has had all of Brighton in here, raising money. What a great event he has had. I am here to discuss working from home –

James Newbury: It was a Jewish community event.

Belinda WILSON: That is fabulous, member for Brighton. It is fabulous to see that you are supporting our wonderful Jewish community. But tonight we are hearing all about working from home, and what would we like to be talking about more than that at this hour of the morning. All I can say is this is one of the most incredible policies that the Labor Party have come up with. I have amazing evidence for this, and that is my incredible daughter. I will say, at the ripe old age of 51 that I am, I had the old-fashioned sense in my youth that everyone had to work from the office. But I can tell you that legislating working from home is going to be absolutely life-changing for many people in my electorate, and my daughter is a great example of that. As someone who joined the workforce for the first time only a couple of years ago, she actually works from home four days a week some weeks, five days a week some weeks and one day a week some weeks. Her workplace, a very big organisation in Australia – I will not name them – have a very flexible workforce. What I see is an incredible shift and change in her health, in her mental health and also in the way that she works. Interestingly, while I was leaving to come into Parliament this morning, she was heading off to Pilates and was able to get home in time to start her day bright and early at 8:30. She is able to do a lot of extra activities because she is closer to them, being able to work from home. I have had this discussion with many, many people in our community about what a difference this is going to make.

Many people on the other side have questioned why we would want to legislate this. What they do not understand is that not every workplace, not every boss, is as flexible or sees the benefit that we see in this. The facts have spoken, and many people tonight have spoken about that. I would especially like to mention the member for Hastings, who spoke wonderfully about his incredible daughter. He made a number of points, which I had actually forgotten, about this incredible policy that we have. One was about people that actually cannot physically get to the office as they are struggling with certain health ailments but still have so much to give.

I remember really, really fondly when my children, 20 years ago, started school. The principal got up at that point and said to us as the very eager parents sending their first child off to school, 'Your child is going to do a job that no-one has even thought about yet, and they are going to work in a very different way to what you're used to and what you do.' I think that is really, really true. As the member for Hastings was talking to us about earlier, five years ago his daughter actually would not have been able to work at all. I think when we look at how that affects the capacity for so many different people, flexibility really changes people's lives.

The other thing that I find so interesting is that we have this incredible mindset that we work 9 to 5, take an hour for lunch and that is our day. The workforce and the flexibility of the workforce have really, really changed. The other thing that I find so interesting is that often from the other side we hear chants and points being made about how a firefighter, a nurse or a plumber is going to work from home. They are not going to because that is not how it works. Not everyone is going to be able to work from home. But what they can do is they might be able to stay at home and do their paperwork. Not

all nurses are on the ward. I know that I have got a couple of friends that are nurses that work in the back of house, and they may be able to do some of that work from home. What it does is it brings about a lot more flexibility. The other thing is that not everyone lives close to the city. In my community we are a good hour via public transport into the city. With the amazing new Metro Tunnel you can actually get to the city in 58 minutes. Driving in takes a little bit longer, because there is always a lot of traffic depending on what time you are leaving.

One of the other points, again that I never thought of either, is about taking your kids to activities. I know how much of a difference it makes dropping your child off at their dance class or their soccer game or soccer training and you being able to pick them up. That might not mean that you are able to do that every single day of the week, but it might mean that you can do it a couple of days a week. It might mean that you can actually help out in the canteen during your lunchbreak. It might actually mean that you get to spend an extra half an hour, hour or 2 hours with your children, and everyone knows that children are happier when their parents are around and involved in their lives. The other great thing that I know the member for Cranbourne spoke about earlier was volunteering. We all know what a difference volunteering makes to our community and how it makes people feel. By being able to be at home a couple of extra days a week, we know that you are going to have more accessibility to going and helping out in your community.

I think the other interesting thing about working from home is that it has a ricocheting effect on people. It is less cars on the road. It is more money in the pocket of the employee because they are not having to pay for petrol to drive into work. I know from firsthand experience that it also gives much more of a sense of self-worth, I would say, by being able to manage your time. Some people on the other side have this ill-conceived feeling that working from home means that you are going to work less. I know that what it does is it has you probably working more hours with more concentrated time. There is more productivity. You are not being interrupted by people in the office, and you are concentrated in your space working. The other great thing about working from home is that not everyone sits at a desk all day. Not all of us work the same. We do not all sit down and work from a very conceived, closed and quiet space in everything we do. I think that is one of the other great things about working from home, because you can work in a space and with flexibility where it works for you.

The other thing is that this is new. It is different. I think it is one of the most fabulous things that we are introducing. The great thing is that it will be legislated in September, which is really close. Can you believe it is June? Wow, where has the year gone? It will come into the Parliament in July, which is absolutely fantastic. It is my absolute pleasure to commend this motion to the house.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (00:29): I rise to speak on the motion that this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for failing to stop the Shadow Attorney-General's reckless campaign for a mandatory five-day office return, condemns the Shadow Attorney-General for spreading misinformation on working from home and for failing to commit to Labor's plan to legislate working from home as a right for all Victorians. What we are hearing from those opposite shows just how out of touch they are with the realities of modern working life and with the needs of working families across Victoria. Because of them, flexibility at work is not something to support; it is something to apparently attack.

The member for Brighton has made his position very clear, and we have heard that from many other speakers this evening. He has been very openly hostile to work-from-home arrangements, despite the overwhelming evidence that they benefit workers, families and the economy. Last year he demanded that the government force public servants back into the office full time. He claimed without justification that working from home was some kind of sweetheart deal and accused hardworking public servants of failing to deliver. He even said, 'Every public servant should be turning up to work,' as if the thousands of public servants working from home are not working hard every single day for Victorians and as if they are not delivering essential services, supporting vulnerable people and keeping our state running. He did not even consult his own colleagues before launching that attack, which seems to be a common theme of his. Even after others in his own party, including federal

colleagues, softened their stance, he and his leader still refused to rule out dragging tens of thousands of Victorian workers back to their desks five days a week. We have even heard comparisons from their allies equating working from home to extreme and offensive concepts, which tells you everything you need to know about the mindset that we are dealing with from those opposite.

They simply just do not get it. They do not understand that flexible work is not a fad, it is not a luxury and it is not going away. Flexible work is here to stay, especially for young parents who are both trying to juggle working with childcare and school arrangements on top of everything else in their daily lives. We know that working from home works for people in rural communities who want to connect to more job opportunities. We know that it works for people in our growing regional suburbs like Lucas, Miners Rest and Smythes Creek in my electorate who then do not have to commute to work in busy Ballarat or Melbourne.

That is why our government is acting on this legislation. As the member for Narre Warren North so perfectly put it previously to me, from 1 September 2026 Victoria will lead the nation with world-first work-from-home laws. Under these laws workers who can do their job from home will have a legal right to work from home two days a week. But this progress is at risk, as we know, because those opposite are not just attacking flexible work, they are planning cuts – many, many cuts and deep cuts – which is very much in their DNA. They have announced a plan to rip $40 billion out of the budget. Let us be honest about what that means. The majority of state spending goes to health and education, so you simply cannot cut $40 billion without cuts to hospitals and schools. We already know part of their plan includes cutting one in seven public sector jobs. That means fewer nurses, fewer child protection workers and fewer disability support staff. They might try to dress it up as a back office reduction, but we know that cuts at that scale do not stay in the back office. They hit the front line, they reduce services, they hurt communities and they shrink our economy, because when you cut jobs like that, you are not just cutting costs, you are cutting livelihoods. This is not responsible economic management, it is reckless. It is exactly what Victorians have seen before. Cuts are part of their DNA, as I have previously said.

In contrast, I am much more happy to say that our government understands what modern work looks like and what modern families need. We have listened to workers. We have heard from more than 36,000 Victorians through public consultation, and the message could not have been clearer. Nearly three-quarters of workers told us that the right to work from home is extremely important to them. Thousands said that they do not even feel comfortable asking their employer for flexible work because they fear it will be refused or, worse, held against them. Among those who have asked and been refused, most said the decision made their work and home life harder. These are not just abstract policy debates, these are real experiences. It saves time – hours every week that would otherwise be spent commuting. It saves money on fuel, parking, public transport and child care. For many families, that adds up to more than $5000 a year back in their pockets. That is not a small amount. It is groceries, it is bills, it is school expenses. In the cost-of-living crisis that we are in now, we know that every dollar counts, and more than $5000 a year back in pockets really does add up.

It also boosts productivity. Tens of thousands of workers have told us that they are more focused and get more done when working from home. Importantly, it boosts participation in our economy. Flexible work helps parents, carers and people with disability to stay in jobs and build careers, including women. The amount of women that I have doorknocked in suburbs like Miners Rest, Mitchell Park, Lucas, Smythes Creek, Haddon, Smythesdale – there are so many areas where so many women are at home when you knock on the door at 2 o'clock on a Wednesday because they are working from home and they have that flexibility and they know that they can go do the pick-up at school and then they can get back to work. As the member for Narre Warren North put it, not everyone is just working 9 to 5 anymore. Sometimes people might be working into the evenings or earlier in the morning. That flexibility is what really matters, and that is what we want to see with these work-from-home arrangements.

While we are looking forward, building a fairer, more flexible, more productive economy, those opposite are looking backwards. They very much want to drag us back to a one-size-fits-all, 1950s, male-dominated model of work, a model that does not reflect how people live today, a model that does not support working families, a model that simply does not work anymore. At its heart this is about choice. It is about trusting workers, and it is about recognising that when we support workers, we strengthen families and we strengthen our economy. Only Labor is backing that future. Only Labor is supporting families, and only Labor will protect these rights in law.

Assembly divided on amendment to amendment:

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

Noes (49): Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Amendment to amendment defeated.

Amendment agreed to; amended motion agreed to.

Budget papers 2026–27

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (00:46): I move:

> That this house takes note of the 2026–27 budget papers.

Can I just say that the rivers of gold continue to flow into the Ivanhoe electorate. There is no mistake. We have seen record funding in schools. The Austin Hospital was attempted to be privatised by the Kennett government, the Baillieu government and the Napthine government. We know that the Austin Hospital supports all Victorians, particularly those in the Ivanhoe electorate. A $275 million emergency department has been funded by the Allan Labor government to fund 100,000 emergency department treatments in a year at the Austin Hospital. Not only that but there is $14 million funded in the budget for the Heidelberg Primary School redevelopment. I look forward to the Deputy Premier coming out to see the latest works at Heidelberg Primary School, let alone Olympic Village Primary School, rebuilt by the Allan Labor government with a $6 million investment. Not only that but I can also go to the Ivanhoe Park redevelopment – $300,000 for the redevelopment of Ivanhoe Park. I have been in the running group in Ivanhoe for some 15 years. I do not mind also mentioning the Ford Park redevelopment, which has been delivered thanks to the work of our Allan Labor government. The North East Link is a fantastic project right through Bundoora and Ivanhoe. I know the member for Bulleen is a big fan of that project. It looks a little bit untidy over there in Bulleen, but it is all zipped up and tickety-boo in the Ivanhoe electorate, because that is going to take 15,000 trucks off Rosanna Road in the Ivanhoe electorate.

I am very pleased with the work that we have delivered at my old school, Viewbank College – an $11.5 million redevelopment of the performing arts centre at the old school there at Viewbank College, a fantastic redevelopment that has been delivered by the Allan–Andrews government. Investment in

schools in my electorate also includes the treehouse and the beehive at Ivanhoe Primary School. I can also go to Mother of God Primary School, which has now been combined with Ivanhoe East Primary School thanks to a great leasing arrangement made by our government to support more students to go to school across my electorate. I would also like to acknowledge the $5 million redevelopment that we have delivered at Macleod College for the science and maths technology rooms, another fantastic redevelopment in the electorate of Ivanhoe.

Across the budgets that we have delivered as a government, the removal of the Rosanna level crossing at Lower Plenty Road and new station at Rosanna have been welcomed by my community. We are just about to start, and money has been provided in the budget for the Macleod level crossing removal at Ruthven Street. The boom gates are down for 30 minutes in the 2-hour peak as 28 trains roll through that location in the morning peak. The only reason you can have 28 trains rolling through that intersection in the morning peak is because of the 1.5 kilometres of single track that we duplicated through a $110 million investment from our government. That is what has come from Labor budgets: a $110 million investment to duplicate 1.5 kilometres of track. That is why there are 28 trains rolling through the Macleod level crossing in the morning peak. The boom gates are down for half an hour, so what are we going to do? In this budget we continue to fund the early works to remove the level crossing at Ruthven Street in Macleod. That is a great project for Macleod. For the six train stations in my electorate, we had three boom gates. After this project we will only have one set of boom gates left in the Ivanhoe electorate. This is about significant investment in my electorate.

That investment has built on the $275 million emergency department redevelopment that is underway at the Austin Hospital, a hospital that those opposite tried to privatise under the Kennett government. The last time the Liberals held the seat of Ivanhoe they tried to privatise the Austin Hospital, and people in my electorate have not forgotten and I will be making sure they do not forget as we roll towards this election. I might just say that on social media alone the most highly engaged with posts have been anything about the Austin Hospital. I recommend to those opposite that they get on board and support the Austin Hospital. The $275 million investment in this year's budget and last year's budget is a significant demonstration of the investment from our government in the Ivanhoe electorate.

Can I say also that we have built a new library at Ivanhoe. We have invested some several hundred thousand dollars, thanks to the member for Bentleigh in his time in his previous portfolio. That is invested in the West Heidelberg library redevelopment, and I am really pleased to make sure that we have been able to do that. We have built a new library at Rosanna, thanks to a $1.5 million development –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Anthony CARBINES: I take up the interjection from the member for Frankston when I point out that at the TAFE campus of Melbourne Polytechnic in West Heidelberg we have seen a multimillion-dollar redevelopment thanks to the member in the other place, the former Minister for Skills and TAFE, who announced that project. I was pleased that my friend the member for Bundoora was out there as the current Minister for Skills and TAFE to check on that project just recently, a multimillion-dollar redevelopment of the TAFE centre out there in West Heidelberg in my electorate. As we bounce our way around, the Viewbank Primary School redevelopment has been concluded and opened. The Banyule Primary School redevelopment has been concluded and opened in my electorate. I can say that schools in my electorate have benefited from significant funding from our budgets in government.

I also want to point out some other significant developments that we have been able to deliver on. Some of those have been very recent, like the 20 per cent rego refund that has been provided to people in my electorate. They have been storming the electorate office just this week – $186 back in their pocket thanks to our 20 per cent rego refund. It has been taken up significantly by people in my electorate. I must say my first car, the 1985 Ford Laser, is still going. Everyone remembers their first car, and rego is a very significant cost. A 20 per cent registration refund puts money back into families' pockets. If you have got two cars, you can get that money too. That is a very significant project.

I want to also go to Olympic Park. Heidelberg United in my electorate is a great world game team, as the member for Pascoe Vale knows, and has an $8 million investment from our government. This goes to show that over the budgets in our electorate we continue to deliver significant projects. The Tarakan Street housing estate in West Heidelberg is 75 new homes. At Bell-Bardia estate on Bell Street, we are in the middle of over 100 new homes thanks to our engagement with the Albanese federal government. We have also just opened in Beetham Parade many, many new homes across a high-rise redevelopment along the railway line, which is again part of a development with the Albanese federal Labor government. This just goes to show that our government continues to invest in jobs, housing, health and education in my electorate.

Sporting facilities are very significant, and they are important to people in my electorate. We have invested in the Ivanhoe Park Croquet Club; the Ivanhoe bowling club, $300,000; and Chelsworth Park, $300,000 in this budget for new lighting. I want to say further that we have been able to do redevelopments at Macleod Football Club. Just last month I was able to open at Macleod Junior Football Club a multimillion-dollar redevelopment that we partnered with Banyule City Council on. Having a daughter who is a premiership player in the under-14s at Macleod Junior Football Club, it is fantastic to see that ground get the facilities it deserves for the local people in my electorate. A former member of this place Damian Drum opened the new lights at Macleod Park junior football ground many years ago, but the new pavilion says a lot about investment in local community and local families. Volunteers do an amazing job, but you need the facilities to back in local people and local families.

As we work our way across the Ivanhoe electorate, I am pleased to also point out that the redevelopment at Heidelberg Primary School of $14 million is coming up out of the ground. This is new classrooms and new facilities at Heidelberg Primary. There are some 650 students at that school just down the road from my electorate office. That project will largely conclude by the end of this year. I should also point out some of the projects that we continue to pursue in my electorate but were not successful in this year's budget. Rosanna Primary School and the redevelopment of the administrative wing and the remaining classrooms continues to be a key priority for me. Also, at Viewbank College they would like a new hall and gymnasium. I remember being there in 1986 when I started in year 7. It is still the same hall as it was right back then. I am very committed to working towards getting a new gym at Viewbank College all these years later. We have delivered an $11.5 million performing arts centre, and I am committed to delivering the new gym at Viewbank College. We will work towards that project, just as we did when we rebuilt La Trobe College in my electorate, also shared with the member for Bundoora. I am working very hard on the next stages of the Macleod College redevelopment. We have delivered $5 million for the science and technology wing. We are committed to delivering the rest of the school redevelopment. Right across my electorate, and with my colleague the member for Bundoora, the work that we have been able to deliver at each and every school, including up at Streeton, for local families has been very significant.

We continue with very significant large-scale projects such as the North East link, which will get 15,000 trucks off roads like Rosanna Road to make roads safer. The curfew will continue on Rosanna Road to keep our community safe. I want to make it very clear that across my electorate we have also been able to deliver, thanks to some budget funding for planning, mandatory heights in Ivanhoe – a very significant project that was supported by my community in Ivanhoe through a precinct structure plan that ensures there are mandatory heights. Those opposite, particularly when they were in government, were happy to have guidelines for mandatory heights, but when we came to office, under former member for Richmond Mr Wynne we ensured that there were mandatory heights in Ivanhoe. That is backed in in our electorate. It is very significant for the people in my community to make sure that neighbourhood character is protected across the Ivanhoe electorate.

Not only have we delivered Rosanna a new library, Ivanhoe a new library and now a new library at West Heidelberg; we are also making sure that the new emergency department at the Austin Hospital will treat up to 100,000 people a year. It is more than lifting its capacity. We know that project, at

$275 million, is very significant. It is only a Labor government that has built two hospitals on one site, the Austin and Mercy hospitals. Not only that but there is the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre, and there is our continued support for Ringwood Private Hospital across the road. There is the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and the funding that we have been able to provide for the elective surgery centre and ongoing services in the remembrance garden. Can I just say that health services are at the core in the Ivanhoe electorate. That is what we do best. They employ so many people in my community.

I want to say also that for the SES in West Heidelberg on the old West Heidelberg police station site there is a multimillion-dollar redevelopment. The SES cover several local government areas, but it is being built there in West Heidelberg. It has got so many new volunteers backing it in and being part of that service. It is a very significant redevelopment for the people of my community. It is only appropriate that our volunteers in emergency services have the very best services to support them. I know that is a project that they appreciate. The one that we have just left off the list might also be the Chandler Highway bridge redevelopment. People said it could not be done. At over $100 million, the Chandler Highway bridge redevelopment is a very significant project that has opened up the freeway between the Ivanhoe and Kew electorates and made it a lot easier for us to get from one to the other.

Can I say also, on the generosity of spirit in the Ivanhoe electorate, when we talk about state budgets, many students in Ivanhoe and East Ivanhoe attend school at Kew High, so several years ago we worked very hard to make sure that we received a multimillion-dollar redevelopment of Kew High School, which I advocated for and delivered with the former member for Kew Mr Smith. I do not mind saying that that is a project delivered in the Kew electorate that shows again that we are open minded and that we are about supporting people in our community and making sure that those across the Ivanhoe and Kew electorates get the services that they deserve. So many students in Ivanhoe and East Ivanhoe attend Kew High that we made sure we got a redevelopment delivered, but it took an Allan Labor government to get the multimillion-dollar investment for new services and facilities. The member for Sydenham, who was able to open that project in her time as the Minister for Education, is a fair indication of the ongoing investment in schools and people's wellbeing from our government.

Can I say further that across the Ivanhoe electorate, over very many years, we have seen every school get investment and redevelopment. We have seen significant redevelopment at the Austin Hospital. We have seen our wellbeing and recreation facilities upgraded. We have seen the North East Link, which will get 15,000 trucks off local roads. We have seen the Chandler Highway bridge totally redesigned and redeveloped. We have seen level crossings removed at Rosanna. We are seeing level crossings removed at Macleod. Only a Labor government in Ivanhoe will make sure we continue to be put first in the community, protect our jobs and our services and look out for our people.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (01:02): I rise to speak on the 2026–27 state budget on behalf of the people of South-West Coast – the hardworking families, farmers, small businesses, volunteers and community leaders who are doing everything right yet continue to be let down by a government that has lost control of the state's finances and lost touch with regional communities. This is not a budget for the future; this is a budget that exposes the consequences of more than a decade of financial mismanagement, broken promises and misplaced priorities. After more than 11 years in office, this Andrews–Allan Labor government has delivered not just a debt crisis but a housing crisis, a health crisis, an education crisis, a roads crisis, an energy crisis and now, most frighteningly, a growing crime crisis.

When Labor came into office in 2014, Victoria's debt was just over $20 billion, but by the end of the forward estimates we will exceed $200 billion of debt in this state. Victorians now have to find around $1.35 million every hour, every day, just to pay the interest on that debt – not to reduce the debt, not to build hospitals or schools, not to fix roads but just to pay the interest. That money delivers no new services, no new infrastructure and no relief for struggling families. While Victorians tighten their belts with this government, which continues to max out the state's credit card, there is no credible plan to repair the damage. None of this was unforeseeable. In fact it was glaringly obvious. Anyone with a

basic understanding of economics or who just has experience – who has been in business – would know that historically low interest rates do not last forever. Yet this government borrowed as though money would remain free forever. That is not responsible financial management, that is reckless, and now we are all paying the price.

Despite all this borrowing, taxing and raiding of public funds, regional communities are still being neglected. What do the people of south-west Victoria actually have to show for the record debt and the record taxes? We still have no PET scanner for south-west Victoria; no gymnastics centre, which was promised prior to the last election, in Portland; no funding for the Warrnambool Surf Life Saving Club redevelopment; no commitment for the Lookout drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility; and no funding for ageing swimming pools in Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Heywood and all over our regions.

