

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 29 July 2025**



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**Tuesday 29 July 2025**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Matt Fregon) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Condolences*

**Hon Brian James Dixon**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:05): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Brian James Dixon and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of St Kilda from 1964 to 1982 and Minister for Employment and Training from 1981 to 1982, Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation from 1973 to 1982, Minister of Housing from 1979 to 1981, Minister of Social Welfare from 1976 to 1979 and Assistant Minister of Education from 1973 to 1976.

Clearly Brian Dixon was one of those rare people who left a mark on all that he put his mind to – in sport, in politics and in the community – and in each of them he gave his all. Many Victorians will remember Brian for what he achieved on the football field, and they were some big achievements. He was a five-time premierships player for the Melbourne Football Club, their 1960 best and fairest, a member of their team of the century and a hall of fame inductee. With all of this, in 1964, while still playing footy, Brian was elected to this Parliament – quite a remarkable achievement. In his inaugural speech he spoke about the honour of representing the people of St Kilda and his determination to play his part in building a strong, forward-looking government. He also set out the issues that would define so much of his public life: education, housing and poverty.

Brian believed that education was one of the greatest investments a government could make and that a skilled workforce was the foundation for Victoria's growth. He also cared deeply about housing, particularly for low-income families and older Victorians, and in that first speech he called for thoughtful, compassionate solutions to meet their needs. He also reflected on the global challenges of poverty and affluence and spoke about the need for governments to lead with principle. And then, for the next 18 years in this place, Brian worked to turn those words into action. He served under Premier Hamer in many, many portfolios, and whether it was across those portfolios of sport or housing, social welfare or employment, Brian always came back to one simple idea: that politics is all about helping people live better lives. That way of thinking led to reforms that still shape our state today.

As chair of Victoria's Road Safety Committee, Brian helped introduce the world's first mandatory seatbelt laws in 1970. It is something that is easy to forget today – something that we just take for granted – but at the time this was deeply controversial change. Many argued that seatbelts were indeed dangerous, that they would trap people in cars and keep them from escaping crashes. There was public anger and there was plenty of scepticism, but Brian stood firm. He stood firm by the evidence because he knew how many lives could be saved, and he was so right. In the first year alone, road deaths in Victoria fell by more than 13 per cent, and then what we saw was other states soon followed. Within two years Australia became the first country in the world with nationwide compulsory seatbelt laws, all driven out of Victoria, led by Brian Dixon.

Also, Brian understood the value of prevention in public health. We all know – well, those of us of a certain age do – the Life Be In It campaign that encouraged people of all ages at the time to get active and look after their health. It was a simple message, but one that became part of our state's story.

Outside of Parliament too, Brian gave his time to countless community causes. He worked to take Aussie Rules to the world and continued to serve in education, sport, and community development long, long after leaving politics. He was a teacher, a sportsman, a reformer, but above all Brian Dixon was someone who believed that public life is about service.

## CONDOLENCES

His legacy lives on in the everyday things that we take for granted: in every seatbelt buckled, in every person inspired to get off the couch and get moving and in the many quiet contributions he made to community life. On behalf of the government and on behalf of the people of Victoria, I extend our deepest condolences to Brian's family, his friends and to everyone who knew and loved him. Vale, Brian Dixon.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (12:10): I rise today on behalf of the opposition to pay tribute to the life of Brian James Dixon. Brian was born in 1936 and grew up in St Kilda, the area he would later represent. He went to Toorak Central state school, Melbourne High School and Melbourne University. In what must have been destiny, Brian's football coach at Melbourne High was none other than Lindsay Thompson. Before entering Parliament, Brian was a school teacher – head of the economics department at Melbourne Grammar and a lecturer in economics at Melbourne University.

And, as we have heard, Brian played a little bit of football. During that time, between 1954 and 1968, he played 252 games for his beloved Melbourne Demons. This was a record at the time, upon his retirement. During Brian's time with the club, they won five premierships, and Brian was awarded the club's best and fairest in 1960, and in 1961 he was awarded the Australia's best and fairest medal at the Australian National Football Carnival in Brisbane. On top of this, Brian received all-Australian selection in 1961 and was selected in the Melbourne Football Club Team of the Century in 2000, alongside some of the classic names of Ron Barassi Jr, Robert Flower, Norm Smith, Percy Beames, Jim Stynes and Garry Lyon. He was also inducted into the Australian Hall of Fame in 2010. Brian's football career is all the more incredible when you consider that in 1964 he played in a premiership team at the same time he took up another job, and he continued to play football at the highest level for another four years.