The promises made before elections become excuses afterwards. Take the promised gymnastics centre in Portland: the community was understandably excited when it was announced before the 2022 election by Labor, but it quickly became clear that the project was not properly planned. There was no detailed scope, no certainty around costs and no proper understanding of what actually was required. Years later, here we are today and there is still no gymnastics centre. Worse still, the government has undermined the broader community vision for a multisport hub that would support basketball and other sporting groups. Basketball participation in Portland is booming, with children playing late into the evening on weeknights because demand for court space is so high. Families and volunteers stepped up, but the government has not.

The same story applies to the long-promised PET scanner. When the Warrnambool Base Hospital redevelopment was announced in 2020, the government claimed it had been carefully designed to meet future health care needs, yet there was no PET scanner included in that design. Then, just before the election, Labor suddenly promised as an afterthought a PET scanner. Four years later, there is still no PET scanner, and patients in south-west Victoria are still travelling long distances for critical diagnostic cancer investigations. The excuses have become absurd. We are now told the PET scanner is interdependent with the new hospital development, but if the redevelopment was supposedly futureproofed in the first place, why was the scanner never included? I am not doubting we need it, it is just that we are getting so many lies told to us. The truth is there was another option. A private provider was prepared to install the scanner at St John of God hospital. It is also a private provider that is in the public hospital. Let us be clear: there is no extra cost to the patients in Warrnambool or in the region. The services actually could be already operating today. Instead the government has delayed, dithered and failed to deliver.

I am so deeply disappointed that this budget contained no funding for the Warrnambool Surf Life Saving Club redevelopment. The club has done everything asked of it. Volunteers have fundraised tirelessly, plans have been developed, and the need is clearly obvious. These are people who patrol our beaches, rescuing swimmers and keeping families safe, protecting not only residents but also visitors from right across Victoria and interstate and travellers from overseas who come to enjoy our unique, beautiful coastline, yet after years and years they are left waiting while the government hides behind bureaucratic excuses. This government is more comfortable hiding behind red tape than supporting volunteers who save lives on our coastline.

South-west communities were also hoping to see support for the ageing pools at the Warrnambool AquaZone and Port Fairy community pool. There is nothing – no funding, no commitment, no plan. There is still no funding for the Lookout rehabilitation facility. For more than a decade the south-west community has campaigned for dedicated drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. Every other part of Victoria has either a facility or funding committed. South-west Victoria remains the glaring omission. Families dealing with addiction deserve better.

The Allan Labor government has completely failed South-West Coast with its farcical management of our roads. Tonight is the night to really highlight that, with so many cars damaged on the Princes Highway. You should see my inbox; it is inundated with people who are telling me what happened. I

had a young woman say, 'I am too frightened to drive home tonight.' The government is going to use the rain that we have had as an excuse, but we have rain every winter. We are a dairy farming region for a reason. We like the rain; we like it because it grows grass, and we can build roads just like they do in Queensland, where they have torrential rain, which is not what we have had. It is a normal event of a few inches of rain, but our roads are falling apart purely due to mismanagement and lack of maintenance by this government. The government needs to stop wasting taxpayers money on endless pothole patching and return to proper preventative road maintenance, including implementing the recommended minimum 10 per cent annual road maintenance standard. What is happening on our roads has become so ridiculous it feels less like infrastructure management and more like an unaired episode of *Utopia*.

Earlier this year electronic signs appeared on the Princes Highway, proudly announcing roadworks coming in March and April. The government was spruiking works before a single shovel had hit the ground. Then when locals noticed the dates had passed and nothing had happened, the government quietly removed the signs – and nothing happened. Witch's hats and site sheds, like a travelling circus, were packed up overnight before anyone could ask questions, and the roadworks themselves never eventuated. Instead crews simply returned to patch potholes – not to rebuild the roads and not to properly resurface them, just to shovel material into holes. Then only weeks later they came back and patched the same holes again. At Panmure I watched workers compacting asphalt into potholes by literally jumping up and down on them, and tonight that has come home to roost. With the rain we have had today, what we have seen is those potholes completely fall apart, as every good dairy farmer who knows how to fix a road knew would happen. Genuinely I thought perhaps the department had abandoned engineering standards and moved into interpretive dance when I saw them jumping up and down on potholes. Then somehow it became more absurd. Just last week I literally witnessed workers using leaf blowers – the same kind I use in my driveway – to blow the water out of potholes before patching them. I genuinely did. The only problem was it was raining at the time. Does anyone else see the irony here, blowing water out of a pothole while the rain is coming down around you? You honestly could not script this stuff.

The frightening part is that this is no accident. The government's own budget papers now effectively measure success by the number of potholes patched, rather than whether the roads are actually being repaired properly. The KPI appears to be quantity not quality. In other words, the quicker the pothole fails, the sooner they patch it again and count it twice. And then again, a third time – and gosh, after last night's rain, they will be counting a lot.

Country Victorians are not fools. Farmers, contractors and quarry operators understand roads. One constituent who owns a gravel pit told me that cows standing in the paddock watching the repairs had a better understanding of road maintenance than this government does. Frankly, after what I have seen, I am struggling to argue with him. This is not infrastructure management. It is a wasteful, incompetent and embarrassingly irresponsible use of taxpayer money. Roads between Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Portland, Terang, Cobden and Macarthur are riddled with potholes, crumbling edges and dangerous surfaces. When I have people texting me like I have today that they are frightened to go home from work because it is 5:30 and it is getting dark and they cannot see the potholes, I understand completely their fear. Local people are sick of damaging tyres, rims and suspensions because this government failed to maintain the roads properly in the first place.

While infrastructure crumbles, crime is spiralling. Victoria Police currently has around 1500 vacancies. Regional police stations in Portland, Koroit, Macarthur, Heywood and Terang have reduced operating hours because resources are stretched so thin. Communities like Warrnambool and Portland are seeing home invasions, retail theft and antisocial behaviour that many residents say they have never experienced before in our part of the world, and I would concur. I never even locked my house until two years ago. Victorians no longer feel safe, as they once did, and this is what happens when governments fail to back police and fail to impose meaningful consequences for criminal behaviour.

The Liberal–Nationals coalition believes communities deserve to feel safe. That means stronger bail laws, real consequences for repeat offenders and proper support for frontline police who want to do the job they signed up to do. This government claims only Labor can protect services, but after, what, more than a decade, Victorians have actually seen that it is a disaster here in Victoria – a health system under immense pressure, an education system stretched beyond capacity, a housing crisis driving families out of the market, an energy crisis pushing up power bills, a road maintenance crisis across regional Victoria and now a growing crisis of community safety.

Victorians are paying more tax than ever before and receiving so much less in return. Teachers are exhausted, nurses are burnt out and police are stretched thin. Families are struggling with the soaring cost of living. Businesses are closing or moving interstate because Victoria has become too expensive and too difficult a place to invest in. Farmers who help drive our economy and feed our state are now being slugged with the emergency services and volunteer tax – I refuse to call it a levy – a new tax expected to raise billions more than the former fire services levy. At the same time, the agriculture budget has been cut, and that sends entirely the wrong message to Victoria's most productive sector.

Energy prices remain another concern. Victorians were promised lower bills, but show me someone who has seen that. Instead, households and businesses are paying more. Manufacturers are under enormous pressure. Investments are leaving the state, and confidence has fallen. The cumulative effect of soaring land taxes, the vacant residential land tax, the windfall gains tax, has made Victoria increasingly unattractive for investment. Rental properties are becoming less viable, housing supply is constrained and rents continue to rise. Young Victorians are finding it harder than ever to achieve the dream of home ownership. This is the inevitable result of poor policy settings and reckless financial management.

We on this side of the house know there is a better way. We believe in responsible financial management, and it matters. We know it is going to be tough. We know there is a hard road ahead, but we have a plan. It is time for a fresh start, it is time for a disciplined financial response, it is time for honesty and integrity and it is time to restore hope, confidence and opportunity.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (01:17): I rise to support the 2026–27 Victorian state Labor budget, and it is a budget that is all about making life easier, safer and more affordable for every single Victorian. Further to my contribution of 13 May, I would like to highlight again the various other supports and initiatives that are contained in this budget around cost of living, jobs and job creation, skills, education, transport, health and wellbeing, our sport community and visitor economy, action on the environment, social justice and of course, importantly, community safety. These are the things that matter to every single Victorian. These are the things that we invest in through this budget. These are the things that the Liberal Party stand against, and these are the things that the Liberal Party will cut with the $40 billion of cuts contained in their shadow budget and their sacking of one in every seven public servants, which will have a direct impact on public servants and emergency services and frontline services.

I would like to take the house to the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) section of the budget papers, which also contains $100 million towards improving bus services in my community, beginning with the 526 bus route through Coburg and Newlands, which will be really lifting and boosting its service to seven days, including on Sundays for the first time, with an average service frequency of every 20 minutes. The 561 bus route from Pascoe Vale station to La Trobe University will get an increase in weekday peak and weekend frequencies as well. The 542 bus from Pascoe Vale station to Roxburgh Park will have a full service uplift from Monday to Saturday, and Sunday services will be extended to 10 pm – and I know that is welcome news for the member for Greenvale and his constituents living further north on that bus route. The 503 route through Essendon to East Brunswick via Albion Street in Brunswick West will get a boost: an extra 25 weekly services delivering consistent 20-minute weekday frequencies outside of peak times, with improved connections, importantly, to the Craigieburn train line. And route 508 from Alphington to Moonee Ponds via Victoria Street in Brunswick West will get a significant boost and uplift as well.

The budget also contains $1 billion to repair roads and potholes right across the state. In my community we have had quite a number of investments to date already to improve our local road and transport network, but some in particular that I would like to draw the minister's attention to that deserve further attention and further assistance and further improvements include Bell Street, Elm Grove and the Urquhart Street corridor around the Coburg Primary School community. We have recently installed some further speed humps on Elm Grove, which will really help reduce and calm traffic through there. Thank you to the department of transport for installing those, but there is more work that needs to be done around that entire precinct.

On Moreland Road, the department of transport have said they support a 40-kilometre speed reduction from 60 kilometres and support a new pedestrian crossing being installed at the Queen Street intersection. On Melville Road, the department of transport are conducting a holistic review of Melville Road and they do support an in-principle speed reduction including, for the first time ever, installing a new 40-kilometre school zone for St Joseph's Primary and Brunswick North West Primary School communities as well. DTP also supports speed reductions through Coburg North, from O'Hea Street up to Boundary Road, and that will help improve safety for the Mercy College students in particular, and the Australian International Academy college students as well.

On Gaffney Street, DTP have agreed to review this more recently, with a view to reducing the limit from 60 kilometres down to 50 kilometres. That is particularly important for the students of St Oliver Plunkett Primary School and also Coburg North Primary School who particularly need some further road treatments. We installed a new pedestrian crossing last year that was delivered for the Pascoe Vale Primary School community just west of Cumberland Road. But we need to do more, really, further east from Cumberland Road all the way to where the Bunnings is, covering the Sydney Road intersection as well. Coburg North families are advocating for a new pedestrian crossing at the front of Harmony Park in the vicinity of the Sacca's supermarket, which is importantly needed. The St Oliver's community are asking for further safety treatments in that section of Gaffney Street around the Landells Road section, right at the front of the church, where many of their students and families cross every single day as well.

Of course there is more to do on Murray Road. We have already installed and funded the 40-kilometre school zone for the first time on Murray Road through Coburg, by the way, from Stockade Avenue all the way to Connolly Avenue over the Merri Creek bridge. But we need to keep advocating to extend that further as well to Elizabeth Street to support the Barry Beckett child care and Newlands Primary School families as well. There is more to do as well on Boundary Road, Cumberland Road, Sussex Street and many of our other major arterials and major connector roads and streets.

Importantly, the budget contains $16.8 million for the school crossing supervisor program. The state government meets 50 per cent of the cost of supervisors, in partnership with councils. On that front, I am pleased to say, we did support the installation of a 40-kilometre school zone on Coonans Road for the Pascoe Vale South Primary School families, which the council, to their credit, have installed. The school community is calling for council to help facilitate a road crossing supervisor at the Parkstone Avenue intersection there, which I strongly support as well.

But the alternative to this when it comes to transport is quite stark, because the Liberals would not have built the Metro rail tunnel. They would not have built the West Gate Tunnel. They certainly would not have built the North East Link either. If they got in, they would be cutting the extra train services that we have funded for the Upfield line and the Craigieburn line. Also, they would be cutting the bus services. You cannot fund these services by cutting $40 billion out of the budget. I am waiting for the media release from you guys to confirm that you welcome these extra services, and I will wait to hear that imminently.

In terms of health, $32 billion is going into our health system. Our hospital workforce has grown by 50 per cent. We have hired an extra 17,000 nurses and 7000 extra doctors since 2014. The Northern Hospital is continuing to receive $114 million in this budget as part of its overall $812 million upgrade

that continues. The Austin Hospital receives a further $83 million towards its $275 million upgrade as well. We are growing the reach of the virtual emergency department, the community chemist care program and urgent care program. I commend the former Minister for Health for her efforts in rolling that out and in visiting my electorate on several occasions to help support and champion that initiative. Importantly, it is about providing – especially women and young families as well – services without the need for a GP script on many conditions, things like contraceptives, shingles, UTIs, travel vaccinations and so much more. We are expanding the urgent care clinic in Moonee Ponds, but we have also recently opened, thanks to the federal Albanese government, a new Coburg Medicare urgent care clinic in Sydney Road, which is already operating, well and truly, and has been very well received by the community.

We have opened 15 women's health clinics across the state, added $109 million for 4000 more kids' surgeries and 45,000 more specialist appointments. There is $2.3 million to support the secondary school immunisation program. Free tampons and pads continue to be rolled out as well. We have changes to ADHD prescriptions. Public fertility services continue to expand and we continue to invest in them. We are investing $2.5 billion for Victorians with a disability through home and aged care disability services outside the NDIS, specialist disability accommodation, wheelchair taxi support, advocacy and much more.

But again, what would the alternative be when it comes to health in the Liberals shadow budget? Cuts, slashing and burning. The last time the Liberals built a hospital in this state was when Premier Hamer was the Premier of this state. We are going back decades. We have delivered the Frankston hospital, the Footscray Hospital, the Melton hospital, the Joan Kirner hospital in Sunshine and so much more.

We continue to invest in tourism and sport. We are the major events and cultural capital of the country and the world. Whatever the Liberals say or how they try and talk us down is just totally untrue. We have got a lot to be proud of here. For tourism and major events there is $15.5 million to support and attract more events. We continue to be the envy of the country with the Australian Open, the grand prix, the Spring Racing Carnival and the AFL Grand Final long weekend. The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre continues to attract major business investments, which are the highest yielding events. John Brumby and Steve Bracks were the ones that extended it. It was Labor that delivered the Geelong convention centre as well. I do not remember a state Liberal government delivering a Geelong convention centre. We have attracted the NFL to the MCG for the first time in this country. We have got the live sites happening for the FIFA World Cup at Fed Square and right across the state – go the Socceroos – with the first game coming up in two weekends time against Türkiye.

There is $29 million for the NGV transformation and much funding – the former Minister for Creative Industries is here as well – for the contemporary music initiative, the Victorian Music Development Office, the songwriting in schools program and music work initiatives as well. We are supporting the Victorian screen incentive through film, television, visual effects, animations and games employment initiatives. We are supporting our multicultural communities with a whole range of events, and we have a Regional Events Fund. In terms of sport, we have funded the Brunswick Hockey Club with $468,000 to deliver a new pitch at McDonald Reserve on Bell Street in Coburg, which I have previously highlighted and drawn the chamber's attention to.

Significant investment and real action on the environment is in this budget, beginning with $700,000 that we have allocated to Coburg Lake and the Merri-bek council to deliver new public amenities, restrooms and toilets to accommodate the growing community events needs of suburbs in that area. Funding will go towards the rebuild of the public restroom facilities on the Murray Road side of Coburg Lake, which are well and truly past their use-by date, and help provide new, comfortable and accessible facilities that are welcoming for everyone. The Premier visited on 23 April, and we met with the Alevi community and the Kurdish community. Their two combined annual events at Coburg Lake attract 10,000 people each year, and the funding is very much welcomed by those communities, who have continued to advocate to me for some time for those facilities. They will also be welcomed

by the families who recreate, commute and go for play dates or walks through Coburg Lake on a daily basis – those that live in Coburg, Pentridge, North Coburg, Newlands, Kodak and others as well.

We are introducing the Victorian midday power saver. About 2.6 million households will be eligible for 3 hours of free power in the middle of the day every day. Families could save $300 per year, or $1070 if they have solar batteries as well. And on that note, I commend as well that we recently opened a community battery in Brunswick and also previously in Coburg. We switched on the battery in Brunswick, at the 797 Sydney Road car park, thanks to a federal Labor government grant of $500,000, in partnership with Merri-bek council. It is a 500-kilowatt battery which complements the 400-kilowatt battery in Hudson Street in Coburg we previously opened. Local families can store renewable energy during the day to use at night when power is more expensive. Household rooftop solar can also share in the benefits: lower bills, fewer emissions and less pressure on the grid.

On renewables, we are bringing back the SEC. There is $511 million for a wind farm in Delburn and $91.9 million towards the Horsham renewable energy park. That is all about meeting our targets as well: 65 per cent renewables by 2030, 95 per cent by 2035 and progressing the Solar Homes program, which the Liberals have not committed to retaining if they get back in.

The container deposit scheme continues to go gangbusters: 3 billion containers have been returned and recycled, with $300 million in refunds in people's pockets. Across Merri-bek, as of November 2025, that equates to 42.68 million containers deposited and $4.26 million in 10-cent refunds. I visited the container deposit site at 18–20 Dairy Drive in North Coburg recently, which has officially processed 8 million containers, which means $800,000 returned into the pockets of locals. It is an industrial-scale recycling depot operated by the incredible team at KARI, who are providing employment and social enterprise opportunities for First Nations communities through the recycling and sustainability sector. It was great to join those teams: Tony Catania from TOMRA Cleanaway; Steve Rainey from TOMRA, their business development manager; Casey Ralph, the KARI CEO; and the wonderful depot workers Max, Cain, Casey, Jake and Julia, who proudly help recycle and deposit our containers as well.

There is $21.5 million to bolster illegal dumping taskforce work and to take strong action on illegal dumping and litter throughout our community. I was pleased on that note to join the Clean Up Australia Day team with the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and Kelvin Thomson as well, who is the chair there, on 1 March to help keep the Moonee Ponds Creek safe. We have invested $10 million already to revitalise the Moonee Ponds Creek. The federal Albanese Labor government has invested a further $5 million to continue those works in partnership with Melbourne Water, which we look forward to hopefully kicking off by the end of the year. That is the goal.

We continue to progress our measures on housing, particularly through the central Coburg, Brunswick and Sydney Road activity centre, $860 million for the Social Housing Growth Fund to deliver 7000 social homes for those in need and those who need them most, as well as extending stamp duty concessions for buying off-the-plan units, townhouses and apartments until 21 April 2027. The budget allocates $70 million towards assertive outreach services, with nine new teams across Merri-bek and Hume to help those in need and those experiencing homelessness as well. But we know what the Liberals policy is when it comes to housing: they will cut the activity centres, they will cut 300,000 homes and they want to shove all the growth out to the outer suburbs, with no infrastructure committed to accompany that.

On social justice there is funding for quite a range of initiatives. Community safety I spoke about earlier today at length, with the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026. This is a budget that is about helping Victorians with the cost of living and making things safer, more affordable and easier for Victorian families to live, learn, work and raise a family.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (01:32): Unfortunately I follow the member for Pascoe Vale again today. This budget does not make life easier for anyone. It does not improve anyone's life; everyone

is actually doing it tougher. The other night I did some numbers. I compared the 2019–20 budget, the first after the 2018 election, with this year's budget, which is effectively two election cycles. If you look at it, the budget should be a measure of how the government are spending the taxes they raise from us to make our lives better, and on all measures I cannot see how we are any better off over these terms of government under the Labor Party in our lives, in our children's lives, in our communities or in anything. If you look at the comparisons, the tax revenue has increased by 70 per cent over that time. As the old saying goes, when the Labor Party in government run out of money they start taking yours. The government's hand is in our pocket all the time, continually taking money now. The tax revenue in that time from 2019–20 to 2026–27 has gone up 70 per cent. There have been more than 60 new or increased taxes over that particular time. In my office we constantly get people coming in complaining, particularly about land tax and the reduction of the threshold for land tax. People who have saved all their lives and have made a modest investment, particularly in a rental property, for their retirement are now getting tax bills that are making that investment unattractive, if not impossible to keep.

The tax revenue has gone up by 70 per cent, and the government spending has gone up by 63 per cent. But I am not sure where it is being spent, because I cannot see it in my electorate. The roads are worse. The schools need maintenance. They are not getting the maintenance they need, let alone any rebuilds. I had an example recently where we had a major campaign. The toilets at Swan Hill College are past their best-by date by about 25 years. We had the parents of the current students there. Last year the leadership group of the school had a program to try and get the toilets upgraded because they are just so bad, and their parents said, 'They were bad when we were at school, let alone now.' I do not know where all this increased government spending is going, because we are not seeing it in regional Victoria.

The public sector wage bill has gone up by 57 per cent over that period of time. But what is more concerning when you actually look at the make-up of that increase in the public sector wage bill is that the majority of that increase is in the higher salary levels of the public sector. It is not in the people that actually do the real work. It is in those that sit in offices in Melbourne and scheme and plot to support the government's spin on how they are ripping everyone off into the future. The public sector headcount has gone up by 22 per cent, and the full-time equivalent has also gone up by approximately 22 per cent.

For everything we need to do now we are told, 'Go to the website and do it online.' I do not know why in today's world when we have artificial intelligence we actually need so many public sector people when we are told to do everything online. And for those that have tried to do things online, it is not always a pleasant experience. I recently renewed my gun licence, and I think I have spoken about this here in the chamber before. I was sent a note to say, 'You qualify to do your online renewal', so I went through the process. It took me about 40 minutes. And when I got to the final last question, they said, 'Oh, no, because you've changed your address you can't do it online. You've now got to go back and do it on a paper form and send it in.' Why couldn't we be told that at the start of the process? What person dreamed up the fact that they would actually email you, say you qualify to do it online and then have you go through the whole process, upload bits of paper – and if you have not got the scanning capability that is not much fun, particularly for older people that have not got the computer skills – upload the information to put on it and then when you get to the final question you get told, no, you cannot do it online, you have actually got to go and put a paper copy in. I do not know who designed that, but it is so typical of the things that this government designed for us to do that actually make life harder for us, and I am not sure what useful purpose they serve for the government.