Subsequently he became the coach of what was then described in reports as – sorry North Melbourne supporters – the 'lowly' North Melbourne Football Club, for 1971 and 1972. Brian announced his retirement as a coach the day after Henry Bolte resigned, and according to his daughter Judy, who spoke at his state funeral last week, this came after a discussion with Rupert Hamer, who told him he could choose between being a future minister or a football coach. Now, it is a fair history in football, with what he has got there, but his highlight in football came in 1974. Brian played two games at the mighty Berwick Football Club, and in his two games he played alongside Michael Voss's grandfather, Tuck's brother – really, Tucky's brother and it was not a bad team. However, no matter how much we searched we could not find the results of the games. They may have been hidden because he wanted to have a perfect record at Berwick. He was also involved with our local churches and charities in the local area.

As we all know, Brian served as the member for St Kilda for 18 years, between 1964 and 1982, winning six elections and holding a number of significant portfolios, including Assistant Minister of Education, minister of social welfare, housing, employment and training, and Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation. Very importantly and significantly, Brian was a member of the parliamentary Road Safety Committee, as mentioned, from 1967 until 1973, and was the chair of the committee when Victoria became the first jurisdiction to make wearing seatbelts compulsory and significantly reduced deaths first in Victoria and then around the world. And yes, there were those that were against it, and my father still talks about it, at the time having the protests against putting seatbelts in a Sandman. It was something that was not seen as appropriate, something they did not want, but the changes speak for themselves, and we are seeing safer people and safer roads today.

As a member of Parliament, Brian was always prepared to state his own opinions, whether they were popular with his colleagues or not, on issues such as capital punishment, the decriminalisation of prostitution and whether VFL games should be played on a Sunday. Imagine how he would feel now we have Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday games occasionally.

Brian may have been the only man in history to have held his own against two of the most powerful men of the era, Norm Smith and Henry Bolte.

In Brian's first speech to Parliament Brian spoke about the importance of home ownership when he said:

It is with some pride that we in Victoria can claim to have the highest rate of home ownership in the world.

Obviously it is sad that it is no longer the case; we would love to see that come back to this state, where home ownership is something the Victorians can strive for in the future.

As a minister, Brian also had many accomplishments. However, his role in the creation and publicising of the worldwide impact of the iconic Life Be In It campaign cannot be overstated. According to former ad man Phillip Adams, Life Be In It became the country's most famous popular campaign with the highest rates of awareness at the time, even more so than Coke and Marlboro. It was fitting that in our household I had a father who looked very much like Norm. Those that remember Norm – he enjoyed a beer, he did not do a lot of exercise and he wore his very colourful top that said 'Life. Be in it' to change. It was those campaigns that genuinely changed people's lives – that meant people like my father got off the couch and started walking and getting about their activity. It is a campaign that could continue to run today, probably for different reasons: to encourage kids to get away from social media and say to them, 'Don't film life. Be in life'. I think it is a great opportunity for us to honour someone like Brian and say that will be our focus moving forward. The campaign to get people moving and keep themselves fit and healthy was a worldwide hit. At its peak it included the program in 50 US cities and 19 European countries. So committed was Brian to promoting and supporting the Life Be In It campaign that he would even turn up to media events dressed as the campaign's star Norm. No wonder he was awarded the marketing award for Life Be In It.

Brian's commitment to sport did not end with his impressive football record or his role in the Life Be In It campaign. He was also the founder of the Melbourne Marathon and a significant backer behind Melbourne's bids for the Olympics in 1988, 1992 and 1996, and he advised on many other Australian bids. Following his defeat in 1982, Brian took up a number of significant roles around Australia, including executive director of the Sydney Swans from 1982 to 1983 and a sports administrator in the Northern Territory, and he was also the president of AFL South Africa.

All of us come into this place hoping to make a difference, but few of us will be able to claim a record as important and significant as that of Brian James Dixon. Brian leaves a massive legacy, and on behalf of the Liberal and National parties I extend our heartfelt thanks to Brian for what he has done in a life well lived and send our condolences to his wife Carmel and his family, friends and colleagues. Vale, Brian Dixon.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:17): I rise today to share my condolences at the sad passing of the Honourable Brian James Dixon, a true Victorian icon whose life was defined by service, integrity and leadership. Mr Dixon's journey from a modest upbringing delivering newspapers and collecting wood to help support his family to becoming one of Australia's greatest footballers epitomises the power of determination and community spirit. On the field, as has been stated, Brian played 252 games for the mighty Melbourne Football Club, winning five premierships and earning induction into the Australian Football Hall of Fame. His sporting excellence was matched by his unwavering camaraderie. He was remembered by his friends as a great teammate and by colleagues as one of the very best to grace the game.

In 1964, while still an elite athlete, Brian was elected as the Liberal member for the seat of St Kilda, serving with distinction until 1982. He held numerous ministries, including youth, sport and recreation; employment and training; social welfare; housing; and education, and he was widely regarded for his progressive social reforms and thoughtful leadership. Perhaps his most enduring legacies are in his instrumental roles in launching the Life Be In It campaign – as a gen Xer I can fondly remember that, and it was incredibly impactful; it inspired millions to embrace exercise and healthy living, so that is

something to be extremely proud of – and in championing mandatory seatbelt legislation, making Victoria the first place in the world to enact such laws, measures that have undoubtedly saved countless lives. And as Dr Barry Jones fittingly noted at Brian’s state funeral, he was not only an outstanding footballer but also a courageous, dedicated and visionary parliamentarian, whose positive impact crossed political lines. ‘To his family, you have lost a hero,’ he said, and Mr Dixon’s legacy will never be forgotten.

In lieu of flowers the Dixon family asked for donations to FightMND, a cause deeply meaningful to them. Given Brian’s personal experience with motor neurone disease in his family, this is a fitting tribute to a man whose commitment to community service extended to the end. May we honour the Honourable Brian Dixon’s memory by carrying forward his spirit of courage, compassion and purposeful action. Vale, the Honourable Brian Dixon.

**Danny O’BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:20): I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Nationals to pay our condolences to the family and friends of Brian James Dixon and to honour his legacy. When preparing speech notes for these condolence motions, there is a lot of enlightenment that goes on, not only in what happened in history in this place but also in the contributions that some have made. More often than not it is quite humbling, and no more so then in reading the history of Brian Dixon.

This was a man who was, in every sense of the word, an overachiever. It is humbling to read his contribution to sporting, political and other life in our community. It has been said: 252 games across 15 seasons for the Melbourne Football Club, best and fairest in a flag-winning season in 1960, All-Australian selection, Tassie Medal in 1961, selected on the wing of Melbourne’s Team of the Century and inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame in 2010. And if that was not enough, for anyone to then go and become a member of Parliament and a minister of the Crown for another 18 years – at the same time, I might add, as being a VFL footballer – is just an extraordinary achievement and in today’s context as well. The bit that got me is that, not content with having played VFL football and being a member of Parliament, several years later he decided to go and coach a VFL team while still being a member of Parliament. The member for Malvern and I might be called upon should Vossy get the chop this year. Deputy Premier, maybe North Melbourne needs someone to start it up again. But it is an extraordinary situation to think that just 50-odd years ago there were members in this place who were still playing at the highest level and/or coaching. It is incredible.

The Premier touched on Brian’s inaugural speech, then called a maiden speech, and no-one who read that would think this was just a footballer who had been preselected and elected to his seat because he was a footballer and he was famous. His contributions in that were eloquent, researched, passionate about education, passionate about housing, and with a fairly good grasp of economics as well. And none of this came from a background of privilege. Brian’s background was quite difficult. His father was a person with a disability who died when Brian was only 14. As the member for Albert Park indicated, Brian undertook a number of jobs as a young boy just to help keep the family going. He then went on to do amazing things.