In all that increased taxation, all that increased spending, the rhetorical question that most people ask me is: if that is the case, why are our roads getting worse? Why are there bigger potholes? Why are we having people having damage to their motor cars? Why are we having people who have tyres that burst, get damaged and have to be replaced on the roads because they are so bad, but we are paying more taxes? It just does not make sense. What they also say to me is that when roads are repaired they

do not last. So the crew go out, they dig it out, they put some new soil in, they put some new top on it, they seal it again and within weeks it has broken up again. It would appear – and it is the rhetorical question again – that people just do not know how to fix roads properly at all at the moment or have all the skills that we used to have. When roads used to be built, they used to last. Now they do not last at all. So for all those extra taxes, for all the money we are paying the government, it is not being spent well.

That equally applies to the amenity of our communities. As I said, at Swan Hill College the toilets are an absolute disgrace. The school actually went and got a quote from a registered builder as to how much it would cost to get it done, but the Victorian School Building Authority, their quote was almost double the price, and they were told, 'You cannot do this school project because it has to fit in with the VSBA', even though they are, I believe, ripping the system off and taking money for nothing, because a registered builder could have done it for substantially less, but they were told they were not able to do it. And that happens all the time.

The Rochester CFA–SES got money post the 2022 floods to build a new fire shed and a new SES shed. That has still not been built. When you look at the price from the emergency services building authority of what it is going to cost to build a new CFA–SES shed, all the farmers in the district just shake their head in horror. How could it cost that much to build a shed? If the locals were actually allowed to build it, they would build it for a fraction of the price, it would be built and they would be in it now, rather than nearly four years on from that flood not seeing one dollar of that project actually spent to put something on the ground.

The former Premier was in Rochester post the floods, and he had the press release with him about the announcement for that particular project. The fire brigade captain at the time actually asked the Premier to sign the press release to make sure it happened. That is how cynical the community were about this government, because they just know that it is all spin. There is a press release, and nothing ever happens. Tragically for the community of Rochester, that CFA shed has not yet started four years later. The shed they have is not fit for purpose. They do campaign fires continually; they send the truck and crews away to the major bushfires. They cannot fit all their equipment in the current fire shed and have room to change and have multigender change rooms for the women that serve on the brigade as well. Four years on, that project has not been done, and that is the same right across my electorate. The flood funding that was promised has been very tardy, very slow to come through, and people are still suffering because of those major floods that were there in the past.

The Rochester community is still feeling it. Not everyone is back in their houses – not everyone has actually been able to repair their houses after the floods – and what they all want is for the government to actually look at the management of the Eppalock reservoir and look at how that reservoir can be managed better to reduce the peak floods. You will always have floods, but make sure the floods are managed at a level that does not flood so many houses in the future. In the 2011 floods about half the town flooded. In the 2022 floods, which were bigger, nearly the whole town, nearly every house in Rochester, got flooded. People thought they were going to be safe. They were not safe. People took their cars out of town and put them on a road that had never flooded before, and those cars still got flooded. That is how bad it was. That is why they have been constantly asking the government to do something about how Eppalock is managed – manage the full level in a wet year but put an extra outlet in so when there is a major event there can be water put down the river before the peak of the flood so the town does not flood so much. They are the sorts of things that I would have liked to have seen funded in the budget.

The other issue I would have loved to have seen funded in the budget is some money for the Swan Hill bridge. The federal government actually put $60 million into the Swan Hill bridge project in 2019. Some of that money was drawn down by the New South Wales roads authority to do the detailed planning and community consultation, which has been progressing. The New South Wales government has put $7.5 million into that project, but what have we had from Victoria? Absolutely zip. We need the money to progress the new Swan Hill bridge. It is not fit for purpose anymore. With

the extra trusses that have been put on the bridge to make sure it does not fall in, it is now back to a single lane. It is a major truck route. Trucks that are mass accredited to have full weight have to go all the way to Robinvale now, which is 150 kilometres further, to actually cross the river. That bridge is a major impediment to the economic activity of Swan Hill, and it needs replacing. It is progressing, with the New South Wales government doing work, but there is no work being done by Victoria and no financial contribution from Victoria. We can spend tens and tens of billions of dollars in Melbourne – if you listen to Mr Watson, you can have $15 billion of that rorted away by the CFMEU – but we cannot get $100 million to build a bridge in Swan Hill. There is something wrong with the system when billions and billions of dollars is being spent in Melbourne on projects that are being rorted but we cannot get money for a local project at all.

Another issue I would like to raise is the stormwater flooding of Kyabram. Again, we cannot get money from the government to actually do the work to put in better drainage for that community. They are fortunate they do not live on a river, but if there is a major rain event, the town floods. People's houses recently got flooded when there was a major rain event there. That should not be happening. There are ways to manage that, but this government just does not care about regional Victoria. They are happy to spend money in Melbourne. We listened to the member for Pascoe Vale, with the list he had for the northern suburbs. We can never, ever have a list like that in regional Victoria. We started to have it with the Regional Growth Fund when we were in government. But what was one of the things that the Labor Party cut? Once the budget allocation to the Regional Growth Fund ran out there was no more money for regional Victoria. Ever since that money ran out in 2018 there has been no major initiative for regional Victoria that funds community infrastructure, funds sporting infrastructure or rebuilds our schools. As I said, a toilet for Swan Hill secondary college is not too much to ask. They have got a toilet now that they had to close and install portable toilets because it is just so bad. That is not a lot to ask from a government that has increased the tax take in Victoria by 60 per cent. We are not 60 per cent better off with all that tax. As I said, we are worse off.

What I would like the Victorian government to do is have a hard look at what their priorities are and actually start to spend money on all of Victoria. A number of years ago we asked the independent Parliamentary Budget Office to do the work on comparing the capital spend on metropolitan Melbourne versus regional Victoria, and consistently now for a number of years the independent Parliamentary Budget Office has said that about 11 or 12 per cent of the state capital spend goes into regional Victoria. Twenty-five per cent of the population lives in regional Victoria. It would be only reasonable to expect that you would actually get a similar amount of the allocation of capital spend into those communities, but for some reason the Labor Party just does not see past the ring of Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and the greater metropolitan area. There is nothing much that gets past that. I do not think most people in the Labor government would even realise there is a Victoria to the west of Ballarat or to the north of Bendigo.

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Peter WALSH: It is so true, member for Macedon, that we have a real battle to get anything done out in our electorates. I will give you, as minister, credit for the new emergency department at the Swan Hill hospital, but that took years and years and years. It got to the point where it was unsafe for people to work in it before it was done, whereas if you are closer to Melbourne that money gets spent all the time. Are we better off with this year's budget? No, we are not. Are we worse off? We most definitely are. As they say, when it comes to roads, if you fix country roads, you save country lives. That is the risk that we have: the roads are so appalling that we end up with fatalities and injuries all the time.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (01:47): I am very happy to rise to give my contribution on the take-note motion for the 2026–27 budget. I would like to say a big thankyou to the member for Pascoe Vale for his very energetic, enthusiastic – I was going to say longwinded – and intricate discussion on the take-note motion, on all the big things that have been going on in the budget. He certainly focused on some of the big stuff.

Every time I have gone through and started to read the budget, there is a song that just gets stuck in my head. It is the Paul Kelly song *From Little Things Big Things Grow.* This budget is really quite like that song for me. When you first look at it, some of the numbers do not seem to be hugely game changing – you know, 20 per cent rebate on your rego, half-price public transport after the free period has ended, free glasses for kids. You would be forgiven for thinking, 'So what? That's not going to change anyone's life.' But I reckon it does, and here is why. That rego rebate is up to $186 for one car and $372 if you have got two. For a family in Hastings or Somerville or Tyabb, that is not just a discount, that is a trip to the movies they say yes to instead of no. That is the birthday present they actually bought. That is the dentist appointment they stopped putting off because something else always came up first. Money is not abstract. It lives in decisions, and this budget is quietly shifting some of those decisions towards a yes instead of a no. The same thing goes with public transport, because cutting fares in half and making it free for every kid under 18 is not really a transport policy, it is a cost-of-living policy. It is saying to the mum in Langwarrin who is watching the price on the bowser tick over every time she fills the tank that we can see what this is costing her and we are doing something about it. It might be a little thing, but we are doing something about it.

There is $28 million for school uniforms, which saves families $93 on average per application. I know $93 does not sound like much – not until you are the parent standing in a shop in Bittern trying to work out if you can cover it this fortnight. Then $93 is enormous: it is groceries, it is a pair of shoes, it is one thing less to lie awake thinking about. There are 13,700 kids who have got free glasses through this government, kids who can now actually see the whiteboard, whose whole experience of school has changed because someone decided that whether you can see properly should not depend on whether your parents can afford an optometrist. There are kids across Victoria who are sitting in classrooms right now, better off for it. There is breakfast at school for kids who come in hungry – and teachers know which kids those are – they can tell by 9 am. You simply cannot learn on an empty stomach, no matter how good the teacher is or how much you want to. There is $11 million for Get Active Kids vouchers so another 55,000 families can get their kids into sport, which sounds like a nice thing to have until you remember that sport is where kids learn to lose and try again or where they find the thing they are brilliant at, even if the classroom has not shown it to them yet. No kid in Balnarring, Somers or Hastings should miss that because of a registration fee.

In health it is the same story: $249 million for maternity services in Melbourne's west, where more babies are born than anywhere else in the state; 1500 extra sonography appointments a year at Joan Kirner, so pregnant women do not have to pay hundreds out of pocket just to know their baby is okay; and $109 million for 45,000 more specialist appointments for children who are sitting on waiting lists right now. They are important things. They are little things.

In education we have spent $20 billion on schools over 12 years, and this budget puts nearly half a billion dollars into kindergartens, because the evidence on early childhood is not subtle: what happens in those first years shapes everything that comes after. And free kinder, built next to the school so you do not have to do two drop-offs across town, is not a small thing. It is a gift of time to every working parent in Hastings and Somerville and Balnarring and everywhere else who receives it.

I want to say something about what it means to deliver a budget like this in the times we are in, because the pressures are real and nobody is pretending otherwise – global uncertainty, rising interest rates and the ripple effects of Donald Trump's trade wars and other wars hitting prices at the bowser and on the shelf. These are not excuses, these are the actual conditions that Victorian families are living in right now, and against that backdrop this government has still found a way to provide real help, targeted help, help that lands in the right places for the right people. I think that deserves to be acknowledged, because it would have been understandable to pull back, to say the environment and the world is too uncertain and we need to wait and see. But instead, the decision was made to lean in to back Victorian families, even when the global picture is difficult, and to deliver a budget that is responsible. It made responsible choices about where the money goes and who it goes to, and it did not splash it around for the sake of a headline like some people would like it to. It targeted it at the places where it does the

most good: at families who are stretched, at kids who are missing out, at communities that have been waiting. That takes discipline. It takes a clear sense of what you are actually here to do, and what this government is here to do is make life a little bit more manageable for the people who need it most. I think when you look at what is in this budget and who it is designed to help, you can see that discipline at work.

Some of the big things for my electorate are the $1.7 million upgrade for Hastings Primary School. I go to the school when I give out my Bright Star award at the end of every year, and every kid is crammed into this very tiny hall. They barely fit in there, and it is not really fit for purpose. This is a wonderful upgrade for Hastings Primary School, and they are very, very excited about it. I am also very excited about the $6 million for the early parenting centre in Hastings. The member for Macedon came along and we dug the first bit of dirt up. Then we went there and opened it. We missed the member not being there. It looks absolutely amazing; the facility is awesome. It is in Hastings, so local mums and bubs and their dads are going to be incredibly well serviced by all the people – the staff, the nurses – that work in the parenting centre. It is very exciting.

A really, really big sum – I am very excited about this – is the $124 million for the continued development of the Victorian renewable energy terminal, which will build the offshore windmills off Gippsland and which will provide clean, green, renewable energy to our communities.

When I go back and think about the Paul Kelly song *From Little Things Big Things Grow*, I think about something that I spoke about in my inaugural speech, when I first stood here, and that was my desire to bring about a cross-peninsula bus service, something that the community had been asking for for 20 or 30 years and had not ever been delivered. In each budget over the last four years I have got little bits of money just to start to create the ability to progress that project. In my first year I got a bit of funding for planning, in the second year I got some money for shelters, in the third year I got some more money for community consultation and then I got money for the bus. I am very, very excited to say that for the cross-peninsula bus service – which was a dream when I ran and which is something that my community have been asking for for a long time – the rubber will be on the ground in early July. It means if you live in Hastings you will not have to spend –

Members interjecting.

Paul MERCURIO: I will not go there, but I agree. You do not have to jump on the bus in Hastings and go all the way into Frankston and change buses and then go into Mornington, which takes 1½ to 2 hours depending. This bus will go from the top of High Street down into Hastings, out through Tyabb and then turn left and go straight into Mornington. I have not been on the bus yet – I am looking forward to the very first trip – but I believe that should take 30 to 40 minutes instead of 1½ to 2 hours.

They are little steps, just the little steps that we make as members of Parliament. Every day we advocate for our communities. I always think it is the small things that we do every day and that we keep on doing – that we have the passion, the dream, the desire and the commitment to continue to chip away at – from which we get some of these big things. I have worked with several ministers to make some of these things happen, and I am incredibly grateful for the support that they have shown me. By showing me that support, they have also shown my community that support.

Paul Kelly's song does not end with everything solved. We have got lots more work to do. It just keeps walking. That is sort of the point. Change does not arrive in one big announcement. It accumulates; it compounds. It shows up in the schoolbag that has got everything in it this year, in the kid who can see the board, in the family that made it to the footy on the weekend because the train was cheap enough and they did not have to think twice about it. This is what this budget is about and where Labor's priorities are. From little things, big things grow. I will not sing it; it is too late. I commend this motion to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (01:59): I rise to take note of the 2026–27 state budget and to speak on behalf of my community in Prahran. I would like to address what the member for Hastings

said: from little things, big things grow. I would really like to see even some little things in the seat of Prahran in this budget. I am crying out for the people of Prahran that we actually start to see this government listen to what we need. I am delighted that for the first time we have started to see some things happen. Last year I saw nothing in the budget; this year I am starting to see that they are playing catch-up. They are looking at and funding a few things that I put my hand up for and saying, 'Will do'. That is fantastic, but there is more to be had – more little things, more big things – and I will be fighting hard for them. We had 11 years, nearly 12 years, of the Greens in the seat of Prahran, and they did absolutely nothing – could not deliver a single thing. It is now 2 in the morning and they are not even here talking about the budget. So I would just like to point out that when you have a local member, from whatever party, if they are there to advocate they can actually make those little things happen.

This budget is presented by the government as a budget about making life easy, about making life safer and more affordable. Those are worthy objectives. No member of this place would disagree with the desire to ease the cost-of-living pressure, to improve community safety, to invest in children or to support essential services. However, after more than a decade of Labor government, Victorians are entitled to judge this government by its record and definitely not by its slogans. The record is shocking. Victoria is the high-tax, high-debt state. Families are paying more, small businesses are carrying heavier burdens and property owners, renters and young people are trying to enter the housing market and are all dealing with the consequences of decisions made in this place.

A phoney budget surplus is cold comfort when debt continues to rise, interest bills continue to crowd out service delivery and communities continue to see the basics neglected. This surplus was created through, in my view, a non-transparent deal signing up Victoria to a lottery agreement with no due process or competitive tendering process. The Liberal Party's message is absolutely clear: Victoria needs responsible government, honest government and a return to the essentials. We believe that government should live within its means. Just like we were taught to do, government should do it, because every dollar wasted on mismanagement is a dollar that is not spent on essential services, not spent on hospitals, not spent on schools, not spent on police, not spent on roads, not fixing potholes, not spent on mental health, not spent on housing or even on community infrastructure. We believe that lower taxes, safer streets, better services and responsible investment are the foundations of good government. In Prahran these foundations matter.

My electorate includes some of the most vibrant, creative, diverse and hardworking communities in all of Victoria, from Chapel Street to Windsor, from Prahran Market to St Kilda Primary School. Our community is full of people who invest their time, their money, their energy, their creativity and their care into making our neighbourhood better, and that is why I want to begin by congratulating the St Kilda Primary School community. Their campaign for a proper indoor facility has been long, determined and entirely justified. The old school hall was demolished by this Labor government. With 11 years of the Greens in the seat they could not get this government to deliver, and only after I made a commitment to a $12 million community hall as part of a coalition commitment did the Labor Party come to the party scampering to play catch-up in this budget. Students, teachers and families have had to make do without the facilities that any reasonable person, any reasonable family and student, would consider basic to a modern primary school. Assemblies, physical education, performances, sport and wet weather activities are not luxuries. They are part of a full education that you would expect for any Australian child. But let me be clear: this is not a gift from the government. This is funding that was absolutely hard fought for and won by our community. Now the government must deliver. The government must provide clear timeframes for when this is going to be delivered, transparent scope, proper consultation and a facility that genuinely meets the needs of the school and the wider community so that they too can share in it.

The same principle applies across Prahran. Our community does not ask for wasteful extravagance, it asks for the basic essentials to be done properly. The polytechnic site, which the Patrick School of the Arts calls home, was promised to Victorians and the people of Prahran as an arts precinct, and yet the government have never committed to utilising this space effectively and what they promised it for. A

significant theatre and rooms which could be used for Prahran High or arts programs are simply left totally empty – what a waste of money and space.

My community asks for Prahran Market to be protected. Prahran Market is part of the living history of Melbourne, not just my local area. So many people from across the state, interstate visitors and overseas visitors go to the market. It has served the community since 1864, and generations of families, traders, producers and customers have made it one of the great civic institutions of our city. It is not a development opportunity to be traded away. It must be permanently protected for its purpose as a market, for its heritage value, for its traders and for the people who rely on it. In my view, that is not negotiable.

These things are missing from the budget. Like much of Victoria, we ask for our local shopping strips and businesses to be treated as economic assets, not as convenient sources of government revenue. Small businesses in Prahran have faced the cumulative pressure of payroll tax, land tax, insurance, energy costs, rent, compliance costs, labour shortages and weaker consumer confidence. They are resilient, but no resilience is inexhaustible. When a government taxes more and when it borrows more and regulates more, it cannot be surprised when confidence collapses.

We ask for community safety to be taken seriously. Residents in St Kilda, in Windsor, in Prahran, in South Yarra and in Southbank all raise safety with me constantly. They describe their daily lived experience of antisocial behaviour, theft, drug activity, public disorder and the loss of confidence even around public transport, retail precincts and residential streets. People want visible policing. They want PSOs where they are needed. They want proper enforcement and proper mental health responses.

Charities like Uniting have missed out in this budget. In fact they have lost significant dollars. Uniting, one of our biggest charities, based smack in the middle of Chapel Street where we have got most of our major issues, have lost a significant amount of funding. When I talk to them, do you know what has gone? Their employment services. Well, what is next – Hartley's, where they deliver food, or the food bank? How far do our poor charities, which are helping the most vulnerable, have to go when our government is not delivering the dollars that are needed in these areas?

We need local youth infrastructure to be valued, with facilities that give young people somewhere to go and something constructive to do. In an electorate with growing apartment living and intense pressure on public facilities, losing community sport and youth infrastructure has real consequences. I often speak about our local Toorak Prahran Cricket Club and the Unicorns rugby club. They have no girls change rooms or disability access. It is an absolute joke. Again, Labor is playing catch-up. I have been starting to call it out and say that we need girls change rooms and we need disability access. What do we get? A few hundred thousand that goes through local government, and then the clubs go, 'Sorry, what is this for, to build a whole new a new girls change room? That's not going to be enough.' 'Oh, no, it's for kitchen facilities.' If representatives on the other side actually took the time to go and have a look at the facilities and understand my community, they would know that this is not a good way to spend money. We actually need to do a plan, we need to look at it, we need girls change rooms and we need to redo the whole site.

My community wants planning decisions that respect local character and community purpose in Windsor, South Yarra, Prahran and St Kilda. People understand that Melbourne has to grow. I am not opposed to growth, but growth without infrastructure, without consultation and without regard for heritage or community use is not good planning; it is pressure passed down to residents, schools, roads, parks, traders and local councils.

Perhaps most importantly, my community expects a government that spends public money as carefully as families spend their own money. That is the contrast at the heart of this budget debate. Labor believes the answer to every single problem is more announcements, more borrowing, more bureaucracy and more taxation. The Liberals and the Nationals believe Victoria needs a fresh start and

a government that is focused on the basics, disciplined in spending, respectful of taxpayers, supportive of small businesses, serious about community safety and determined to rebuild confidence.

Of course where this budget funds something worthwhile I will absolutely acknowledge it. The role of an opposition is not to recite the government's media releases. It is our responsibility to examine whether this budget is honest, whether it is actually sustainable, whether it meets local needs and whether it gives Victorians confidence in the future. I will fight with every breath in my body to ensure that my seat has a voice and that it gets the funding that it needs. If it takes years and years, I will continue to advocate for this.

This budget falls short. It does not repair the damage of years of waste and mismanagement, it does not provide the tax relief needed to restore confidence and it does not adequately confront the safety concerns being raised in communities like mine. It does not give enough certainty to traders, families, schools, renters, property owners and local organisations who are asking for practical support and not political spin. Prahran is a generous community, and it is a tolerant community. It is a community that believes in culture, enterprise, education, fairness and public service. But it is also a community that expects competence. It expects honesty. It expects the government to do what it says it will do and to deliver the facilities, the services and the safety that people have already paid for through their exorbitant taxes.

Today I say this: congratulations to St Kilda Primary School and congratulations to our community in Prahran. Thank you for electing me as your local representative and entrusting me with the opportunity to advocate for you, because we have finally got something – not enough, but we have finally got something. Congratulations to the parents, the teachers, the school council, the students and the local residents who secured the recognition that you absolutely deserve and has been long overdue. Your campaign is an absolute reminder that community matters, that persistence matters and that local advocacy absolutely matters. But I also say to the government: do not mistake an overdue commitment for a complete answer to the needs of Prahran. Our community needs safer streets, protected heritage, stronger local businesses, responsible planning, proper youth facilities and a government that manages money with the seriousness that it deserves.