We have mentioned that he held the seat of St Kilda, and again we might think that back in those days it must have been a much more Liberal-type seat. In fact it was not. It was very, very hard fought every time. The only bit I was a bit disappointed in when reading the history was the 1979 election, when Brian Dixon’s very narrow win in St Kilda was enough to allow the Liberal Party to continue to govern without the support of the Nationals at the time. He did an incredible job. Perhaps it is a reflection of him as a person, as a personality at the time, that in the records that we have here there is a feature piece on Brian Dixon, having been elected in 1964, which was written in 1968 by the ALP candidate that he defeated in the 1967 election. The candidate clearly did not have any concerns about Brian as an MP. He literally went out and wrote a feature piece on him and said, ‘I was the candidate he beat a year ago.’ It was extraordinary that he had done all of those things. As previous speakers have indicated, he then had such a role in the introduction of seatbelts and of course the Life Be In It campaign. Premier, only a few of us in this place can still remember it.



It is an extraordinary legacy. It was also illuminating to discover that Brian Dixon was very good friends with the great athlete Ron Clarke. In fact I think Ron was best man at his Brian's wedding.

I would like to finish with a couple of comments that Ron made in a piece in the Sunday press in 1974. First of all, Ron Clarke met Brian Dixon as a new student at Melbourne High School. On the first day the teacher said to Ron:

If you sit next to HIM, I wouldn't give tuppence for your chances of passing at the end of the year.

It seems that Brian was not a favourite of the teachers, but he became a favourite of many others, including Ron Clarke, who said this about him:

... No one more assiduously sought out the truth. He asked question after question – often very searching ones ...

He would argue or compete with anyone or anything. Nothing daunted him.

Ron's piece on Brian finishes with the words:

One thing I do know and know well – as a friend you'll never find anyone more loyal or truer.

Vale, Brian Dixon.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (12:25): It is a great pleasure and privilege to rise on the condolence motion for Brian James Dixon. I do so only really having a glancing knowledge of Brian but having had the great privilege, with a number of members of Parliament, of attending his state funeral service. I had the opportunity to attend on behalf of the Premier and read a poem for Brian and his family.

The mark of a person's contribution, parliamentary and life contributions, is through the eyes of those that tell the story when they go. When you heard the reflections of those that gave eulogies and contributions there, you got a sense of a remarkable person who had lived lifetimes in one. You could have done a eulogy and a service just on his achievements in football as a hall of famer and five-time premiership player at Melbourne, albeit at the height of 5 foot 9. Ray Groom did a great summary of that during that time.

But it was through the eyes of his daughter Judy Dixon that I think the greatest contribution was made. We would have this through our communities: the lived experience of what your children see as your contribution and how they reflect on that in their adult lives, and how their grandkids see that legacy as something truly extraordinary. Judy's contribution on the day – the stories of running through Queen's Hall as kids; the late-night phone calls and visits to the home, because electorate offices were not quite the place to do business at the time; that tireless dedication; the compassion of sitting in an electorate office and hearing Brian go through a housing matter with a constituent in duress – was truly extraordinary.

Barry Jones's eulogy was something for the ages. It was amazing to see Barry in action. Of course Brian and Barry both went to Melbourne High School. Barry sort of had a conversation with himself, and I think the spirit of Brian, during the eulogy, where he wondered why he was not in the Labor Party with his values. I think that says more about the person – I think the Nationals leader summed it up perfectly. This was someone who was universally admired and who had extreme courage under huge duress. Think of standing up to the likes of Premier Henry Bolte on capital punishment and pleading that someone not be put to death, joining people across the parliamentary divide. The cost that that would have had on your career is one window into the courage and conviction of this man and his legacy.

The seatbelt campaign – any school tour that goes through here has that story each and every day told in this chamber, of 'Think of a moment in time when seatbelts weren't a thing,' and every primary school or secondary school student reflects on that. I said to Judy and Jenny, 'That's something that is a legacy that will live on for decades into the future,' and that is one snippet of the work that Brian Dixon undertook. His first speech is littered with values like the notion of how we support education

and build education states – Deputy Premier, if you reflect on his contribution, it is something extraordinary – and our contribution to taxation and how that builds our state and our nation. Some of those really innovative conversations and policies around housing as well were really extraordinary.

To hear those reflections and pass on, on behalf of the Premier and the people of Victoria, our condolences to Carmel Dixon, his wife; to Jamie, Jono, Judy and Jenny, his kids – their contributions were just truly extraordinary; and then to hear the Melbourne Football Club bagpipes as we went out and see the congregation, a who's who of AFL and Melbourne Football Club luminaries, was truly extraordinary.