There are other local priorities which deserve serious consideration in this budget that were left out, without the practical support our community needs, like St Martins Youth Arts Centre in South Yarra, a remarkable local institution which has supported young Victorians for more than 50 years, giving children and teenagers confidence, belonging and a pathway into the creative arts. St Martins has produced and nurtured extraordinary talent, but it continues to face the uncertainty of short-term funding, like many of our arts programs in the area, and short-term arrangements rather than the stable core funding it deserves. Its local theatre was used over 12 years ago by my own children, who did ballet concerts there. When I went back as the local member 12 years later, it still was not able to be used, after being closed down for 12 years, because the air conditioning and disability access were not up to scratch. So for 12 years it sat empty at St Martins Theatre, where people could not use the theatre. This is a government-owned facility. I am absolutely stunned, as somebody who has not been in politics a long time, that when I walk around my local area I am seeing so much waste.

Victoria cannot tax its way to prosperity. It cannot borrow its way to confidence. It cannot press confidence in a way that means competence. It can only rebuild trust by delivering the basics: respecting communities and putting public interest first. That is what the Liberal Party stands for. That is what the people of Prahran deserve, and it is the standard by which this budget should be judged.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (02:14): I rise to speak on the Victorian budget 2026–27. We all know on this side of the house that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Certainly this side of the house is willing to address the really hard realities of what families and people and residents and constituents are facing right now when it comes to the pressures of the cost of living. Those pressures include getting to work, getting kids to school, getting yourself to appointments or getting a loved one to appointments. Fuel prices are up, and that is also adding to the cost of doing business.

That has a flow-on effect to the cost of groceries. Victorians are carrying more burdens every day, and that is why this this budget is making it easier, safer and more affordable.

Cost-of-living pressures are being felt by everyone that I am talking to in the Sydenham electorate, and that is why this budget is slashing the cost of commuting. We have delivered free public transport up until the end of May, and now we are delivering half-price public transport until the end of the year. This will save the average daily commuter in Sydenham more than $1300.

Donald Trump's war in the Middle East is driving up fuel prices, putting local households under pressure, and that is why we are delivering the 20 per cent off regos. With the 20 per cent off regos, a driver with one car will receive up to $186 back and a family with two cars will receive $372 back in rebate. It is a one-off cost-of-living help for families right now, while we are still delivering a surplus. Already just over the last 48 hours over a million Victorians applied for money back on their regos, and that puts money straight back into the pockets of local residents.

For those local families in Sydenham that are struggling with the demands of paying their bills, this budget has expanded place-based information and support services like Bring Your Bills days. These provide real practical in-person support for those that need it. While cost-of-living pressures affect every Victorian, some families are finding it harder than most, and that is why the Allan Labor government is investing $1.8 million to expand financial counselling services. These services are helping local families navigate financial struggles and get back on their feet. We know that this is very prevalent across the Brimbank and Melton areas.

Victoria has one of the best school systems in the world, with NAPLAN results leading the nation, but the rise in the cost of living is putting pressure on household budgets. So from our free school breakfast clubs to more affordable uniforms, this budget invests $59.4 million to help families with school-aged kids. This includes expanding the Glasses for Kids program, where we are testing kids' eyesight in schools and providing free glasses to those that need them. And of course we cannot ignore the fantastic commitment of free public transport for kids under 18. From free kinder to free TAFE and everything in between, the Allan Labor government invests in education. We are transforming early childhood education and delivering free kinder, saving families up to $2700 per child per year. This budget also invests nearly half a million dollars to build and upgrade kinders and government-run childcare centres across the state, something that has been very welcome in my growing suburbs.

One of the hottest topics at the moment in Sydenham is roads, and with this budget we are making life easier by giving busy Victorians time back in their day with better roads and more public transport. We are funding the biggest road blitz in the state's history; just over $1 billion is going into rebuilding, repairing and resurfacing local roads. This includes the Calder Freeway, the Tullamarine Freeway and the Western Freeway. Better roads not only improve traffic flow but make such a difference to safety. I have heard many residents talking about the lack of traffic flow and the congestion and safety issues tied up around Taylors Road. This is a council-owned road that runs from Brimbank through to Melton, and we have seen so much development on either side of the road over the last 10 years in particular. So I am really pleased to say that Taylors Road will be receiving funding from the overall roads package that has been announced in this budget – a commitment of $29 million to undertake planning and fix local roads. We will be getting a share of this to make sure that we can do the planning and initial development to work with those councils on how we improve and widen that road.

Investing in roads helps to give busy Victorians time back in their day. This budget makes the biggest investment in roads funding ever, and this record spend on maintenance will fix potholes, upgrade road surfaces and deliver safer roads for families in Sydenham. We know that only Labor is investing in Sydenham and supporting a future plan for places like Taylors Road and the Calder Highway. I am really pleased that this budget releases funding from the state government to start the Calder Park Drive interchange on the Calder Highway, which is part of a joint $1.2 billion state and federal program. This project is currently in the planning phase, and construction is expected to start at the end of the year. This comes on top of all the other road commitments we have made in the electorate

of Sydenham that we have seen come to fruition over the last few years, including, just recently completed, the new road surfacing and safety treatments as well as new traffic lights at the intersection of Leakes Road and Melton Highway; and the level crossing removals at Melton Highway and Calder Park Drive. We have seen improvements in the Melton Highway through widening at the Sydenham–Hillside end of the freeway, and we have seen a number of traffic lights being inserted in there to help that traffic flow in and out of those growing estates.

Our investment in rail continues, and hasn't Sydenham welcomed the opening of the Metro Tunnel. There are more trains more often going through our station and certainly being utilised by residents. We are also delivering major rail upgrades when it comes to the Melton line, which is another line that my residents are very dependent on, as are the member for Melton's residents. We are progressing more funding and the next stage of investment for the Melton line to undertake development works to support the future electrification of that line. I want to acknowledge the great work that has happened in removing level crossings along that line and extending stations as well as upgrading signalling, all extremely important parts of the future electrification of that line. I know that is something that is going to be very welcomed by residents once it is completed.

Buses are a really essential part of servicing growing areas, and this budget has delivered $100 million to deliver more buses to uplift services and put new services in place. We have seen a commitment to the 476 route, which runs from Moonee Ponds through to Watergardens. We will be seeing more frequent buses there, more reliability. This builds on the commitment that was made at the last budget for a new bus service from Rockbank to Watergardens, giving Fraser Rise and Deanside residents new access to buses that take them to stations like Rockbank or Watergardens.

And you cannot go past our investments in health, which are just amazing and something I am extremely proud of. The Allan Labor government always invests in our health system, and since 2014 we have delivered 11 new hospitals. We have hired 41,000 nurses, midwives, doctors and healthcare workers, and this budget invests more. We are hiring 250 extra graduate nurses and delivering fast-track surgery and specialist appointments for kids. This is something that is really welcomed in the west. Families in the west can continue to access world-class care, including 32 new postnatal beds in the western metro area, 1500 additional sonogram appointments and nine new special care nursery cots at the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's facility for babies with complex needs. This is absolutely welcome – and a big shout-out to all the NICU nurses and doctors that work there.

We will always back our dedicated healthcare staff and workforce and the extraordinary care that they provide to those when they are most in need. There is also a commitment for 965 medical interns beginning their careers as doctors in the public service just this year. This is all on top of the upgrade that we saw at Sunshine Hospital in the emergency department; the building and operation and expansion of the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital; the completion of the build and the opening of the new Footscray Hospital, an absolutely amazing facility; and we are most excited about the Melton Hospital getting underway in construction phase – and isn't it great to see those cranes in the sky out in Cobblebank? This is also on top of the most amazing virtual ED service. And for people listening tonight at 2:30 in the morning, do not forget that we have this amazing virtual ED service available for people. It is this time of the night that people need those services quite often and do not want to venture out. I can absolutely assure residents and constituents that this service is top grade. We also have the Nurse-on-Call service and of course urgent care clinics in partnership with the federal government.

This comes on top of all our women's health investment in women's health clinics – sexual and reproductive health hubs and the women's health mobile clinic. These are both facilities and places where women can get support with a range of special health needs, including pelvic pain, menstrual health, contraception and continence. This is on top of the fantastic program of free pads and tampons rolling out across a thousand different locations, with a thousand machines dispensing over half a million products already since they have been operational. These machines are in places like shopping

centres like Watergardens shopping centre, in libraries like the Sydenham Library and of course in train stations. I know the one at Flinders Street is extremely popular.

Our investments do not end there. They go on with supporting community safety, with this budget boosting police resources by recruiting 200 police reservists for desk jobs and a $62 million investment to free up frontline officers and make sure they are out and about where they are needed in the community keeping Sydenham safe. We are also investing $33 million in the violence reduction unit to stop crime before it starts. Keeping communities safe is not just about response, it is about prevention, and early intervention can help young people stay engaged and connected with their local communities. That is why this budget has invested $9.5 million to boost Blue Light Victoria's successful youth mentoring program. There are other programs that are currently being supported by the government through the violence reduction unit, and I look forward to even more rolling out and supporting and helping young people get their lives back on track. The Allan Labor government created the state's first South Sudanese Australian youth justice expert working group and also invested out of this budget in the South Sudanese community hub, which is a fantastic step forward.

I could go on with all of the commitments in the space of homelessness, but I just want to make the point that we have been able to deliver these things with economic responsibility. We have been able to do so with a surplus, and in seven years our surplus is averaging $1.7 billion being maintained over the budget and forward estimates.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (02:29): I am pleased to finally get to speak to the budget, although I did not expect it to be at 2:30 in the morning. I will try and stay alert. I will try and stay enthusiastic. I have had a little nap, so I think I am good to go. The state budget highlights a reality and disadvantage that regional communities face due to this government's financial mismanagement. It has simply become so hard for so many just to make ends meet, and this government has a lot to answer for.

Victorian families are facing really tough times, all because Labor does not have a plan to tackle the cost-of-living crisis or pay down the record debt that will make life harder for generations to come. Labor have put this state in exorbitant debt, forecast to reach $194 billion by 2028–29, and interest payments are expected to hit more than $26 million per day. Stretch that out and that is $1.2 million per hour, which is simply astounding. To put this into perspective, in one day this could pay for 128 ambulances, two breast care centres and 2715 elective surgeries and fix many of our roads. Or in one day we could pay the yearly salary of 315 nurses, 510 police recruits or 305 paramedics – and the list goes on.

A few hours of debt of $1.2 million an hour would fund the state government share of $5 million towards the development of the Shepparton sports and events centre. It is astounding that my community has been waiting for decades for this run-down stadium that was built back in 1972, not yet funded from the state government share. When you think about the astounding interest on the state's debt and what we could be doing with that money, there are many other run-down sporting facilities across my electorate calling out for investment. It is appalling. Just to give you an example of what we are having to deal with at the Shepparton Sports Stadium: noncompliance with disability access standards, noncompliance with basketball major tournament requirements, noncompliance with major sporting codes such as netball and badminton, and insufficient parking. This lack of investment means that we are missing out on major sporting events, which means a significant loss of economic benefit to our region. Shepparton is the fifth-largest regional city in the state, with significant growth. It acts as a major population service centre for the wider Goulburn Valley region, covering a population of approximately 250,000 people. We need investment into our region. GV Health is the only regional hospital in the state that does not have an integrated cancer centre with radiotherapy. Patients have to travel long distances and families have to fund the costs of travel and accommodation to support their loved ones during the most challenging of times.

This government has lost complete control of its spending and complete control of its debt, and it is Victorians who are paying the price. The government just keeps adding more taxes and expecting

families' previous budgets to stretch further, putting households under extreme financial pressure. We are seeing billions in cost blowouts – money that should be spent on housing, hospitals, roads, schools and much-needed infrastructure in our communities. We are seeing city-centric spending, ignoring the needs of regional communities. Twenty-five per cent of Victorians live in regional and rural Victoria, and yet only around 12 per cent of the budget is spent in the regions. Regional development funding has been cut by $51.1 million and agricultural funding has been cut by $77.6 million.

We are not getting funding for critical infrastructure services. I have been calling for a bus review for my electorate. You would think that this is a small ask, yet this has been denied to my community. Infrastructure Victoria put Shepparton first on their list of towns in need of a bus review. It has been 16 years since we have had a review, and during that time we have seen significant growth, including new housing developments which will have no connection to bus transport services. The Greater Shepparton City Council have it as a priority project. We have small surrounding towns with limited or no bus services. People need to access public transport, and bus services play a critical role in getting people to where they need to go. It is astounding that this government are turning their back on this much-needed service. It is having such a detrimental impact on my communities. The bus companies are also frustrated because they can see the critical need and demand, and they deserve to have the opportunity to also expand their businesses.

We have seen $15 billion in rorts go to crime on Big Build sites. That $15 billion could have gone a long way in my community. We look at that extraordinary waste, then we look at the waste of $600 million in costs to cancel the Commonwealth Games – $600 million of hardworking taxpayers money just gone, which could have gone towards important community projects, many of which I have mentioned. This is public money getting thrown away due to the financial mismanagement of this government. The economic opportunity that would have been invested into the regions is also now lost. It was an embarrassing debacle not only for our state but nationally and internationally. You do not have a significant announcement like the Commonwealth Games and then cancel and pay for another country to host it.

The short-stay tax is having a significant impact on regional tourism and visitation. Regional Victoria depends on tourism and major events, which make a significant financial contribution. Our state is being forced to pay the highest taxes in the nation, with less money to spend where we need it most. Victorians have been hit with more than 63 new or increased taxes, with the recent addition of the emergency services tax. The people of Victoria have had enough of the relentless ongoing taxes.

We have seen the outcry on the emergency services tax, where we had a convoy of farmers on their tractors – some were my local farmers – and the CFA bringing their fire trucks to Spring Street. It is disgusting that hardworking farmers and our amazing CFA volunteers have to go to that level to have their voices heard. They were pleading to their government to listen to what it is doing to families and regional communities. This tax is ripping millions out of regional communities that are already struggling. Shepparton district landholders are expected to contribute over $4.7 million more under the new levy compared to the previous system, placing a heavier burden on local households and businesses. The local council has projected that approximately 50 per cent more revenue will now be collected from ratepayers.

My office has been inundated with many people struggling to pay their bills and to put food on the table. My hope for this budget was that we could help those doing it tough, but that has not happened and things just keep getting harder. Cost of living and financial stress have got to a level that is overwhelming, and the level of hardship continues to grow. How does this government expect people to manage with increased power bills, rental increases, increased grocery bills and increased taxes? What we are seeing is many people who have not struggled in the past struggling now. I had a mother just these past few weeks say to me that she is not able to pay for her children's sporting fees and in fact her budget is now in deficit. She is basically minus $20 a week when it comes to paying her bills and meeting her expenses. Another woman, a part-time working single mother who I met with recently, said that her rent had gone up and she could no longer meet her cost-of-living costs. She was

distressed and clearly not able to find more affordable or available housing. We are seeing a growing number of working families joining for the first time the queues of hungry Victorians relying on food donations. Food relief agencies are stretched to the limit, constantly putting calls out for more support.

When it comes to housing, the budget has failed to address housing in regional Victoria. We are going backwards fast in my electorate when it comes to housing, and those reaching out for housing support have significantly increased in number. We are in a housing crisis. In my electorate we have over 2000 people on the waiting list for public housing. With half of those classified as priority applicants, we have one of the highest rates of homelessness across the state. It is a daily struggle for people trying to find housing. There is a significant shortage of rental properties. If you do find an available rental property, there are probably about 50 other people, if not more, in line, and then you have to be able to afford it. We have people living in cars, sleeping rough or couch surfing. This government is turning its back on housing in regional Victoria, and as I said, we are in a housing crisis.

Just recently I heard from Celia Adams – the CEO of Beyond Housing, Shepparton – at a homeless forum that was held with a number of local stakeholders during Homelessness Week. We discussed the significant housing and rental stress in the Shepparton electorate. Celia said it is distressful for her staff to inform clients that their only option today is to be provided with a tent or blankets. It is hard to fathom that that is actually happening in our country. We have to do so much better. Housing has to be a priority. Everyone deserves to have a roof over their head and a place to call home. Homelessness has become so much more visible on the streets. We are seeing people every single night sleeping in front of shops or along the river in tents and mothers sleeping in their cars with their children. This just cannot continue.

Labor has introduced more than 30 new or increased property taxes. We are paying the highest property taxes in the nation, which is leading to higher property prices and higher rents and driving critical investment in new supply interstate. The unexpected land tax has had a significant impact and has been completely detrimental to the rental market. Property owners who have planned for their future are now finding themselves in a position where they must either pass on the cost to the tenant of the rental property or sell the property. This has had a significant impact on the rental market at a time when we have people finding it so hard to find a home. We need more rental properties, not a declining number. We must focus on supply, and that includes regional Victoria. Victorians are struggling to pay Labor's highest-in-the-nation property taxes on time. Many tax bills are now more than 12 months overdue. This should be no surprise when so many Victorians are under extreme financial pressures. The headlines of 'Taxed to the max' are very accurate.

When it comes to crime, our police are under-resourced and underfunded. I recently met with the superintendent of Shepparton police station. He said that the station does not have enough police on the ground and that 75 per cent of police time is taken up with family violence, not allowing the police to get to other crime matters. He has urgently called for a dedicated family violence response team, which would require six extra police and two extra sergeants. I have asked the Minister for Police to assist my local police station, who deserve to have the resources and funding they need so that they can do their job and protect the community to the capacity they need to. We have had a 20 per cent increase in crime and an increase in the incidence of burglary, car theft and retail theft, and we know that crime is escalating across the state. People are feeling unsafe. They are feeling unsafe in their homes. Businesses are experiencing ongoing break-ins, with many perpetrators reoffending. It just simply cannot continue.

We are finding community services stretched to the limit. Our local community neighbourhood houses are not able to meet the increased demand for food supply. They are finding people are coming in distressed at not being able to pay their rent. They are struggling with fuel costs and struggling to meet their family's needs. I wish to acknowledge Melanie from South Shepparton Community Centre, who works very closely with my office. My office is also inundated with people reaching out in desperate need of support. Melanie does an incredible job not only during her working hours but after hours. She has often messaged me when trying to help people find emergency housing, which often is not

there. Her distress is very obvious, but her care for her people within the community that she serves is so relevant that we have to keep pushing for better and to do more for our communities.

In my last few minutes I also wish to acknowledge a couple of really hardworking people in our community who are helping people that are doing it tough and people that are homeless. Azem from People Supporting People and his amazing volunteers every single day help provide food and food relief for people, particularly people sleeping rough. He has a shower and a toilet behind his restaurant, and he is an incredible person who works tirelessly to help those that do not have anyone else in their lives to do that. On a Saturday morning often I get out the front of the barbecue at Kmart with Azem just to see the people coming to him – often homeless people getting their sausage – and also to see the connection that he has with those people. Often it is those connections that can make the biggest difference in trying to have conversations in regard to getting them back on Centrelink, getting them back on Medicare or getting their birth certificate so they can get their connection back to community. These types of people are quiet achievers that do incredible work and make a significant difference in our community. The Labor government could learn a lot from people like Azem. Victoria is doing it really tough and regional Victorians are doing it tough, and this government is letting Victorians down.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (02:43): I am absolutely delighted to stand tonight to talk about this extraordinary budget, and why it is extraordinary is that it is extraordinary for regional Victoria. Whilst I respect –

Kim O'Keeffe interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: I certainly was, member for Shepparton, and I am about to talk to you about the things that you said. Instead of talking down regional Victoria, let us talk about the successes in regional Victoria. Let us talk about the fact that we have had a 20 per cent increase in jobs in regional Victoria under this government. Your lot want to cut jobs in regional Victoria. In the last 10 years we have increased them by 20 per cent.

A member interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: We have. So let us talk about regional Victoria and what this budget is doing for regional Victoria. The member for Shepparton just talked to us about our debt. She was horrified about our debt. She was horrified about what we are doing. Let me tell you that our debt is 25 per cent of GSP. Do you know what, under Henry Bolte it was 50 per cent of GSP. Let me tell you something else. The last time the Liberals built a hospital was under Henry Bolte, because he understood that you borrow to build. This lot on the other side want to spook the world about debt, but they do not want to acknowledge that what we have done is build in regional Victoria. We now have the lowest unemployment, at 3.9 per cent, in regional Victoria, and that is because this government has invested to build jobs. I sit in the regional development portfolio. I look at what we have got in this budget, and we have got $50 million in the Victorian Investment Fund to bring jobs into regional Victoria to change people's lives.

Those on the other side, all they have talked about is that they are going to cut our budget. What are their cuts going to do? I can tell you. They are going to cut jobs out of regional Victoria. They are going to cut services out of regional Victoria. There is nothing from the other side except cuts. This government invests. This government cares about regional Victoria. Since we were elected we have invested $50 billion into regional Victoria. In this budget alone there is $2.7 billion for regional Victoria. I had to sit through listening to the member for Shepparton – who I have to say I like. I am not being aggressive. She is a nice woman. She is a lovely woman. But to hear the absolute dross that came out – which, to be honest, was read and was clearly lines that were given to her by the party to talk down regional Victoria – was an outrage. Do you know what has happened in regional Victoria? In agriculture we set ourselves a mission to make food and fibre exports $20 billion by 2030. Guess what, there was $22.2 billion this year in food and fibre exports on 3 per cent of the landmass. Why does the other side have to continually talk about deficit and debt and horror? Let us talk about the

success that is regional Victoria. We are the engine room. I am sorry, city slicker mates, but we are the engine room. We are the ones that are driving the economy. We constitute an enormous –

Matthew Guy: Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Michaela SETTLE: I am delighted to continue because we are talking about regional Victoria and we are talking about what this government does for regional Victoria. I want to give you all a stat that you do not really understand. It sits in the budget. It says $100 million for CFA tankers. I was talking to the extraordinary minister tonight, and do you know what that means? That means on average every four days a new vehicle goes out to the CFA – every four days. Let us remember that this government is investing in the CFA.

This budget included $481 million for regional transport services. The city-centric people on the other side of the house do not understand what transport means in the regions. They do not understand, because the last time they had any sort of power they ripped the trains out of communities. I lived in Ararat. They ripped the train line out, and it actually halved the population of Ararat because people had no hope. They had nothing to do. Those on the other side might fix the budget. They might get the debt down. Do you know what that means for regional Victorians? It means no train lines. It means no schools.

Matthew Guy interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: We still remember in Ararat, seriously. I lived in Ararat, and people still remember. We remember Kennett ripping those rail lines out. What we see in this budget is this government has invested $481 million into transport in the regions. But as I say, for me, in my portfolios, it is about making sure that we are bringing jobs and we are bringing livelihoods into regional Victoria, and that is what we have done. I really want to acknowledge the member for Geelong in the house, because she fought really hard to make sure that that investment went into Geelong, and very, very soon – and we might invite the other side along –

Members interjecting.

Michaela SETTLE: Maybe not. No, okay. We are going to open the Nyaal Banyul centre. This is transformative for Geelong. It is bringing people into Geelong. It is invigorating the regions, and that is what this government does. We do not just look at big projects like that; we also understand – and I have to say it is my portfolio, and I am dead proud of it – the wonderful Tiny Towns program. It is not just about the big projects which we do and we deliver, like the Nyaal Banyul centre, but we also do Tiny Towns. I went to Shelford the other day, a Tiny Town. You have probably never heard of it. I love it dearly. They got a grant. It was for the Shelford Common. They wanted a bubbler and they wanted some chairs. They got the local school in to plant some trees. For that community it meant a lot. The thing about Tiny Towns is it is driven by the communities, so they say, 'What do we want in our town?'

The other day I had the pleasure of opening the Victorian Farmers Federation conference, and a gentleman asked me a question. He asked me about our city-centric government, and what I said to him was, 'How can you call us city-centric when we have got 18 regional MPs in this place?' The Libs have got 25, the Nats have got, what, four or five. The Labor regional caucus is twice as big as the Nats and pretty close to the entire Libs. We represent regional Victoria, and I reject any suggestion that we do not and the idea that we are in some way city-centric. Our Premier is from Bendigo, our Treasurer is from the north and our ag minister is from Ballan. This is a government that cares about the regions. What I said at the VFF conference was that regional caucus meet every fortnight. While that lot are having breakfast, we are meeting as a caucus. All 18 regional MPs sit down together and we talk about what needs to happen in regional Victoria, and then we go to cabinet, we go to those ministers, and we say, 'This is what is happening in our region. This is what we need you to do.' This

government represents regional Victoria like nobody else does. When I hear farcical notions from the Nats that they are going to guarantee 25 per cent into the regions, it makes me laugh. It is an absolute nonsense.

If you talk to our wonderful Minister for Education, he will tell you in this budget – and that is what we are talking about – 31 per cent of school upgrades are going into regional Victoria. If you look at the sports infrastructure fund, the member for Shepparton talked about a lack of sporting facilities. I want her to know that within the last round of sports infrastructure funding, 50 per cent of that went into the regions. We all know, because we are connected to our communities, that one of the things they talk to us a lot about is roads. Do you know what, of the $1 billion in the budget this year, 70 per cent is going to the regions. Any way you cut it, some notional idea from the Nats that they are putting in a 25 per cent regional guarantee is a cut. Regions are seeing so much more under this government.

Nobody wants to see a 25 per cent cut. What I would say, when people talk about city-centric governments, is that the leadership of the Liberals is clearly city-centric. They have talked loud and clear about the fact that they are going to cut $40 billion out of the budget. They are cutting $40 billion and the Nats – their friends, theoretically – are claiming that there is a 25 per cent guarantee. As I said the other day, 25 per cent of nothing is nothing. Regional Victoria knows that. They can promise a 25 per cent guarantee, but I want to hear the Libs and the Nats tell us what their budget actually is. We are getting 25 per cent of what? We are getting 25 per cent of $40 billion worth of cuts. That does not sound like a good deal to me, and I do not think that people in regional Victoria are going to fall for it, because we have been there before. We have played this game. It is not our first rodeo with that lot on the other side. You can laugh about how long ago Jeff Kennett was, but people in regional Victoria remember. We remember that we lost the Ararat line, we lost the Maryborough line, we had schools closed, we had hospitals privatised. I think the thing that makes me laugh the most is when I hear the member for Mildura talk glowingly about the hospital. They privatised it and we had to bring it back in. When we see Liberals in power, all we see is an absolute desecration of regional Victoria. You want to talk about who is city-centric? Look at the seats that the Libs have got. I will admit they are getting thinner and thinner in the city, but they are city seats.

Matthew Guy interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: Yes, I cannot wait. We cannot wait, because the member for Bulleen across the table wants to talk about the next election. Let us talk about the next election. Let us talk about One Nation in your seat. You are in a whole lot of trouble, and it is those regional communities that are turning against the Libs. Who are the people that at the moment are polling for One Nation? They are all of those people along the top. They are regional communities that know that the Liberals do not support them, so they are going to vote One Nation. It is not Labor's seats out in the regions that are going to One Nation – not our seats.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (02:58): That was certainly exciting. This is an Allan Labor government that has brazenly and flagrantly neglected Victoria and the Mornington electorate through their absolute financial mismanagement, lack of budget transparency and a disastrous budget earlier this year. Debt is now approaching $200 billion. Taxpayer-funded interest on this debt is already over $1 million every single hour. That is money that could have been spent on things like nurses, paramedics, teachers, police, fire services, potholes and roads maintenance, hospitals, schools and more. There is an undeniable need for funding for basic service delivery. However, because of this Allan Labor government's culture of reckless waste and blowouts, they are not providing the services and investments that we need.

One of the worst examples of this waste is the $15 billion CFMEU corruption, a corruption that this government is still not doing enough about, not to mention tens of billions of cost blow-outs on major projects or $600 million-plus wasted on not having the Commonwealth Games and giving money to Glasgow to soon host them instead. Regional Victoria had been promised them at the time, but they were effectively lied to at the last election.

Thousands of constituents are contacting me and us on the peninsula about Labor's failed road maintenance and oversight, such as with Peninsula Link and the Nepean Highway near Bata. They are calling on Labor to fix our roads, potholes – or craters, in some cases. They are calling for our fair share of infrastructure and public transport on the Mornington Peninsula, a forgotten part of metro Melbourne. This was stark when Labor recently announced $100 million for buses in metro Melbourne. But how much of this was for the peninsula? Can anyone guess? None – none of that $100 million for metro Melbourne bus services was for the Mornington Peninsula.

Let us look at our schools, which are creaking and falling apart, whose facilities are 50 years old, like Mount Eliza Secondary. I went to visit that school recently with the Shadow Minister for Education, the principal, students from the school and also school council representatives. Not only have they not had investment from this state Labor government, they have had to pull down a facility because of problems with mould. It was absolutely falling apart. So they have gone backwards in terms of facilities even more.

There are our local sporting facilities, like Narambi Reserve, where girls are using portaloos and then washing hands and filling drink bottles at a dog tap, or Mornington Baseball, who are struggling to train at night now, as their ancient lights, decades old, are no longer made and are continually going out, with players now having to dodge balls hit both by players and through the back of the broken net – you name it.

One of the worst examples is housing and homelessness. There has been next to zero investment in public housing on the peninsula, with the dial only ticking forward by a few homes in 10 years. The Ranch not-for-profit crisis accommodation was recently shut down and is about to be demolished. The only crisis accommodation now on the peninsula is Ranch 2.0, set up by Mornington Community Support Centre as a not-for-profit, with support from Rotary groups and others but with zero investment from the state Labor government. But this can only house several people with minimal to no state investment in our community support and outreach services, which are struggling and bursting at the seams, not able to keep up with need. This is all while Labor has allowed this to happen. They have allowed homelessness on the peninsula to get into crisis mode. We now have the highest rate of rough sleeping out of any LGA in the whole state – in the whole of Victoria. People – men, women, boys and girls – are living in cars and in tents on the foreshore and elsewhere. Several people have, shamefully, now died on the foreshore under this government's watch. That could have included a gentleman that my office and local constituents helped recently to get out of a tent that he was living in for five months and into a rooming house, who might have been another statistic had we not stepped up ourselves to help, with zero government help at all.

You might think the peninsula is all wine, beers, beaches, cliffside mansions and so on – and we do have that, so come and enjoy that. But we also have significant disadvantage – disadvantage that is not being met with investment. Indeed, compared to, say, Greater Geelong, the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula region is paying something like $290 million in payroll tax versus $65 million in the Greater Geelong region due to metro classification. Yet not only do we miss out on regional investment, we miss out on metro investment, as this government forgets that we are part of metro Melbourne, so we get way less investment than the Geelong region while paying more tax. This is nothing against Geelong, but it is about getting our fair share on the peninsula.

The Nepean and Mornington electorates as well have zero passenger rail services – in metro Melbourne of course. Eighty-two per cent of the peninsula has no public transport. Hastings electorate does have a V/Line service – that is right, a metro area with a V/Line diesel, non-electrified line. If we are going to be classed as metro, then we should get metro investment in public transport. Yet when I secured $225 million previously towards electrifying the line from Frankston to Baxter, this Labor government refused to support it going ahead, and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese scrapped the funding altogether because of this government's refusal after he had promised not only to build it but to build it sooner than us if elected – yet another election lie; it seems to go across both federal and state Labor.

And what about crime? We also have this government investing less and less in resources for our police. We are more than 1500 police short. They reduced front counter hours or shut stations across the state. This includes Mornington police station, which had its hours reduced three years ago, all while crime was going up and all while this government was weakening bail laws and consequences.

Now let us talk about taxes – 67 new or increased taxes under this government, when Dan Andrews in 2014 said there would be no new taxes under a government that he led. Surely it is clear to any sensible member opposite that Victoria has been neglected and many are not better off than they were 12 years ago, despite the cognitive dissonance, mental gymnastics and budget opaqueness Labor tried to engage in. I will mention the time. It is great to speak on the budget at 3:05 in the morning. It seems like we have an endless debate in the chamber – in both chambers – here tonight. It is very similar to the budget situation with Labor; we have an endless amount of debt, an endless amount of mismanagement and more. Victorians are suffering under what is nearly now 23 out of 27 years of Labor in power in Victoria. So I say to Victorians: we must change. We must do things differently. We must change government in November. Why? Why must we change government? It is not just change for change's sake. It is because we need to run our economy better. We need to grow our economy. We need to create jobs. We need to grow industry. We need to invest in the right connectivity infrastructure. I know how much members love investing in infrastructure on the peninsula. Actually, they do not, but I know someone else I would want to invest in it. We need to create opportunity, though. We need to create hope and we need to create freedom for Victorians. How can we do this? We can do this by reducing taxes such as the GP tax, the emergency services tax, the schools tax and the holiday and tourism short-stay tax, which is greatly impacting the peninsula, and by cutting stamp duty up to $1 million for first home buyers. We will lift the payroll tax threshold to $1.2 million by 2028–29 and then reduce the metro payroll tax rate down to 4.8 per cent. And we will increase the land tax threshold to $300,000.

We will also stop Labor's gas bans and open up gas exploration, and not only that, we will open up investment in mining and resources, mineral sands, gold and more. There are so many opportunities in this space. We will grow our economy with our 10-year economic plan and then pay down the debt, reaching a real cash surplus – an actual real cash surplus – in a few years time, by 2032, so we do not then have to spend $1 million an hour on interest. That can then be spent and put into essential services. On crime as well, we are going to have policies like break bail, face jail and Jack's law. We are going to have things like better police pursuit laws. We are going to employ 3000 more police. We are going to reopen police stations to full-time counter hours, including Mornington police station. We are going to have 200 more PSOs. We are going to toughen our bail laws and have greater consequences for offenders and invest in programs like Youthstart and Restart for crime prevention.

We will put money into reducing homelessness – homelessness that this government does not seem to care about. We have already committed $250,000 to Fusion, housing young people on the Mornington Peninsula. We are also going to invest $250,000 for the southern Mornington Peninsula, and there are more announcements there to come.

We will pause the white elephant Suburban Rail Loop – $200 billion-plus that is not yet even on the budget papers, when we could actually spend that money more wisely elsewhere. We will have a royal commission into CFMEU corruption – CFMEU corruption that has seen $15 billion wasted under this government. We will have proper IBAC follow-the-money powers to track down those funds – funds that we can then put back into our economy, that we can actually put back into investment – that were stolen under the auspices and the watch of this Labor government.

We will have a back office public service hiring freeze and an executive pay cap so we can then have more money for frontline nurses, police, teachers and others. We will have a regional 25 per cent fair share guarantee. We will fast-track home building in growth areas and in regional Victoria and by expanding the capital city zone. We will manage this budget better into the future, including by having a proper charter of budget honesty. We will repeal the treaty, with a saving of $1 billion. And it is not just the saving –

Members interjecting.

Matthew Guy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt my colleague, but I cannot hear him with the level of interjection. Can you please call the house to order?

Sarah Connolly interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): That is not on the point of order, member for Laverton. The level of noise from members in the chamber has reached a rather loud level.

Chris CREWTHER: I am having to yell louder and louder because they just do not want to listen. They want to try and talk over me. They do not want to listen to the fact that they are failing this state. They are failing this economy. They are failing Victorians. I was talking about the treaty, where there is a saving of $1 billion, but it is also about equality. It is about equality under the law. We should all be equal under the law, all be considered as equal Victorians, so we can then use those funds to invest properly to reduce disadvantage right across Victoria, including within our Indigenous communities.

We will also do things in the health space. We have an ambulance ramping crisis. We have so many issues in our hospital sector. We are going to invest in the meningococcal B vaccinations as well. We are also going to protect agriculture, which I think this government has forgotten about. You are mowing down agriculture. You have got the VNI West project, which we are going to put a halt to as well, putting transmission lines through all this great farmland. I am the grandson of a farmer who was farming at Ellam, near Jeparit, right next to Tom McIntosh's father. They had neighbouring farms, actually. They were right opposite each other; they were sharing farm equipment. I know his grandparents and my grandparents understood farming and the need to invest in farming. Having grown up in Horsham, having worked in the agricultural sector, I understand this need as well. And the Liberals and Nationals know that if we are going to grow this economy we need to invest in minerals and resources but we also need to invest in agriculture and in growing that sector. We have a great opportunity there, particularly to add value to what we produce here in Victoria. We have a huge opportunity to add value. It is not just about high-quantity goods, it is about products that we can produce, whether it is in Mildura, Shepparton, Horsham or elsewhere, or indeed on the Mornington Peninsula. The Mornington Peninsula has about 40 per cent farmland as well, even though we are classed as metropolitan Melbourne. We need to invest there.

We need to invest in our water infrastructure. We need to invest in getting our goods to the port better and better and easier and easier. And that is why projects such as doing the Murray Basin rail project properly – it was not done properly under this government – are so important. And it was not done properly, because this government has not managed this economy. So I call on this government to better manage this budget, and if they do not, Victorians need to change government in November.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (03:13): I proudly rise to speak on the Allan Labor government's 2026–27 state budget. For over 20 years, since I was first appointed to the Moreland transport forum, chaired by Cr Robert Larocca, I have been advocating for improvements to the Upfield train line, and since I was elected three years ago, we have had significant progress. Last year the federal government committed $7 million for planning work, and the state has contributed significantly to this and the plans are progressing. And now in this budget I am so proud to have secured $3.6 million for the final business case to duplicate the line and for other associated works, like traction and signalling upgrades and further level crossing removals along the line, delivering the next important steps to increase peak service frequency for the people of Fawkner, Campbellfield, Dallas and beyond, as well as for all those south of the line in Fawkner, Merlynston, Brunswick, Coburg et cetera. And coming very soon are the extra off-peak night and weekend services on the Upfield line, with trains at least every 20 minutes.

We are already benefiting from the new and bigger Ballarat-made X'trapolis trains on both the Craigieburn and the Upfield lines, providing extra capacity, comfort and accessibility. New off-peak, shoulder-peak and night and weekend services will soon be operating on the Craigieburn line, with

trains every 20 minutes, which I know you are very happy about too, Acting Speaker. And I was very happy to secure funding for beautification, safety and lighting upgrades at Broadmeadows station. PSOs are now at Broadmeadows all day, every day, until the last train, and the community connectors outreach program will be expanded to Broadmeadows station in the coming months.

Community connectors have expertise in mental health, trauma, homelessness, alcohol and drug issues, family violence and crisis support. They work at the train stations and help vulnerable people in crisis. They connect people with services and work closely with Metro staff, protective services officers and Victoria Police. The program has operated at Dandenong station since 2023 and at Frankston since late 2024. Across both sites the community connectors have engaged with almost 5000 people and referred hundreds to support services. The outreach workers have helped de-escalate or prevent more than 600 incidents, which is incredible. Since their rollout both stations have seen a drop in disorderly and offensive conduct offences, an 85 per cent drop at Dandenong station and a 44 per cent drop at Frankston station and the Young Street precinct. We know that support is really important. Outreach services do an incredible job getting to people who might not know how to access services or just need a little bit of help to get the services they need. We have got PSOs all day at Glenroy station, making our beautiful new station precinct even safer and more attractive. I am sure you know, Acting Speaker, that the level crossing removal at Glenroy and the new station is one of my proud achievements and something I have been working on, again, for over 20 years.

Given the member for Hastings started tonight's theme earlier inspired by Paul Kelly's *From Little Things Big Things Grow*, it is very fulfilling to see projects we have worked on for many years come to fruition, like the Upfield bike path, the last stage of which is almost finished, to finally link all of the paths in Merri-bek to the ring-road path. There are bus service improvements as well – another issue I have been advocating on for many years. Last year we funded Sunday and evening services on route 536, which runs from Glenroy station to Gowrie station through North Glenroy. This year I was very proud to deliver Sunday and evening services through Oak Park, Glenroy West, Jacana, Broadmeadows, Dallas and Coolaroo on route 542, the bus I used to catch home from school and work. Bus 561 has been upgraded as well in this budget, with additional weekday and evening services, which would have been handy many years ago when I had to trek off to La Trobe from Glenroy at night.

As you know, education remains my number one priority. I cannot tell you how happy I was to secure $1 million for the detailed design and preparation work for the new leading-edge science, technology, engineering, design, arts and maths hub, as well as new classrooms and food technology, cafeteria and wellbeing spaces, at Glenroy College. The Merri-bek North education plan has delivered the master plan for Glenroy as well as new programs, more subject choice, university links and other resources to all the schools involved in the plan. We have also worked closely with council to deliver upgraded sports fields at Glenroy College as part of the shared-use investment. Many years ago, when I was a local councillor, we jointly funded the magnificent performing arts centre there. The school is coming along in leaps and bounds, and I encourage local families to check it out and meet with the wonderful principal and leadership team.

I tell you what, I cannot wait to check out the new science and visual arts buildings and food technology hub at John Fawkner College. This was the first project I was able to commit to before being elected three years ago, and the magnificent new $14.5 million building is about to welcome students next week. When I was there last with the builder, he said it was the best food tech building he had ever seen in all the years he had been involved in school buildings, both public and private. I am really proud of our investment there and how it will change lives in Fawkner. I was chatting to some of the John Fawkner kids today who were here for Youth Parliament – that was yesterday now – and they were so excited about the new buildings. Last week I had the pleasure of having a year 10 student, Tugra, from John Fawkner with me for work experience. I want to thank Lisa, the leadership team and all of the dedicated teachers and staff for the magnificent job they are doing at the school. I also commend the Friends of John Fawkner group, including Alex, Gemma and Fiona, for the positive

work they are doing in the community. This year's budget also delivered $154,000 for the Melbourne Victory sports and leadership program at John Fawkner, and I am currently in discussions with council about other opportunities to expand the sports field and shared-use agreements at the school.

It was also a pleasure to drop in to Moomba Park Primary. The new toilets there are finally open, and the kids were just really excited. I would not have thought you could get that excited about new toilets, but they really were. They are quite beautiful toilets, if I say so myself. The good news I was able to deliver when I was there was the $314,000 that we are delivering for a new modular music classroom at the school. The old classroom had issues, and when I first met with the principal last year, the main thing he wanted was an upgraded music room, and I am very proud to have been able to deliver that. The Wimbi early childhood centre is just on the other side of the oval there, and that is a magnificent early childhood education centre. It is government owned and government run and one of the first of the 50 that this Labor government will deliver. It is a magnificent building, and everybody is loving it and trying to get their kids in there.

We have also got the tech school about to open. It is incredible. I cannot wait. I am visiting there again on Tuesday. It is almost ready to open up for students, and you will be very excited, Acting Speaker, to come along and see the difference it will make for all of our kids in the north. It will have a focus on building skills in growth industries like renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, logistics, robotics and IT, and we know those opportunities are really important for the kids in the north.

Right next door to that is the magnificent Kangan centre of excellence for health and community care, and that is in addition to the building and construction learning facilities there. I encourage everybody to check out our free TAFE courses that are operating there, with everything from accounting to vet nursing, building and construction, engineering, nursing, early childhood, cybersecurity, IT, animal studies, dental assisting, youth, commercial cookery, aged care and disability, health, community services, logistics and accounting and bookkeeping. It literally has everything. The students when they walk in there feel so valued because it is such a beautiful building, and it makes them feel proud to study in Broadmeadows and to get the skills they need for the jobs they want and the jobs we need into the future. And free TAFE is not limited to just young people; it is open for every citizen and permanent resident. I think still a lot of people do not know about it, but we know it is one of our trademark Labor initiatives that literally changes lives. We have also recently launched the Broadmeadows university campus hub led by La Trobe, and that was funded by the federal government. I thank Basem Abdo for his work on that.

In the budget we have $390,000 for Banksia Gardens to help with their program that works with disengaged students from Broadmeadows Primary, Coolaroo South Primary, Dallas Brooks primary, Meadows Primary, Hume Valley School, Holy Child Primary and Broadmeadows Valley Primary School. They are the schools in my electorate, Acting Speaker, but there are some schools in your electorate that benefit from the wonderful program that they run at Banksia, Project REAL. They do a magnificent job there.