I just want to share one particular line that I think sums up his legacy in this place in this poem that I was asked to read – I have never been more nervous and shaking in the coldness of St Patrick's Cathedral – about the nerves of someone who had such stature in this place as a Victorian and as an Australian. There was one line in that Rudyard Kipling poem that I think sums up Brian extraordinarily well:

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

Vale, Brian James Dixon.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:30): Brian Dixon led a life that most people can only dream of, and he did it exceptionally well, with great success on the sporting field and in his professional life. Brian was a man of great conviction and determination. He was a man of intellect who lived and breathed his values every day. He had many passions: his six children, his beloved Melbourne Football Club, the Liberal Party, health and fitness, and MND. Whenever I spoke to Brian he reminded me about the importance of the Life Be In It campaign and how it should be policy again because it has lived on so well. He always had ideas, and a lot of these ideas were about how to combine his passions. He would speak to me about being the president of the past premiership players association and how we could use that perhaps as a fundraising opportunity for one of his causes, MND. It did not matter what he was doing, Brian had ideas. He attributed his success to a number of factors: concentration, determination and courage on and off the field.

It must be said that there were times when Brian could be a little bit difficult. As we have heard, he had humble beginnings. His father suffered poor health; at the time they were told he had a type of muscular paralysis which his family now believe to be MND, and that was a disease Brian's late eldest son Anthony was also to suffer, hence Brian's passion. Brian was an only child, and he had strong memories of pushing his father around in a wheelchair. His father, as we have heard, passed away when Brian was 14, and he was raised by his mother Amy. He went to Melbourne High, and this was a school he loved. He maintained a relationship with them all his life, and it was fitting that the choir sang at his state funeral on Friday.

Now we come to his politics. People may have thought that Brian might have been aligned with Labor Party values, but he took a look at them and went, 'Yeah, nah.' He had a look at the Liberal Party values and thought this was where he belonged: a party of aspiration, reward for effort, looking after those who needed looking after and, importantly, equality of opportunity, particularly around education. Brian was a true Liberal in Menzies' fashion, determined to be progressive. He was moderate, socially conscious and very happy to have his opinion heard, always. Elected in 1964 – as we have heard, the same year as he won his fifth and last premiership – as the member for St Kilda. He could have won six premierships; however, he incurred the wrath of Norm Smith by playing in a game between the dentists and the commerce faculty at Melbourne University. That was something he was not supposed to have done, so he did not get selected for that grand final.

He arrived at Parliament, where his passions and values were at play. We have heard his stance on capital punishment, and if you read his speech on that debate, he could not see why you would deal with violence with violence. He worked very collaboratively with opposition members to get that bill through the Parliament in a progressive Hamer government. Remembering he was the member for St Kilda, and they have different types of activity – or they certainly had different types of activity there at the time – Brian was very keen to make a difference to the sex industry, and he did research by chatting with the sex workers to understand their safety needs. He thought that as this was the oldest profession and it was not going to go anywhere, those working in it should be safe, and he put a proposal forward to the Parliament, which you can find in the library, regarding prostitution and massage parlours. I want to read a couple of comments from here, because it was about controlling safety in prostitution and in massage parlours. This was of particular interest – the proposal followed the principles endorsed by the state Liberal Party, which in March 1979 passed the following resolution:

That this State Council –  
remembering we are talking about a council moved at the state Liberal Party –

recommends that there should be legislation to the effect that premises for the purpose of prostitution be able to operate only in non-residential areas and subject to stringent controls, and that thereafter more powers be made available for the control of prostitutes soliciting from the streets and utilising illegal premises for the purpose of prostitution.

He put a very detailed paper to Parliament recommending that prostitution be permitted to function in massage parlours in the prescribed areas in Victoria subject to controls and that existing sanctions against street prostitution be retained.

He was very keen that everybody should be protected and safe in their workplace. I am sure that executive director Carolyn Gowers and her team from Project Respect would be really pleased to have seen what Brian put forward in 1979.