The budget, as only Labor budgets do, delivers $2.2 billion for students with a disability, including free transport, after-school care and inclusion supports statewide, and that makes a massive difference. We have spoken before about carers and the need for those supports. I know parents who have got a child with a disability, and they have not been able to work full-time because they could not get care during school holidays. But having after-school and school holidays care makes an incredible difference to these families. It means that they can work, they can get a job and they can participate in the economy and we are not relegating them to a life of poverty. I just think that is really one of the best things we have done as a government, and it makes a huge difference to families. We have upgraded all of the special schools. Tomorrow – actually, well, today now – I am off to the Broadmeadows Special Developmental School. We have invested $20 million to double that in size, and it has got a whole new indoor gymnasium. I am going to take some soccer balls down there. I am sure those kids are right into soccer right now. I think everyone in our electorates is. That will be lots of fun.

This budget has delivered $500 million to build and upgrade kinders and government-run childcare centres, and our free kinder for three- and four-year-olds continues. Again, that is another life-changing initiative that only our Labor government invests in. We also invest in our early childhood educators and teachers. Our hardworking teachers, school leaders and education support staff will be the best paid in the country, and they have earned it. Their salaries will rise by 28.3 per cent over the next four years, and early childhood teachers will reach wage parity with Victorian government school teachers for the first time, which is wonderful. We know how important their work is. We know how important those early years are for future outcomes. The kinder educators will receive an average pay increase of 39 per cent over four years, which is exactly what they deserve, but it is also incredible. I am so proud to be part of a government that is delivering that for them.

Our free kinder for three- and four-year-old kids continues, saving families up to $2700 per child. Free dental check-ups and treatments for school students continue, and free glasses for kids. The school breakfast program has been expanded to every government school, and we have delivered over 65 million school breakfasts. We have got the Active Kids vouchers, $200 for eligible families, and the $400 Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund for eligible families. The State Schools' Relief fund helps eligible families with uniforms, shoes, stationery and essential school items. We have also got the baby bundles, prep bags and kinder kits, free museums and galleries for kids under 16, free zoo entry for kids on the weekends and holidays and half-price camping.

I was also really, really proud of this budget investment in homelessness support: $17 million to expand outreach teams, including in Hume and Merri-bek. We know how much that is needed. We have got more funding for food relief, emergency housing, financial counselling and legal aid. We have got $1 billion for roads, rubbish and graffiti removal and more mowing on roadsides and in rail corridors. That is the biggest road blitz in history, and you and I know how important that is. We have got increased allowances for foster and kinship carers, which is really important. Surgery and specialist paediatric appointments are being fast-tracked, and we are expanding our hospitals and giving more funding for chronic disease and palliative care, something I feel really strongly about too. There is $5.3 million in grants for seniors groups and $33.5 million for the violence reduction unit, plus $5 million for youth crime prevention.

There is such great work happening with our youth. Last week I met with Le Mana Pasifika, who are doing fantastic work with young people. There is the Adam Saad Pathways program, with a focus on multicultural and First Nations youth, the Eritrean Families in Hume and the North and all of their wonderful programs and the Northern Community Legal Centre, with their lawyers in schools programs. There are so many good programs that now have pathways for extra funding for the good work they do. We are combating hate and racism with $3.43 million for community-led projects. We have got $1.2 million for the Small Business Activation Fund. We have got 7000 new social homes in addition to the 16,000 already being delivered, including the 120 at Coleraine Street, which are nearly ready to go. They are magnificent. You will have to come and check them out as well.

I am just really proud of all of the things we have delivered. Stamp duty concessions have been extended. We have got the Solar Homes and hot water rebates extended and $4.5 million to support local music across the state.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (03:28): I am so proud to rise and speak on the 2026–27 budget. When I think about this budget, I see it as a budget that shows that we are listening to the Victorian people and that their worries are our worries too, and so we have acted to provide support to them. There are three areas that I would like to focus on to start with. The first of those is around transport and getting around, which is the biggest priority for my community – having an easier way to get to work, an easier way to get the kids to school, an easier way even to go and buy a bottle of milk.

I was so thrilled to see that in this budget we provided funding matched by the federal government to bring forward stage 2 of the Donnybrook Road upgrade, which is delivering a second bridge over the Hume, expanding the exit lane off the Hume and providing a duplicated Donnybrook Road up to

Dwyer Street. One of the reasons I am so pleased to see this done is because this shows how the community raising their voice and speaking together and how joint advocacy can be so effective. I say that because when community consultation for stage 1 of the Donnybrook Road upgrade was underway, Major Road Projects Victoria, as they were then, received the largest number of pieces of feedback from community members they had ever received for a community consultation. The community lifted its voice up and its message was very clear: we need more, sooner. I am so proud that together with the member for Kalkallo we have been able to deliver that for our community. Now stage 1 and stage 2 will be delivered together. The community will not have to wait for additional lanes over the Hume, and the trip onto and off the Hume will be much faster and smoother for the community. I am so thrilled about that.

Another concern of the community that has been addressed through the 2026–27 budget in Donnybrook is pedestrian safety for people travelling by foot to Donnybrook train station. Currently people need to walk on the shoulder of the road, where the land is undeveloped by the developer. Without the approval of a subdivision permit, the developer is not required to build a footpath. So we are putting in place some remedial works and barriers so that people can safely – this includes school kids on bikes and mums pushing prams – get to Donnybrook train station. It is something simple and straightforward but something I am really pleased to see for our community. Another issue that had been raised with me that we were able to address through this budget is the desire for bike parking – a bike cage, essentially – at Donnybrook train station so that people can secure their bikes when they are travelling to work or to school. That has also been delivered in this budget.

Within this budget also we are taking the next step with improving northern rail. It is a bit of a worry that the opposition spokesperson for major transport infrastructure does not seem to understand how this works, but the northern rail program business case takes the planning work to the next step. This is being funded together with the federal government, and at the end of this process there will be decided scope and understanding of what needs to happen and staging of when it will happen. This is moving us towards better rail services for those in the north. I know, Acting Speaker Walters, that that is important for you too, so I am really pleased to see the government continue that important work.

People in Mernda are also benefiting from an easier way to get around, with increased frequency of trains on Sundays. We are moving towards a train every 20 minutes or so from Sunday morning and all weekend. This makes it easier for young people who have got a job at the Plenty Valley shops and people heading into town for the footy and all sorts of reasons. Along with that, we have the 386 and 387 buses with extended hours right up to midnight. Young people that head to RMIT to study and might want to either continue their study in the library or discuss their philosophy course earnestly over a beer with friends will be able to get home safely into the night. I am really pleased about that.

The budget also includes support for more affordable transport more generally. Of course in this budget we have the 20 per cent off rego, which has been extremely popular in my community. I think we have seen something like 1.4 million claims already, which shows how important cost-of-living support is for our community right now. I think it shows that we have made the right decision to use some of our surplus to support Victorians. Rather than banking it, we are backing Victorians. Half-price public transport is also supported through this budget, as well as the continuation of free public transport for under-18s. This is a topic that came up at the cost-of-living forum I held with the Minister for Cost of Living. Parents spoke about how much of a difference that free public transport for under-18s makes to the family budget, so I am really pleased that this government has backed that in in this budget.

Moving on from transport, I would like to speak about what this budget means for the health of Victorians. We know that the Allan Labor government is continuing the tradition of Labor governments that have served before in increasing funding for health every year, and there is $32 billion in funding in 2026–27 for health, which is a big figure that is hard to grapple with, but some of the things that that provides will make such a difference for families. There is one I want to highlight particularly, because it is a topic I have been working on in my community just this past

week. The 2026–27 budget provides 250 speech pathology and occupational therapy student grants. We know this is one of the first steps on a family's journey to getting support, both physically and in terms of money, for a child when they notice something is not quite right or a teacher notices that the child has difficulty with pen grip or they are not quite getting there in class. Having more speech pathologists and having more occupational therapists will help address the wait that can exist for families while they wait to have that confirmation of diagnosis with support and adaptations required for that student in the school and also strategies for families to help their child at home. That is not going to come about straightaway, because it is student grants, but it shows that we are a government that is planning for not just this year but future years as well and the future needs of Victorians in regard to their health.

There is $109 million in this budget for planned surgery and specialist appointments. In budget estimates hearings the minister went into some detail about the strategies they are using to shorten waitlists for Victorians to see a specialist and some of the innovative ways that they are auditing, updating and bolstering waitlists with the appropriate paperwork so that appointments can be effective, not wasted, and that we are making sure that people that need to be in front of a specialist are in front of a specialist. That is going to make a real difference. People will not even know this is happening in the background. This is not something that is going to be well understood across the community. It is not something to secure votes or any such thing. It is just because we are a good government and we are looking at ways to improve the health system, and this is something really fantastic for the families in my community.

The families in my community will not know themselves when we have a new emergency department at the Northern. I have a picture of the new Northern ED up on the wall in my office, and it is my happy place to look at that picture of a fantastic large ED for our community, with separate areas for children, for mental health and for alcohol and other drugs – and with more comfortable seats, hopefully. I will have to learn where the plug is for mobile phones. I know exactly where it is now at the ED; I always make sure I sit in the chair next to the plug, just in case I need to charge my phone. But this new ED will mean that we have got more treatment spaces, and so you probably will not have to charge your phone because you will be able to get through faster and in a nicer environment for the children.

But often you do not even have to go to the emergency department. In this budget there is continued funding to expand the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. To have an emergency department in your lounge room to speak to a doctor in the middle of the night – I mean, it is 3:40 now. We could get on the phone and talk to an emergency physician right now. I do not think anyone on this side needs to, but perhaps somebody on that side might benefit from a quick chat with a doctor.

Brad Rowswell: I think that is a personal reflection, member for Yan Yean.

Lauren KATHAGE: I would not be so brave as the member for Sandringham to say that after his disgraceful comments this morning towards me.

I move on to the bigger picture of our fiscal strategy. We know that, as I said at the start, our surplus this year means that we have additional funds to provide cost-of-living support to Victorians and to continue to invest in the health of Victorians, and that is because we continue to deliver on our fiscal strategy. Steps 1 through 3 have been met: creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth, tick; returning to an operating cash surplus, tick; and returning to operating surpluses, tick. We continue to work towards stabilising net debt levels as a proportion of gross state product, and that work continues.

We have seen even just today that business continues to invest in Victoria. The latest ABS figures show that our business community is strong, that our economy continues to grow and that businesses have faith that they can grow, make a profit and employ people in Victoria. And we are really –

Natalie Suleyman: Hear, hear – 123,000.

Lauren KATHAGE: many, many – thank you very much, Minister. The minister is across the details on that, as she should be. Let us zoom down to the small again. We had the Minister for Small and Family Business in my community just last week talking with business owners about the new mentoring supports and the different programs that are available for small business in Victoria. Small businesses make up, I am going to say, over 50 per cent of businesses in Victoria, and each small business is a family, basically. It is a family, it is shoes on the kids' feet, it is the cost of sport – all those things by our strong, vibrant and growing small business community, which continues to receive support from this government.

The things that matter most to Victorians are in this budget. We have listened to what Victorians want and need, and we are proudly delivering for Victorians in the 2026–27 budget.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (03:43): What a delightful time of the day to be speaking about the budget. This was another fantastic year of delivery for my community in Melbourne's inner west. With the 15 minutes I have available – and I welcome participatory sharing of contributions; that would help – we have lots of good things to talk about in Footscray, in particular the very exciting announcement for a major upgrade for Maribyrnong College. It is a $14.3 million upgrade for Maribyrnong College, a school really close to my heart. My dad was a school captain at Maribyrnong High, which it was called back in the day. I believe he was school captain in 1968. And Maribyrnong of course is well known for being an exceptional sports school.

We have the sports academy, which was championed by the wonderful late Lynne Kosky. It is also a fantastic local school, but we really need an upgrade to some of those academic buildings. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with the school council in recent years, and of course the principal Michael Keenan, who is doing a fantastic job there to work together on the master plan and advocate for this funding. It was a great honour to join the Minister for Education last week to visit Maribyrnong College and tour the area that is going to be having an upgrade. The performing arts space will be redeveloped, and the food tech rooms and some of the music classrooms. Maribyrnong is just going from strength to strength in its performing arts and with its music students, which is wonderful to see.

Footscray High did not miss out in the budget this year. Footscray High of course in its original iteration was closed down by the Kennett government. It was formerly located on Wembley Avenue in Yarraville, and now under the Labor government we have spent more than $100 million on rebuilding this school into a three-campus model serving students across the inner west. One of the things I am so proud of with Footscray High is that at their Kinnear campus, which is located on the Maribyrnong River, the students expressed an interest in learning how to row and utilising the Footscray rowing club. Again, my dear old dad was the secretary of the Footscray rowing club, and they produced some great rowers there. So the kids at Footscray High are now learning to row; it is one of the only state schools that has a rowing program. But of course it is a really expensive sport, and one of the things I have spoken about in recent years with the principal there Jill English is how we make it an affordable sport for students at the school. I secured $140,000 in this year's budget to solidify that program and embed it to get those kids out on the water. It is fantastic to see the impact it has on students. Last week at the Footscray High chef's dinner, which is a magnificent event that the students host every year with a local chef – this year it was Harley and Rose from West Footscray – I spoke to so many parents who were just absolutely glowing in praise of the rowing program and the impact it has had on these young people. Leadership, teamwork, the routine of getting up early and getting out on the mighty Maribyrnong River – it has been an incredible program, and I am really delighted to have secured $140,000 for it to continue and to grow.

In Footscray we are proud of upgrading our government schools. I believe that high-quality public education is the great leveller we have in society. Since I have had the great honour of being the member for Footscray over the last eight years, we have worked methodically to upgrade our local government schools. Budget to budget, that has been something I have worked on. It is really great seeing students enjoying the new facilities as they are opened. This year we opened West Footscray Primary School's new gymnasium, a project that the principal Brendan Millar and the school

community have been working on for some time, and it is terrific to see the students at West Footscray enjoying those new facilities. It has also added a much-needed venue, with the indoor stadium shortage in Melbourne's inner west.

The budget also delivered free public transport for our young people getting out and getting to school and travelling, and that has been fantastic. It is time for some of the participatory aspects of my contribution. That is a really important cost-of-living measure for families in our community, and it is just one of many measures. My kids had their dental checks a couple of weeks ago. I think the dental vans was another program that was cut under the Kennett government but that this government has brought back. We know that for a lot of families, taking their little ones to the dentist is a real stretch in the family budget, so that is fantastic. I love the free Glasses for Kids program, and it is always really exciting to see the students proudly opening their glasses when they receive them.

One of the other things that I talk a lot about to people in our community –

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Katie HALL: Thank you, member for Sandringham. Keep holding it up. I do not have my glasses on. I was not expecting to be on my feet at this hour, so I forgot my laptop and my glasses.

The school breakfast clubs program – Footscray Primary School runs a terrific program, and just every bit helps. The Get Active Kids voucher program – whenever those vouchers are released I know it is something that the sporting clubs in our community promote heavily, and they are really, really popular. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund for eligible families – every young person deserves the opportunity to go on a school camp. The fund is to help families pay for that. Also, I am really proud our hardworking teachers, school leaders and education support workers have been provided with a pay offer and increase of between 28 and 30 per cent. That supports teachers to do things like take our kids on camps. We are enormously grateful for that. I am really proud, as the daughter of a teacher who spent her entire career in the government system, that they have a pay offer that they can be really proud of. That is something that has been really important for me, and I thank the Minister for Education and his staff for their work on that.

We have announced in this year's budget $500 million to build and upgrade kinders. The sod turn for a new kindergarten has happened in Footscray North at the site of the former special school on Rosamond Road. It is going to be a big kinder; I think it is a five- or six-room kindergarten. But the thing I love the most about it is that it is opposite Footscray North Primary School, so the kids in that community will be able to go to a beautiful new kinder – and access free kinder as well, which is saving families around $2500 a year – and then go across the road to Footscray North Primary School, which is a terrific local school and which has already benefited from a $20 million upgrade, and then they will be zoned to Maribyrnong College, which, as I just mentioned, is having a $14.3 million upgrade. So there is a lot going on in Melbourne's inner west.

We are also now benefiting from the no-truck zone enforcement cameras, which is something I secured in last year's budget. They have been switched on and they are working, and they are transformational for people who live in the inner west on roads that should never have been a connection for trucks to the port. That is actually really improving livability in my community. So there is a lot going on.

Of course our beautiful new Footscray Hospital opened this year, and the investments in health services locally are absolutely extraordinary. To see this hospital go from an idea and advocacy, with the support of the former health minister Jill Hennessy, to now being a reality is really special. I know people in Footscray are doing it tough right now and the cost of living is really hitting families hard. Something I have been working on over the last couple of years, which I secured additional funding for in this budget, is a project called the Lighthouse Cafe in central Footscray, because I could see that there was a need for people experiencing homelessness or food insecurity to have a warm space to go into, a safe space to sit down and have a meal and have the expert social workers of the Salvation

Army help them out. This is about meeting people where they are at, and it has now been open for two weeks. In their first week they served 700 meals. These kinds of support services are there to help triage people into the existing services they need, whether it is at Footscray Hospital, whether it is with Cohealth or whether it is for housing services, and I am grateful to the Salvation Army for partnering with us.

The Western Bulldogs Community Foundation – Cody Weightman has painted a beautiful mural on the wall. I am very excited that Cody is coming back to play for the Doggies this weekend after a two-year hiatus. The mural is a fantastic addition to central Footscray.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (03:58): I am absolutely delighted to make a contribution to the budget 2026–27 take-note motion at exactly 4 am on Friday 5 June. It is exciting. There is a lot of exciting news in this budget in my electorate of Clarinda, because the Allan Labor government is making life easier and safer and more affordable for families in my electorate of Clarinda in the south-east of Melbourne. Cost-of-living pressures are being felt by everyone in Clarinda, and that is why this budget is slashing the cost of commuting. We have delivered free public transport until the end of May and then half-price fares from 1 June to the end of the year. This has saved the average daily commuter in Clarinda more than $1300. I know that for a fact, and I take my father-in-law as an example. He had not had experience travelling from the neighbouring suburb, but this time, because of the free public transport, he took the opportunity and the advantage that he got, and he took the train from either Springvale or Westall train station all the way to Bendigo. I heard the other day he went all the way to Albury, exploring the wonderful area, and this was made possible by the Allan Labor government's response to this cost-of-living pressure.

The cost of living is front of mind for so many in my electorate of Clarinda. It is one issue which my constituents raise with me on a consistent basis when I am out doorknocking, at a mobile office and at community events. With the cost of living, from utility bills to every bill, balancing the family budget is consistently at the front and centre of the mind of families in Clarinda and across the state. This is particularly so in Greater Dandenong in the south-east, which is right up there in terms of being one of Victoria's most socially diverse and disadvantaged local government areas, and I would say my good friend the member for Mulgrave would agree with me on that point.

Given this pressure in my community, across our state and across the country, it makes absolute sense that this is where our focus is: delivering real help with the cost of living and more investment in frontline services. For parents in Clarinda every dollar counts. We have heard from many speakers before me, and there is also a real opportunity for my electorate of Clarinda. That is why we are making public transport free for Victorians under the age of 18, delivering savings of up to almost $800 per year per child. With free public transport for those under 18 years, we are ensuring cheaper school runs, more affordable weekends and one less thing for families to worry about. Donald Trump's war in the Middle East is driving up fuel prices, putting local households under pressure. That is why we are delivering 20 per cent off car regos. A driver with one car will receive up to $186, and a family with two cars will receive up to $372. It is one-off cost-of-living help for families right now, while still delivering a surplus.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the surplus here in Victoria. Donald Trump's Middle East conflict is having an impact on the global and Australian economies. Despite this global pressure, Victoria's economy has grown faster than any other state over the last decade and provides half a million more jobs than in 2020. This is fantastic. More businesses are also being created, with business investment up 44 per cent since 2020. Victoria's resilient economy is well placed to weather global challenges. This budget's return to surplus is delivering step 3 of our fiscal strategy. Debt is being reduced to a share of the economy in Victoria that is compatible with other states and other countries globally. Victoria was hit harder than any other state by COVID-19. It has continued to invest in schools, hospitals and the transport network and has continued to see growth in our economy.

Once again Victoria is a world leader – in health technology and medical research, with the largest sector in Victoria. Given the electorate of Clarinda is in the south-east, close to the Monash Medical Centre and Monash University, I would like to talk about education. Victoria has one of the best school systems in the world, with NAPLAN results that have led the nation. With the rising cost of living putting pressure on household budgets, from free school breakfast clubs to more affordable uniforms this budget invests $59.4 million to help families with school-aged kids. This includes expanding the Glasses for Kids program for more schools, delivering free eye tests and free glasses to kids who need them. We know when kids go to school with a full stomach they can study much better. They can concentrate better as a result of the free glasses test, and I have seen how it is done at the school in my local community at the Westall community centre, which is a fantastic facility. We can see how kids have improved their learning by having their eyes tested, with free glasses for the kids who need them most.

From free kinder to free TAFE and everything in between, the Allan Labor government invests in education because we know that we are transforming early childhood education and delivering free kinder, saving families up to $2700 per child every year. This budget also invests nearly half a billion dollars to build and upgrade kinders and government-run childcare centres, and we have continued to invest in this space because we can see how it fits in from prep to kinder, then to primary school and then to secondary school. Another example in my electorate that we can see is of how a family of let us say two or three kids can study at the same school – from a kinder that is being built or upgraded, to primary school and to secondary school near there. These are fantastic initiatives.

The other one that I am very proud to see is the statewide disability inclusion program at schools. We all know how important this is, and I am sure that each and every family has a family member with special needs or knows of a family with children with special needs. This is very, very important, and I am very proud of it.

I just would like to come back to free TAFE, which is very important in my electorate of Clarinda. We are investing in three new TAFE centres of excellence in partnership with the Commonwealth, including the Home and Community Care Centre of Excellence at Holmesglen TAFE, at the Moorabbin campus. Although it is a little bit outside, it is in the neighbourhood, and I know that many of my constituents would have the benefit of taking up TAFE. These are national hubs that will make sure Victorians can take up job opportunities into the future. This is well received, and I know this for sure because when we talk to residents, either through phone banking or doorknocking or at a community event, we know that it has been of real interest to those who want to upgrade their skills or to those who want to improve their skills so that they can get a better-paying job with a real outcome. So this is a fantastic initiative.

Because the former health minister is here, I would like to say the Allan Labor government always invests in our healthcare system. Since 2014, without saying much, we delivered 11 new hospitals and hired 41,900 nurses, midwives, doctors and healthcare workers, and this budget funds the hiring of an extra 250 graduate nurses and the delivery of fast-track surgery and specialist appointments for kids, and this is very important. I cannot help but say the electorate of Clarinda is not far from the Monash medical precinct, and I am also very proud to see the Monash Children's Hospital very close by and the heart hospital on Blackburn Road. This is fantastic. I cannot help myself, because, either driving past or visiting the hospital not long ago, it says a lot about the values and about the care of the Allan Labor government. When critical illness or injury strikes, the emergency department is exactly where you need it to be. But some conditions do not need to be treated in hospital, and we heard from a previous speaker that urgent care clinics deliver health care when the need is urgent but not life-threatening. Victoria was the first to introduce this model, which has now been adopted by the Commonwealth and rolled out across Australia – as you see, another fantastic initiative. With this budget we are investing $20.9 million to continue running nine urgent care clinics, including the Monash Children's urgent care clinic in the south-east.

Community safety is another concern in my electorate, and I am very proud that Victoria has more police than any other state. With this budget we are boosting police resources by recruiting 200 police reservists. This $62 million investment will free up frontline officers to make sure that they are out where they need to be most and keeping our community in Clarinda safe.

I would like to go on in the remaining time – because the minister at the table, the Minister for Local Government, is a very big fan of the Hawks – to talk about the Kennedy Community Centre. This community sporting club brings Clarinda locals together. It is fantastic that our suburb is growing. Victoria's bus network also makes it easier for locals in Clarinda to get around. This budget invests almost $100 million to deliver more buses where they are needed most, including at the new bus stop at the Kennedy Community Centre. It is wonderful and is welcomed by the Dingley community in my electorate. Hawthorn Football Club will move there, and the AFLW and AFL tenants and the local football club will be playing there. I invite those who support the Hawks – and those who do not – to please come along to see the new Kennedy centre, right in the electorate of Clarinda. Labor is investing in Clarinda. Do the Liberals support our investment, or will they cut?

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (04:13): Well done, member for Clarinda. What a champion he is of his electorate. Acting Speaker, wakey-wakey, eggs and bakey! Here we are. What is it? It is a quarter past 4 in the morning. Where are all the softies on the other side – drooling on the pillow? It is going to be time to get up now.

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: No. I am tie free this morning – no shackles at a quarter past 4 in the morning, member for Sandringham.

Let us get into it, the state budget. The Victorian state budget delivered four new schools, 31 school upgrades and 22 new kinders. We are hiring up to 250 more graduate nurses – I know there is someone up in the benches there that loves that one. We are delivering the biggest road blitz in the state's history, and we are hiring 50 more PSOs and 200 police reservists – which we just spoke on yesterday, I think, in the Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026 – and we are doing it all while delivering a surplus as well. So a big thankyou to the Treasurer and her team. I know some of those very, very hardworking people intimately, having worked in that portfolio area as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, which was an absolute pleasure. I know how hard they work.

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Sorry, am I shouting? Am I waking you up? The thing that is really getting me energised is the 20 per cent off your rego. Have you got it yet, Acting Speaker? No? Well, I can help you out. The Service Victoria app is up and running. We had a small period there when it was overwhelmed by excited people who could use that money – that $186 per car. It is up to two cars per individual – $372, with some quick maths. They could get that and, as one person told me, they could service their car. They could do the minor service on their car that was due. They could actually put food on the table. They could pay other bills. This is a government that is listening and providing that targeted cost-of-living relief to make life easier and safer for Victorians. For that 20 per cent off your car rego there have been over a million applications. Probably around $38 million, I am led to believe now, has gone into Victorians' hands and into their back pockets. Over 200,000 people had been paid out, the last time I looked, for that 20 per cent off their car rego.

I heard some complaints on the morning it went out about how the website crashed. I am not sure it actually did crash; I think it was just overwhelmed. The way I see it, when there is demand, sometimes supply cannot meet it. Ticketek is one of those examples. I well remember my daughter and her friends with five iPads and mobile phones open for Taylor Swift, and I reckon we are in that zone here with the 20 per cent off rego. I think we are in the Tay Tay zone. I think we are in the *Anti-Hero* Tay Tay period or era, and I think the demand was such that the poor website just could not take it for about

half an hour to 40 minutes there. But it is back up and running now, and we know this is a targeted area of relief that is working really well. It is targeted properly – it is precisely where it should be – because of the demand from Victorians saying, 'Yes, this is what we need.' For 20 per cent off your rego, applications are still open for two months. You do not have to rush. You can get in there. It is budgeted properly. Everyone will get 20 per cent off their car rego.

But we know you want more. Acting Speaker, I can see you want more. We have got half-price public transport. The preceding two months had free PT. I saw an amazing Instagram reel last night of a woman dressed in black mourning that free PT and then coming into her half-price PT era. It was about a minute, and it just had me locked in the whole time that someone actually went out there on our public transport system and decided that they were going to create their own installation. They were going to have a dance party on a tram and put it all on social media and Instagram reels. It was quite creative. With that half-price public transport for the rest of the year, we are talking an $11.40 full-price ticket down to $5.70. To put that in perspective, you can leave Melbourne and go all the way to Mildura and back for $5.70, if that is what you want to do. I am sure the member for Mildura, if she is awake, will agree with me that it is a great place to go, but it applies anywhere throughout Victoria. That is something that is saving people a lot of money already and will continue until the end of the year as well.

We have also heard that Victoria's teachers will be the best paid in the country very soon, hopefully. We are now just waiting on confirmation, I guess you could call it, but this is a situation where Victoria's teachers, as of next year, will be the best paid in the country. As a former teacher, I say to myself what a time it is to be in VCE right now, thinking, 'What course will I do? Where will I be aiming?' Teaching is such a rewarding career, and to be the best paid in the nation is something to crow about too, I think.

Also we have got the announcement of 2000 apprenticeships to build Victoria's energy future by bringing back the SEC. I know, from my perspective, I was very excited to see a picture of a few Labor members at the Labor conference wearing khaki work shirts, the long-sleeve work shirts with the old SEC sun on them. I had not seen one of those for years. In my day, when I was a kid, they were a bit daggy. I used to have to wear them as art smocks when I was at school. Do you remember the old Bluey? I think it was actually green, but they called it a Bluey. It was a coat. We used to wear them around as well. But to see the opportunity for 2000 apprentices to build Victoria's energy future is so exciting for young people in Victoria.

The thing that has me concerned, though, having almost completed my MBA, is that some of the projects that I have been doing have involved some of the projects we have been carrying out here in Victoria and some of the economics of those projects, and the issue I have is around the fact that there is a promise to cut 7000 jobs. You cannot deliver a surplus in a situation like the Liberals are talking about, that fiscal situation – as in a cash surplus, not just an operating surplus; there is a difference there – without $40 billion worth of cuts to our economy. You cannot have $40 billion worth of cuts to our economy and have that promised cash surplus without cutting the things that our community needs, like the jobs that are creating the services to give people 20 per cent off their rego and the jobs that help create those initiatives and maintain those initiatives like half-price PT. You cannot have $40 billion worth of cuts and still maintain some of the announcements we have made in the last couple of days in the portfolios that I work in.

In the last couple of days we have made massive announcements around renters, we have made massive announcements around owners corporations and we have made massive announcements around purchasing and buying properties. Very, very soon – and the bill is before the house at the moment – real estate agents and vendors will have to publish a reserve price seven days beforehand. There are some proponents who are getting a bit confused about it, saying, 'I'm going to have to put my price online seven days beforehand.' It is not a price; it is your reserve price. It is the minimum you are willing to take. We need to remember that there are still the mechanics of an auction – the tools that can be used, like the auction and whether the property is actually on the market or not. But

we need the Consumer Affairs Victoria teams to be making sure that people are actually adhering to this law. I am sure most vendors and most real estate agents will be – I have no questions about that – but we know that there are always those on the fringes that do not want to adhere to things like that.

Without these new changes, which $40 billion worth of cuts would just put to the axe, we will not be able to do this. We will not be able to make rentals fairer and sales fairer for Victorians at this point if those figures are true – those $40 billion and 7000 jobs worth of cuts. It concerns me when I hear about those kinds of cuts. I think, 'No, surely, they can't be thinking that. No-one would be silly enough, with a Casio calculator, to say that they could actually achieve that kind of surplus without $40 billion worth of cuts.' I think, 'No-one is silly enough to do that,' but then I see people riding around on forklifts without forklift licences, and I think, 'Well, perhaps people are that silly. Perhaps people are so silly that they would write down on a piece of paper, which then becomes a media release, that they could actually achieve that without hurting Victorians.' That is what concerns me.

It would be remiss of me not to talk about the state budget and how it is delivering for Frankston. It is delivering for Frankston in a big way because for some time the route 833 between Carrum and Frankston has been spoken about, and what we are going to do is extend that Karingal–Seaford via Carrum Downs–Skye service, routes 777 and 778, to get more people where they need to go. So there will be more bus services, more reliable public transport and better connectivity to jobs, to shops and to services in Frankston, Karingal, Skye and Langwarrin. That is what people have been asking us for, and that is what we are delivering.

We have seen something that really, really disturbed me but did not surprise me over the last couple of weeks, and that was that now more than a million people have accessed the 20 per cent rego rebate. Can we agree on this: more than a million people have accessed that. The statistics are in.

A member interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: 1.4 million. Can we go higher? We will tomorrow. It will be 1.6 million tomorrow, I reckon. We heard, though, member for Sandringham, that that was a hoax. How many was it, member for Sandringham?

A member interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: 1.4 million hoaxers are walking around now with $186 extra in their back pocket, $372 for two cars, that are putting food on the table, that are paying bills, that are getting their cars serviced – targeted cost-of-living relief for Victorian families that need it because of a choice that they did not get to make. They did not choose to be affected by a war overseas, but that has driven up prices. Inflation is another thing that to some extent – there could be an argument about this – they do not have a hand in. It is a very blunt instrument, raising interest rates, but it affects families. In some ways raising interest rates is a blunt instrument that is very ironic in its action, in that the people that probably are not spending that much because they are paying off mortgages are the people that are so affected, because even a little interest rate rise causes a massive rate rise for them and their mortgages. So it is the things like 20 per cent off your car rego, it is the things like the initiative for half-price public transport that are making a real difference to people in Victoria because of the things that are out of their control.

I will finish this up by saying that it is only this side of the chamber that is listening to people in Victoria and listening to their ideas and putting into action their ideas on how to make life easier and safer for them, and that is what good governments do. Good governments do not turn around at the cost of the whole state and say, 'Because we can, we're going to say we want to achieve a cash surplus at the cost of everything' – a cash surplus which would require 7000 jobs cut, $40 billion cut from the economy, schools not built, hospitals not built. I feel sorry for the member for Nepean, because he was promised a hospital, and there ain't going to be a hospital built there under a Liberal–National government, because they have already said in their own numbers that they will not build extra hospitals, they will

not build or maintain schools. That is a dangerous, dangerous decision that Victorians have got, but it is a commonsense one come November, and Labor is the only answer.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (04:28): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (04:29): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 5, page 13, lines 21 to 23, omit "or, if a higher amount is prescribed by the regulations, the prescribed amount".
2. Clause 5, page 92, in the Table, in Column 2 of Item 2, omit "or the prescribed amount".
3. Clause 5, page 101, line 7, omit "1 July 2023" and insert "25 November 2018".
4. Clause 5, page 107, lines 33 to 35, omit "or, if a higher amount is prescribed by the regulations, the prescribed amount".
5. Clause 12, page 115, line 7, after "Assembly" insert "or former member, however described, of the Parliament of the Commonwealth or the Parliament of another State or a Territory".

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (04:29): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In moving that those amendments be agreed to, I start by pointing out I am not quite sure just how much the member for Brighton has cost the Liberal Party with his shenanigans in relation to these amendments. I point out further that it has only been the Labor Party that has been prepared to stand up for transparency and integrity. It has only been the Labor Party that has not filibustered and spent overnight and into this morning trying to obfuscate and delay to stop the opportunity for fair and free elections and for Victorians to decide election outcomes in our state, not big business, not big money, not those who want to have on speed dial their little slinky mates in the dark. This is what we have seen from the Liberal Party: trying to have big, massive caps, trying to blow up a system that has a special counsel and the support to make sure it can withstand challenge the High Court.

We have seen amendments put before this Parliament that have been about ensuring fair and free elections and fair and free funding to make sure there is transparency and accountability for those who want to make a contribution to who has a say here in Victoria. Those opposite have decided to use ChatGPT, so lazy are they in relation to the determination about what they should do and what they think is appropriate. They do not have any original ideas about these matters. Their strategy, their game, is simply to make sure that nothing stands up to scrutiny, nothing stands up –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, I do not see how attacks at this point in time are relevant to the amendments from the Council before us.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On relevance, I will bring the minister back to the amendments before the house on the bill.

Anthony CARBINES: Again the question on everyone's mind is: why doesn't the opposition want retrospectivity back to 2018? This is in the amendments. Why don't they want foreign donations outlawed? It is because they are a mess. They want to try and protect themselves over protecting the Victorian people, and that is a disgrace. Firstly, clause 12 of the bill – let us go there – includes a broad-ranging post-election review of the entire act by an expert panel to ensure that reviews are informed by experts. The bill provides that the review 'must not include more than one former member of the Council or the Assembly'. After discussion with the Greens political party, we recognised that this should be amended to include no former member of the Parliament of the Commonwealth or the Parliament of another state or territory.

As we have seen in the debate on the bill, there has been a lot of misinformation about this bill put out by those opposite. The coalition circulated amendments to change the date regarding the refund mechanism in new section 277. This currently provides an obligation in the bill on political parties to return money transferred from a nominated entity to a political party between 1 July 2023 and 14 April 2026 that was in a party state campaign account on 15 April 2026. Those opposite have said there is something nefarious about the original date of 1 July 2023 – fascinating. In the interests of demonstrating that is not the case, the government moved an amendment to provide that the specified period in the section commences from the day after the 2018 election. We all remember that election, don't we? Accordingly, this will amend new section 277(3)(a) to change the beginning of the specified period from 1 July 2023 to 25 November 2018. The bill provides that a higher amount can be prescribed for the general cap by regulations. Concerns have been raised about the use of this regulation-making power and whether the government would seek to increase the general cap. We have no plans to increase the general donations cap. Nonetheless, in the interests of assuaging these concerns, we have moved an amendment to amend the definition of the general cap – new section 206(1) – to remove the ability to prescribe a higher amount and make any consequential changes, including, in the table in new section 267 and new section 288(1)(b), to prescribe a higher amount for the election period for the 2026 general election.

Victorians deserve elections that are fair, transparent and free from undue influence. These changes make sure the outcome is determined by voters, not by big money. We know the Liberal Party are perfectly comfortable with having big money flowing into politics, but the Labor Party is not, this government is not. We commend these amendments to the house. We commend this bill to the house, and we will see this bill through.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (04:35): What we have seen is a government trying to rig the electoral system. That is what this government has done. Yes, they have made some amendments to their bill. They have made some amendments, primarily in a deal for the crossbench votes, not solely. They also made some amendments based on pressure from amendments that we moved to the bill. The Leader of the House spoke to a concern that we have put publicly about the date in 2023 being picked in terms of clawback provisions, 2023 of course being picked because it was shortly after the last date that the Labor Party received a payment, some random date in mid-2023 after receiving the last payment in April of that year. And now the government has accepted the need, through force, to change that date. But I suspect most of this conversation will be irrelevant, because I suspect that very shortly it will all be before the High Court.

We are here because the government got it wrong. The government got this legislation wrong. The government said they got it right. Former Premier Daniel Andrews said he got the legislation right, didn't he? Well, he got it wrong, just like he got it wrong many, many times before the High Court. This legislation was thrown out. The High Court said they were wrong. They were wrong. That is why we are here. That is why we are dealing with the bill, and that is why we are dealing with the amendments, because the government drafted legislation that was wrong and based in politics, not good policy. It was found to be unconstitutional.

When the drafting began on the subject matter of this bill, the first thing that the coalition said was that the legislation needed to be based in a constitutionally valid set of policy matter. What did the

government say? 'We don't want to talk about anything relating to the constitutional matters in the bill. We don't want to deal with any of it.' So is it any surprise that the successful applicant who saw these laws get thrown out is already publicly talking about their next challenge? This bill has not passed the Parliament, and the successful applicant is already filling out the form for the next challenge. What the coalition said was, 'We don't want to see a second challenge and a second challenge which sees these laws thrown out in the immediate lead-up to the election.' But what did the government say to that conversation? 'We don't want to talk about it.' Why, you would ask? Because the fundamental underpinning – all of the subject matter in the bill that the government does not want to talk about – is based in politics. We have a system that is being put to the house which blocks all big money out of the system except union money. How can it be that this Parliament could pass a bill that blocks big money out of the system, except from the unions? It is rank, and it is obvious what the government is doing. It is absolutely rank and obvious what the government is doing.

But when it comes to other matters in the bill, the government did not want to discuss those either. The government did not want to discuss many of the fundamental elements in the bill that are of constitutional concern. I will raise another one. We just talked about the union backdoor pathway that is built into the bill. We just talked about the union backdoor money that is being delivered like a slush fund to the Labor Party. What does this bill also do in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis? It increases public funding. From the moment that the government proposed an increase in public funding, we said that it was inappropriate and that it was wrong for the Premier to further dip her hand into taxpayers pockets and to take more money out of taxpayers.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do seek your advice in relation to relevance to the amendments which we are meant to be speaking on in relation to these matters. I know the member for Brighton has cost the Liberal Party a lot of money tonight, but I do think that we should be sticking to the amendments.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Without the extras from members, I do not uphold the point of order. However, I bring the member back to the amendments in front of us.

James NEWBURY: There is a fundamental misunderstanding that the Leader of the House misses. I do not wake up in the morning wanting to do a deal with Labor.

Jacinta Allan: You did!

James NEWBURY: I do not want to do a deal – no, no, no.

Jacinta Allan: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Brighton is misleading the house. He would not want me to start tendering evidence of his deep, desperate desire to reach agreement with the Labor government.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta Allan: That is what I am just saying. His deep, desperate desire to reach agreement with the government is why I am saying he is misleading the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

James NEWBURY: As I was saying, from the moment the government proposed increasing public funding, we said that we did not support public funding. From the moment public funding was raised, we opposed public funding. At no point did we propose increasing public funding. This legislation increases public funding in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, which all Victorians will be able to see. This legislation also leaves a back door open for the unions to bring big money into the Labor Party. All this bill shows Victorians is that this government is at the end of its days, and it is.

When you bring a bill and a set of amendments into this place which are simply attempting to rig the system, what does it say to Victorians? Before the last election the CFMEU delivered $1.5 million to the Labor Party, and this bill allows that money to continue. That is what this bill does. It allows this money to continue. Sadly, unfortunately, the Parliament has not seen fit to stop it. Speaking to these amendments, for context, the coalition sought to stop that, because it is only fair and reasonable. I suspect, as has been indicated by the successful applicant in the first challenge, that may be one of their concerns. One of their concerns may be a system that is now in place where all big money is blocked except for the unions. How can it be?

I also suspect that the core of the argument may be that the government is proposing to increase public funding in a bill at the same time as keeping low donation caps. What the government is doing is strangling, frankly, the capacity of non-incumbents to see themselves funded, and there is a fundamental difference between our position and the government's position. They with pride talk about their reliance on public funding, and our view is that donations are a fair and reasonable part of the electoral system. We are not hiding from that. We are not hiding from the fact that donations should be a fair and reasonable part of the electoral system. As the High Court said, a person's right to donate is there. It is reasonable, and the government's bill – unreasonably, I suspect – does not fix that constitutional issue. We have said that this bill will not fix the constitutional problems that the High Court laid out. We have said that repeatedly, and we have also made clear that this bill rigs the system, and Victorians can see it. Whether the government can is frankly irrelevant, because they are at the end of their days. Only a government that was trying to rig the system would be showing how desperate it is, and we will not support it.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (04:49): I would like to thank members of this place and members of the Legislative Council – those who have supported this bill and who have been determined to sit through the night to restore integrity and transparency to Victoria's political donation system. That is why we on this side of the house, and I do acknowledge the crossbench and political party representatives who supported the bill in the Legislative Council and who propose to support it in this place as well, were determined to sit for as long as was required to ensure that Victorians have the opportunity to determine the outcome of elections – not billionaires and not anonymous foreign donors, who clearly the Liberal–National parties want to see entrenched in our political donation system. That is why we have sat for a very long session, because we choose to vote for integrity and transparency, and we are determined to see this through. I must say, I think it tells Victorians everything they need to know about this craven, desperate Liberal–National partnership who were choosing to use fake questions, ChatGPT-generated questions, to block and stall the restoration of integrity and transparency to our political donation system. That tells Victorians everything they need to know.

But just when you thought it could not get worse than that, we have seen in the dead of night the Leader of the Liberal Party filming social media posts in this place begging for donations. In a craven plea for donations –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Premier may have been straying from the amendments in front of the house.

Jacinta ALLAN: If I can draw your attention to why this is relevant to the bill, the Leader of the Liberal Party in this place, who is opposing this legislation and wanting to see big donors – billionaires and foreign donors – have the opportunity to be entrenched in Victoria's political system is out there –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: No. I can show you the social media post that was posted just tonight, where –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, specifically in relation to foreign donors, the Premier is misleading the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, as we discovered earlier. The Premier is to continue on the amendments.

Jacinta ALLAN: I say this in the context of something the member for Brighton said in his earlier contribution about discussions that were being held at length outside of this place that we were pursuing in order to restore integrity and transparency to the political donations system as a result of the High Court decision. We did have discussions, and I thank all those representatives who had the discussions with us, based on that determination and that principle of restoring free and fair elections in this state and having a robust political donation system.

I say to the member for Brighton that perhaps he was not aware of the desperate phone call my office received less than 48 hours ago from the Leader of the Opposition's office, desperate to have a conversation at the same time that I may have been standing up holding a press conference announcing the arrangements. I say this: you have got to ask why. When we hear the words from the Leader of the Liberal Party or the National Party, you have got to ask: why don't they want a fair system? Why don't they think Victorians deserve to know who is donating and how much they are donating? Why don't they want them to know, and why did they work overtime, with the assistance of ChatGPT, in an abuse of the parliamentary processes to block and stall this legislation?