Combining his passion for politics and sport, Brian was able to leave Parliament or his ministerial office to scoot off to football training. As has been said, imagine if we had a minister for sport who did the same at the moment – leave this place and scoot off to football training. It was as the Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation where Brian made his biggest impact. As I said earlier, Brian was an intellect. He was an ideas person who wanted to make a difference, and he believed his role as a minister was to make a difference. He was the Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation from May 1973 to April 1982, and racing also came under that portfolio. His thinking was some of the best in the world; he was a leader, and he was very serious about the health of the country. Brian was fit. He was a footballer, but he did run 10 marathons – that classifies him as a Spartan. He knew a lot of the programs that the government had were aimed at already healthy, fit people, and he thought, ‘We need to do something different, a different approach to get people off the couch.’ This was the genesis of the Life Be In It campaign, which was rolled out very successfully here, interstate and overseas.

Like all good politicians – you know, kids do get rolled out occasionally – he used his kids in the ads for Life Be In It and for safety – helmets for skateboarding and biking. He had kids running up hills, as well as doing all of the regular stuff like letterboxing. I want to reflect on his role as a minister within the department. I spoke to a couple of people who worked for him at the time. The staff loved him and said he treated people very well. Perry Crosswhite, who some people may know was an Olympian, said he was fantastic – ‘Brian had ideas’, which apparently was pretty unusual for ministers. He had so many ideas and that was infectious. The staff knew that if they too had an idea it was given the light of day. No idea was bad. You could come and present an idea and it would be considered, so there was a buzz in the office and people wanted to come to work. Other department members would come in and they would notice the feeling in the office of that buzz. Perry said it was exciting to come to work. They had a lot of young people.

I want to talk also about Brian's support for staff, because in 1980 there were the Moscow Olympics, and Malcolm Fraser had his view on what should be happening with the Moscow Olympics and whether people should boycott or not. Brian had a staff member – again, Perry Crosswhite – who was in the Australian basketball team, and it was going to be quite contentious whether Perry was given leave to go to the Olympics when Australia's position was, 'We're not really sure that we want you to go.' Brian ignored the fact that Perry was away for six weeks, and when Perry came back and asked whether he was missed, Brian said, 'Oh, have you been away? I hadn't noticed.' Perry thought that was an amazing support for him.

We have heard about a number of initiatives that Brian drove, but some that we have not heard about are bicycle paths and trails. Brian had seen trails overseas and he wanted to introduce them in Victoria. He was poo-h-pooed a bit in cabinet about them and it was seen as one of Brian's crazy ideas, but he persisted, because at the time the only bike path was along the Yarra for the rowing coaches, and that was not really a way of everybody else keeping fit. He thought, again, that cycling helped people keep fit and it kept traffic off the road, so in typical Dixon style he did a publicity stunt that involved him taking some of the staff and the press through the city in some dangerous situations, detailing the need to have bike paths and trails. We have so many of these now, and this is because it is something that Brian initiated and drove. He had a lot of fights with the board of works about getting paths along the Yarra, but he persisted, and that city network of bicycle paths is here because of Brian.

We have indoor sports facilities, something that we all take for granted now. In the early 1970s there were hardly any indoor sports facilities or leisure centres, and Brian worked with local governments across the state to change this, from Poowong to Yackandandah, Croydon and across the city. I know Alexandra, not far from where I grew up, got a stadium, and I used to go up there and play basketball. It was a very big deal for country towns to have indoor facilities. These were funded through punting. Governments do not always like to hypothecate, but it was agreed that profits from racing could be diverted in this way, and indeed this is what happened. If you check out the 1979–80 annual report for youth sport and recreation, we can see that in the 1970s there were percentages of off-course turnover pumped into these facilities: 2 per cent of daily doubles, 2 per cent of trifectas and 4 per cent of quaddies were directed in this way. It was the early days of the TAB, which operated in 1961 as a state government agency, and this was under Brian's portfolio. So not only did he pursue indoor sports facilities but he supported country racing clubs and the city.

Knowing that we needed international-standard facilities and events that were going to help Melbourne to be the sports capital and to be a destination, he began building them. International-standard state recreation facilities were well on the agenda. The state hockey centre at Parkville, with a flash new synthetic surface, opened in 1980 or 81. I remember my first game on there; it was a very big deal. I think it might have been in 1982. Brian continued to have ideas. The 1979–80 annual report also talks about a sports house to be located in the metropolitan region where the administration headquarters of parent sporting associations could be housed in one building. In association with that the establishment of a Victorian institute of sport was under consideration. Brian drove so many initiatives that get lost because we have concentrated so much on the amazing success of the Life Be In It campaign.