I will give the member for Brighton some credit. We thank him for his suggested amendment, which we took on board, and we have taken the decision to take those arrangements back to 2018. I thank the member for Brighton for his amendment and suggestion that he made through this process. As a consequence, we brought it back to this place, and it is why we are amending the bill in this place. Good job, member for Brighton, you have done well. You have done very well there.

I do come back to this central point: these changes are about making sure the outcome is determined by voters, not by big money. This is why we have sat through the night to make sure that Victorians have integrity and transparency restored to our political system. It is why we were determined to stare down the blockers and stallers in the Legislative Council to ensure that this was brought about, because we believe that Victorian elections should be decided by Victorians, not by who has the deepest pockets. And again, you have got to ask: why do the Liberal Party and the National Party not support this? Why don't they want Victorians to have a fair system? Why don't they want Victorians to have a system that is based on integrity and transparency?

Finally, the question of a future High Court case on these matters does also beg that question why people would not want to see Victorians have the opportunity to have a system where they determine the outcomes, not big business. That is the fundamental difference between those of us who support this bill and the Liberal–National parties. Again I thank those who have worked incredibly hard. We have worked incredibly hard since that High Court decision to bring the legislation to the Parliament at the earliest opportunity. I thank those who have worked with the government along the way, and at times that did include the Liberal Party and the National Party. At times they were working with the government along the way, but they ultimately walked away. They walked away because they do not believe in integrity and transparency, and we have seen that demonstrated this evening – the blocking and stalling in the upper house, the craven plea for donations on social media tonight. It tells Victorians everything they need to know. Again I thank my colleagues, and I thank members of the Legislative Council who have worked incredibly hard. I commend the bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (04:57): I was listening to the Leader of the House earlier this evening when he did not know what he was doing in terms of the management of the house and he moved an entirely new motion. But he started with the words 'the rivers of gold' –

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know there are several former leaders of the opposition in the house. I just wonder where the current Leader of the Opposition is –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The point of order is?

Anthony Carbines: Where the current member for Kew is. Where is she? Where is she hiding?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the House, resume your seat. It is late. Frivolous points of order are annoying.

Danny O'BRIEN: Technically, it is not late; it is early, Deputy Speaker. But obviously the Leader of the House is embarrassed to hear about what his own mistake was earlier when he started a speech talking about rivers of gold. I thought that obviously he was talking about this legislation allowing that CFMEU river of gold to continue to funnel its way to his party, because that is what this legislation is all about tonight. The government is rigging the system again.

Let us all be aware there is only one reason we are here in the first place. It is because this mob stuffed up the legislation. This mob stuffed up the legislation in the first place, and now we come back. We have had since 15 April, and – what is it? – it is 5 June now. The government could not get its act together through whatever that is – that is six weeks – and then suddenly says, 'We've got to rush this through within a day or two,' 119 pages of legislation. To have the Premier standing there telling us about the dodgy deals that the Liberal Party was running at the last minute – we were being told by the Premier's office just a few hours before that they could do a deal on increased caps. Just a few hours before, and then 'No. Oh, sorry' – well, not even a sorry, actually – 'did we say that last night? Actually, no. We've done a deal with our mates the Greens up there.' They have done a deal so that those rivers of union gold can just keep on flowing to that one and that one and that one and that one, because they are all very concerned.

One of them over there has said 'It feels like end of days,' and they are desperate to do whatever they possibly can. This is a government now standing up and trying to say this is about free and fair elections. Well, if it was free and fair, why wouldn't you knock out the affiliation fees? Victorians ask us all the time 'So hang on, you can only get $5000 from the corporates?' and I say, 'No, we can only get $5000 from you or BHP Billiton or whoever.' That is the minimum. And yet the rivers of gold from the union movement keep flowing to all of you. Hands up those in the Parliament who are not members of a union. Everyone on that side, everyone! Every single one of them.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: When the house comes to order, I encourage the Leader of the Nationals not to incite members.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am sure that that ruling applies to all of those as well. This is the point of the dishonesty of this government. Mark our words – not our words, but the other plaintiffs' – we will see this back again because the government keeps messing this up.

On the legislation, there are five amendments that are before us. Can I request that the first four be put together and that the fifth be put as a separate amendment, and we will vote on them accordingly? This legislation sets up a particular advantage to the Labor government – a Labor government that is desperate to hold on to power. These amendments will do nothing to change that.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (05:02): I rise in strong support of the amendments and indeed of the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026 as amended, which is a very important piece of legislation, the urgency of which has been made clear by previous speakers. I just want to touch briefly on amendment 3, which of course is the one we are debating and does go to the topic of nominated entities. But just before I get to that I need to address this claim that unions are somehow getting some sort of special deal here. Unions will have exactly the same donations cap as any other organisation in this state. It is true that associated entities can pay affiliation fees. I cannot help but notice there are some other political organisations that also have things like members paying fees. If we are going to allow political organisations to have flexible, internal, democratic, collective decision-making systems that may well involve members and may well involve other organisations, if the Liberal Party would

like to affiliate trade unions or any other type of associated entity, they too may do so. It is simply providing political parties with the key role they play in our system, which is that they need to have the ability to make internal collective decisions, and people may pay affiliation fees if they are then voting within those parties' internal democratic systems.

Turning very briefly at this time of the morning to nominated entities, I think it is absolutely critical just to go back and remind us where nominated entities came from. They came from a problem that all of us in this chamber faced, which is that it is very difficult for a political party to structure itself legally in this state. Every single party has the same problem: you have got to be an unincorporated association to have your party rules, but then you have inevitably got some assets. In the case of the Labor Party, people might remember we had 360 King Street when we owned it. And people might remember this: 360 King Street was our headquarters. For a long time Jill Hennessy, when she was president, had to own 360 King Street because an unincorporated association cannot own a building. Then, when Greg Sword or whoever took it over next, it had to be handed on to Greg. What we did when we set up Labor Services & Holdings was simply to have a company – the correct good governance structure to hold a piece of property in which we had our meetings and discussed our things. There is nothing nefarious about that. That is not a slush fund, that is basic good governance. The only reason the Greens do not do it is because they, very quietly, have an incorporated association. That means the Greens could have $100 million sitting in their accounts at the moment and somehow they, in all of this, have gotten away scot-free. You could ask yourself how much is currently in the funds of the Greens, and because they are not so keen on transparency, I do not think we will get an answer on that tonight.

But I say this: the High Court did have to address a serious question – I will finish on this point – which is that it is true of course that political parties that have been around for a long time have built up some reserves and assets and owned buildings and things like that. Part of that is because it was easier to get donations back in the day, but mostly it was because parties that have been around for a long time have benefited from compounding returns. The Labor Party built a thing called John Curtin House back in Whitlam's era, and then, after many, many decades, that was worth quite a bit of money, and people can read a bit more about where that got to. But the High Court genuinely had to address that issue. They came back with this weird answer that you cannot use nominated entities if they are holding companies but you can use an incorporated association. I think, very generously, we have just accepted that in the bill that we have in front of us. More than that, not only have we accepted what they said on nominated entities, but of course we put in those generous extra arrangements so that new entrants have double the cap of everyone else. To summarize for the member for Brighton's benefit, is this a rort for the Labor Party? It could not be –

Members interjecting.

Nathan LAMBERT: No, listen. It could not less be a rort for the Labor Party. Let us start with the facts here. The Cormack Foundation is the worst of the nominated entities. At least Pilliwinks is kind of half all right. Ours is the best of the nominated entities by any measure, and yet we agreed to get rid of all three of them. We have done the Liberal Party a favour by getting rid of Labor Services & Holdings when they had the Cormack Foundation, which was the big problem here. Not only have we done that, we have let the Greens keep their incorporated association arrangement, left it completely untouched, and then we have given new entrants – again, not us – this special deal. Every single other group are benefiting out of this piece of legislation. Why are we doing it? Not because it benefits us but because it is the right thing to do, because we are a party that believes in integrity. We know we need to fix our system, and we are going to fix it this morning. And why are they opposing it? They are opposing it because they do not share our integrity, and they are partially opposing it because those opposite do not understand it: 'If you don't know, vote no.' They have had 12 hours tonight to learn this thing. They still have not done their homework. God forbid they ever run this state. I endorse the motion, and I support the amendments.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (05:08): I will take a short break from counting my money and make some brief comments about the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026, which contains now some amendments which fix some of the bugs in the bill. Of course the real bug in the bill was introduced in the 2018 amendments, which favoured the major parties, creating the problem.

Nathan Lambert: Which you voted for; your party voted for it.

Tim READ: I do not deny that. I would like to take up the point raised by the member for Preston and say I just wish we had the war chest that he surmises. But unfortunately that is not the case.

Since the High Court threw out part 12 of the act, we have had seven weeks of no regulation of campaign finance, allowing potentially large sums of money to flow that we do not know about and cannot see, so it is very urgent to regulate money in politics. When you think about it, money is really corrosive to politics: it forces candidates to spend time fundraising instead of talking to voters, it generates a conscious or unconscious desire for candidates to impress donors and it ensures that those with greater means have greater influence. There is no way of getting around that point. You can run an election campaign on a shoestring; I have some silver medals to prove it. Provided every voter is just sent an outline of every candidate's policies, which is what a lot of councils do, then that is probably sufficient. But we spend a whole lot more on advertising. Collectively we all send a lot of money to Mark Zuckerberg. We make Mark Zuckerberg a lot richer. We spend a lot of money on Meta and Google and on billboards. But does the electorate really make wiser choices as a result of the extra money we spend? Campaign funding is an arms race: if you are doing that kind of advertising, then I want to follow suit; if I do something, then you will want to match it. If you removed a zero from all the amounts of money spent on campaigning by all parties and candidates on campaigns across the state, I doubt the results would be any different.

You can see why the Greens are keen to regulate political finance as soon as possible, and the bill, imperfect though it may be, does that. It reimposes caps on donations; the Greens were able to negotiate a lower cap. It addresses the concerns of the High Court, we hope, with a higher cap for new entrants and by subjecting nominated entities to the cap. It reinstates public funding. It reinstates disclosure requirements, which is even more important, for donations above $1250. Importantly, it bans foreign donations.

However, the review is important because the legislation is rushed. A number of bugs were picked up in its passage through the Legislative Council. No doubt there will be one or two more. A review will also enable better and more complete legislation to be passed if the next Parliament is so minded. For example, the bill does not contain spending caps. Other countries and other states have them. The ACT has quite a good model. There is no limit to contributions by candidates. Multiple entities controlled by the same person can donate up to the cap, and there is no campaign finance regulation at all in local government.

There is a lot that still could be added to the principal act and should be added to the act, but in Parliament you often have to choose the least worst option. We are confident in this case that we have improved the legislation by working with the government. We urge the next Parliament to continue to work to make our electoral laws fairer for newcomers and incumbents and for people and political movements who do not have thousands of spare dollars to elevate their ideas.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (05:12): The Greens did work with the government on this legislation, and I certainly acknowledge that. Some here did want to work with the government on this, and they woke up in the morning seeking to do so. They will not be doing that very often from here on in. They will be waking up every morning working out which part of One Nation they deal with. That is where they are headed. They are not waking up after this. They are waking up straight for One Nation. I am going to be brief, because some of us have been up for more than 24 hours now. We have improved this bill through the amendments to make sure that no former member of the Parliament of the Commonwealth or a parliament of another state or territory and no former members

can be part of the review – an important matter, an important improvement made through the upper house. I know you have got an obsession with David Feeney. Some do, particularly the member for Brighton.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Point Cook.

Mathew HILAKARI: Of course, Speaker, thank you for your counsel – well required. We have improved, at the suggestion of the member for Brighton, the dates for which we specify the period for looking back at donations all the way back to 2018. What a wonderful thing to do.

Finally, the general donations cap will provide absolute clarity so that everyone will be in no doubt that you cannot prescribe a higher or a lower fee in the future. Some may seek that as well. We have removed that provision from the bill. This is an excellent bill, and it is time to pass it.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (05:14): I think it is only a matter of time before this bill, this law that is about to be passed, returns to the High Court. It is only a matter of time before whatever deal has been done by whoever it has been done with ends up under consideration before the High Court again and more uncertainty is thrown into our electoral donations system in this state.

I am thrilled that the member for Point Cook raised the issue of One Nation, because I have a question that I think all Victorians would love to know the answer to. One Nation voted to support the government on this bill in the other place. So the question that I think Victorians deserve to know the answer to is: what is the deal that this Premier did with One Nation to get this dirty deal through this Parliament? What is the deal that One Nation did with the Australian Labor Party to get this dirty deal through the Parliament? And while we are at it, is part of that consideration a preference deal with the Australian Labor Party at the next Victorian election? Is that under consideration? I think these are questions that are on the minds of Victorians.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, there are a couple of elements there. I would ask that the member confine himself to the amendments. I also point out that the entire crossbench voted for this bill and these amendments.

The SPEAKER: The member for Sandringham will come back to the amendments.

Brad ROWSWELL: Just finally, I think –

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: I do not think anyone behind you, Premier, wants anyone to keep going.

The SPEAKER: The day is very early, member for Sandringham. It does not mean the rules should not be followed. Through the Chair.

Brad ROWSWELL: It was the CFMEU that donated $1.5 million to the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party before the last election. It was the CFMEU that donated $400,000 to the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party after the 2022 election. There is a reason why it is in the interests of the government for this arrangement to continue. It is because they have relied upon them, and every single one of the Australian Labor Party members elected to this place at the 2022 election owes it, in some part, to a donation received by the CFMEU. On my maths that averages out to about $22,000 on the head of every member of the Australian Labor Party that was elected at the 2022 election. It is no wonder the Premier of this state does not want a royal commission into union corruption in this state, because it will unravel something. It will open a Pandora's box for this Premier. It will open a Pandora's box of corruption for this Premier. She does not want to address it.

It is a real shame that this Premier and this government continue to seek to elevate these new donation laws for the time being – before they are revisited by the High Court at some point in the near future, I suspect – through the prism of greater integrity and greater accountability, because the truth could

not be further from that. In fact that is an absolute and utter fib. It is not right, and I think Victorians deserve a hell of a lot better than what we are about to vote on now.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House has moved that Council amendments 1 to 5 be agreed to. The Leader of the Nationals has requested that the Chair split the question so that members can support some aspects of that question and oppose another.

Amendments 1 to 4 agreed to.

Assembly divided on amendment 5:

Ayes (51): Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, 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, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendment agreed to.

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

Business of the house

Adjournment

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (05:24): I move:

> That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 16 June 2026.

Motion agreed to.

Postponement

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (05:24): I move:

> That remaining business be postponed.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

> That the house now adjourns.

Before I call members on adjournment matters, I think we should show our appreciation to the clerks and the staff here at the Parliament.

Members applauded.

David Hodgett interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Croydon would like the bar staff particularly thanked.

Templestowe College

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (05:25): (1689) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education, the Deputy Premier, and it concerns Templestowe College and their desire to build a multipurpose sporting and school communal facility on their premises. Templestowe College is a fantastic secondary school in my electorate. It obviously is located in the suburb of Lower Templestowe. Its school population has grown from the mid-hundreds to over a thousand in the last few years. It has had a rejig of how it delivers education. It has done a very good job. Its principal and senior staff are doing a fantastic job. I would like to ask the Minister for Education if he would consider funding the upgrade to the school to put in place the new facilities that are needed for that facility, which will suit Templestowe Heights Primary School and Templestowe College and enable the build of the new multipurpose school sporting facility, which could also be used as a school communal facility for all the students onsite.

Vehicle registration rebate

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (05:27): (1690) My question is for the Minister for Cost of Living. Can he provide an update on how many residents in the electorate of Point Cook are expected to benefit from the 20 per cent rego rebates for cars, utes and motorbikes? There are plenty of fantastic cost-of-living measures that this government has taken, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Country Fire Authority Lakes Entrance station

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (05:27): (1691) I am pleased to be on my feet at 5:30 am. My adjournment is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that I seek is for the Lakes Entrance fire station to be fully funded. Recently there was a funding announcement made for CFA station builds, planning and land acquisition, and Lakes Entrance was among those included in that media release. What I am hearing is that there is $700,000 for planning only, which would be an incredible waste. Prior to the 2022 election the Lakes Entrance community was told by this government that the station build was imminent. Here we are, heading into the 2026 election, and it appears we have an announcement for planning. Here is the situation: we know where the station is going, we know it is a 2C build, we know the land is flat and we know that it is going to cost $7.5 million. We know all that. So why are we giving $700,000 for planning? It is simply a waste of money. The action that I seek from the minister, given that we know all this, is to just get on with the job, announce the full funding for the Lakes Entrance fire station and get it built.

Vehicle registration rebate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (05:29): (1692) My adjournment is for the Minister for Cost of Living, and I ask to be provided with a report on the number of people who have accessed the 20 per cent rego rebate in the electorate of Broadmeadows. People could hardly wait for 9 am Monday to get $186 back in their pocket, or $372 if they have got two cars. I am keen for everyone in my electorate to access this rego rebate. People can either jump on the Service Victoria app or drop into my office before the end of July to take advantage of this program. This Labor government is helping with the cost of living.

Hull–Cardigan roads, Mooroolbark

David HODGETT (Croydon) (05:29): (1693) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the lack of maintenance and vegetation management of the parcel of land at the corner of Hull Road and Cardigan Road in Mooroolbark, which has become a significantly overgrown. The action I seek is for the minister to direct the Department of Transport and Planning to immediately undertake mowing and vegetation management at this site and to ensure it is properly maintained on an ongoing basis. Despite multiple constituents raising concerns about the condition of this land with

both my office and VicRoads and despite assurances the matter would be attended to, no action has been taken to date. Again, the action I seek is for the minister to direct the Department of Transport and Planning to immediately undertake mowing and vegetation management at this site and to ensure it is properly maintained on an ongoing basis.

Southern Road, Mentone

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (05:30): (1694) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the development facilitation program application for 54–76 Southern Road, Mentone. It was great to have members of the Save our Amenity Southern Road Area Residents Action Group at a coffee catch-up last week. They had some great ideas and feedback and have been very strong advocates for local community. They had some good feedback. This is a very important local issue, and I thank the minister for her consideration and look forward to her response.

Richmond electorate planning

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (05:31): (1695) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to reject application PA2604311 for a ministerial permit. Mark and Michelle live on Adam Street in a quiet residential neighbourhood in Burnley. They got in touch with me to share their distress that a 24/7 seven-storey storage facility was being proposed directly opposite their home. The application by StorHub, a Singaporean-based multinational business, is being processed under the Victorian Labor government's development facilitation pathway. The development facilitation pathway was created to support projects that make a significant contribution to Victoria's economy and deliver substantial public benefit, including affordable housing and job creation. Meeting these criteria gives the project a special fast-tracked pathway straight to the minister, bypassing all community and council input and removing any avenue for a decision to be challenged or appealed. I am curious to know: how on earth does a self-storage facility meet these criteria? There would be limited employment opportunities, no housing – although in the current climate I would not blame someone for trying – and, frankly, minimal public benefit. Mark, Michelle and their neighbours found out that within just weeks their lives could be turned upside down – for what? Their quiet street is not an appropriate place for a massive 24/7 seven-storey storage facility, and it is certainly not an appropriate project for the development facilitation program. That is why today I am asking the minister to reject this application for a permit at 173–177 Barkly Avenue in Burnley.

Greenvale Reservoir Park

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (05:33): (1696) My adjournment this morning is for the Minister for Environment in the other place, Minister Erdogan. Last year I was thrilled to reopen Greenvale Reservoir Park thanks to a $3 million investment that has built new paths, bike trails, toilets and barbecues, and as we speak, work is taking place to rebuild the children's playground. My action for the minister, or my request of the minister, is for them to provide me with an update on the works to install that new playground, building on those upgrades that have already taken place.

Morwell electorate employment

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (05:33): (1697) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, and the information I seek is: what is the government's policy for ensuring local contractors are afforded the opportunity to bid for works on big battery builds in the Latrobe Valley? There are several big batteries in my electorate of Morwell, and we have a proud history of powering the state. The knowledge and the skillset of our local workforce are unparalleled, and our manufacturers take great pride in their work. It has come to my attention that several local businesses have been unsuccessful in securing contracts for local works under the state government or have been precluded from even tendering in the first instance.

The Latrobe Valley LGA has one of the highest rates of unemployment in regional Victoria, and thousands of job losses are on the horizon with the closure of coal-fired power stations as soon as

2028. More than ever, meaningful employment opportunities are crucial in Latrobe Valley, and this government has responsibly tried to ensure it is investing in a region that has thanklessly powered Victoria for more than a century. If local businesses are being overlooked or precluded from tendering altogether on state government projects, then something is rotten. Worse again would be if the works are only being awarded to Melbourne contractors linked with the CFMEU, because we know already that $15 billion has been funnelled into the pockets of criminals working on the Big Build.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Morwell, I am not sure if I heard all of the action. Was it an update on –

Martin CAMERON: Yes, an update on the government's policy.

Electricity prices

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (05:35): (1698) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and concerns the Victorian default offer. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on how the recent announcement of the lowering of the Victorian default offer will benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (05:36): The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education regarding action he would like to see on capital works investments at Templestowe College. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Minister for Cost of Living about how many residents in his electorate have been benefiting from the ripping 20 per cent rego discount – up to $186 back in your pocket. He would like to know the number of beneficiaries in his electorate. The honourable member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services seeking advice on the Lakes Entrance fire station and ensuring that it is fully funded. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Cost of Living, also seeking access to the number of people that have benefited from the 20 per cent rego rebate – that $186 back in your pocket – in the Broadmeadows electorate. She is keen to know the numbers there.

The honourable member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety seeking action around vegetation maintenance at an intersection around Hull Road in Mooroolbark. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Planning seeking updates around a Mentone property, an update on the planning proposals and work that is happening there in his electorate. The member for Richmond also raised a matter for the Minister for Planning around action to reject a planning application in Burnley. The member for Greenvale raised a matter for the Minister for Environment in the other place, and that was with regard to the Greenvale Reservoir Park and further investments in infrastructure for the community around a playground there. The member for Morwell raised a matter for the Minister for the State Electricity Commission regarding government policies for local contractors to bid on big battery builds in the valley. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources seeking an update on how the recent low offers with regard to some energy-saving matters in his electorate have been benefiting the residents of his electorate. I will be sure to pass all those matters on.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Thank you all. I think we are done. The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:38 am (Friday).