Later in life Brian settled in Jamieson. He had had a farm in and around Mansfield and settled in Jamieson and married Carmel, who he met at a Mansfield branch meeting. Brian put in so much locally. He donated; he taught footy at the local schools – it was something he believed in. He was really active in tennis, and in his late 70s he was still beating a lot of people on the tennis court – that competitive nature never died. He had parties. He loved his parties, and at parties the life games manual from Life Be In It would be rolled out. This saw the creation of human pyramids. There is a story of a party where he had a number of the Danihers up there as well, and they had the human pyramid, I have heard, four and five levels high.

Brian always wanted to get things done. Father George, who came down as a celebrant from Mansfield and Jamieson, said Brian would always sweep the leaves at the front of the church on a Sunday up

until a year ago so it looked good. He was very keen on helping out and was not so keen on those who did the wrong thing or did not do enough to support their communities.

Brian and Carmel were the most amazing hosts. I do not know if it has been said that Brian liked parties and having a couple of drinks. At 5 o'clock every night Brian and Carmel would have a glass of bubbly and then a glass of red with their meal. As Brian's health deteriorated the doctor advised Carmel to just water it down a little bit so he could still enjoy the glass of red, even though it was a little bit watered down. You would see Brian and Carmel power walking around town always or watching his daughter Judy, who was either playing or umpiring netball, and her daughters Amy and Jacinda as well. You would see Brian and Carmel come into the Mansfield football club and be their active supporters all the time.

Brian and Carmel had a wonderful 22 years together. My condolences certainly go to Carmel, to Brian's children Jenny, Judy, Jaimie, Jono and Bae and to their many grandchildren. He drank well from the cup of life. Vale, Brian.

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (12:45): I rise today to pay tribute to a man whose legacy touches every corner of our community and whose service to this Parliament and to Victoria remains an inspiration to all who follow in his footsteps. The Honourable Brian Dixon OAM was in every sense a self-made man. Born without privilege, he kicked a football fashioned from bundled socks in the streets of Melbourne. He delivered newspapers and carted wood to help his widowed mother pay the bills. From these humble beginnings emerged a giant of both sport and public service, a testament to the Australian spirit that hard work, determination and character can overcome any circumstance. As the current member for Pahran, my electorate encompasses St Kilda East, which is part of the seat of St Kilda that Brian Dixon served with distinction for 18 years from 1964 to 1982. The community I represent still benefits from the foundations he laid and the battles he fought on their behalf.

Brian's journey from the football field to his parliamentary career exemplifies the best of our democratic tradition. While still pulling on the red and blue for the Melbourne Football Club, where he would become a five-time premierships player across 252 games, he answered the call to public service. In 1964 he took his place in this very chamber, bringing with him the same dedication, teamwork, and strategic thinking that had made him a champion on the field. It was in his parliamentary service that Brian Dixon's true greatness emerged. As Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation he championed the revolutionary Life Be In It campaign that I remember so well from my primary school years, an initiative that encouraged countless Australians to embrace active, healthy lifestyles. Walk through any park in my electorate today, or in your own, and you will see families exercising together and children playing sport, and you will witness Brian Dixon's enduring legacy in action.

However, it is perhaps for his pioneering work in road safety, which we have already heard about, that Brian will be remembered by history. But we should not forget the other significant contributions, including his role in contributing to the abolition of the death penalty. As chair of the Road Safety Committee he played a key role in introducing the world's first compulsory seatbelt legislation. Think for a moment about that – the world's first. Every life saved by a seatbelt in Australia and around the globe owes a debt to Brian Dixon's vision and courage. In an era when such legislation was considered radical, even intrusive, Brian saw past the politics to the human cost of inaction. How many thousands of Victorian families have been spared tragedy because of his determination?

What strikes me most powerfully about Brian Dixon's career was his ability to transcend party lines in service of the greater good. Dr Barry Jones, speaking at Brian's state funeral and despite being on the opposite side of the political aisle, called him courageous, dedicated and visionary. This is the measure of true leadership: when your political opponents become your admirers and when respect transcends ideology. The community of St Kilda East and beyond, which I now represent, were shaped by Brian's advocacy. His work in housing, social welfare and education touches the lives of countless families in our area. The sporting facilities our children use, the very culture of health and activity that

defines our community – they all bear his fingerprints. Brian Dixon understood that true conservatism is not about preserving the status quo but about conserving what matters most: human life, family bonds, community spirit and the opportunity for every person to reach their potential. He showed us that being self-made does not mean standing alone but rather using your own struggles to better understand and serve each other.

To the entire Dixon family, please know that while I did not have the privilege of knowing Brian personally, his legacy lives on not just in the premiership cups and parliamentary records but in every life saved by a seatbelt, in every Australian leading a more active life and in every young person inspired to serve their community. He was, as his daughter so beautifully and eloquently said, a hero, and we will never forget him. Brian Dixon taught us that champions are made not just on the football field but in the chambers of Parliament, in the committee rooms where difficult decisions are made and in the quiet moments when conscience calls us to do what is right rather than what is easy. Vale, Brian Dixon.

**Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:51): I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Brian James Dixon, the house now adjourns until 2 pm today.

**Motion agreed to.**

**House adjourned 12:51 pm.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER took the chair at 2:03 pm.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I would like to acknowledge in the gallery a delegation from the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia: chair of Commission IV Siti Hediati Soeharto, vice-chairs Panggah Susanto and Ahmad Yohan, and all members of the commission. Welcome to all of you.

### *Members*

**Minister for Emergency Services**

**Minister for Government Services**

### *Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Environment will answer question for the portfolios of emergency services, natural disaster recovery and equality; the Minister for Consumer Affairs will answer questions for the portfolio of government services; the Minister for Health will answer questions for the portfolios of women and prevention of family violence; and I will answer questions for the portfolio of treaty and first peoples.

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **Early childcare education and care**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): My question is to the Premier. The Minister for Children recently stated that the Victorian childcare regulator, the quality assessment and regulation division, is effectively doing its job. Given a man who has been charged with 73 child abuse offences was able to work in 24 childcare centres over multiple years, does the Premier agree with the Minister for Children that QARD is effectively doing its job?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): In thanking the Leader of the Opposition for his question, I want to state at the outset all Victorians were absolutely horrified and sickened by these allegations of abuse that the Leader of the Opposition referred to in his question, and in answering his

question and in anticipation, if there may be other questions on this matter, I will not do or say anything that will cut across the police investigation. I will come to the question, but I just want to make it clear from the outset that I will not in any way cut across the investigation by Victoria Police. We all want to see justice done in relation to these allegations, and I think it is incumbent upon all of us to act in a way to ensure that Victoria Police do the work that needs to be done to bring justice for these families.

In terms of the issues around how the child safety system needs to be strengthened, I have been clear from day one that keeping children safe in all settings must be a priority. It is clear, whether it is here in Victoria or indeed around the nation, that the system needs to be strengthened, which is why, in reference to the regulatory regime that is in place, we have called for an urgent review where we will implement the recommendations. That review is only a couple of weeks away from being received by the government. But we have not waited; we are acting immediately –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, in relation to relevance, this is a very narrow question about whether the Premier believes the Minister for Children's response that QARD is effectively doing its job. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that very direct question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Deputy Speaker, on the point of order, it is a frivolous point of order. The Premier was being completely relevant to the question, and I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and let the Premier get on with answering this very serious question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question in regard to the regulatory regime and system. The Premier to continue on the question.

**Jacinta Allan:** That is why we have indeed already taken action to introduce here into Victoria the register for childcare workers. One of the issues that has been identified is the movement of staff around the system. We are not waiting for a national system to be in place; we are moving here in Victoria. The banning of personal devices will be in operation at the end of September, and we have already moved to strengthen the working with children check regime around the worker screening regulations. I have been clear that when you are guided by the safety of children as a priority, if there is more to do as recommended by the independent review, then we will take the advice of those recommendations.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): Given the horrific circumstances that have occurred in Victorian childcare centres, why has the Premier chosen to exclude the Victorian childcare regulator from the government's review?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): As I have already outlined, there are urgent actions that we are already taking. I am not going to anticipate the findings of the independent rapid review that is currently being undertaken by Jay Weatherill and Pam White, and we will await the advice of their recommendations.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a very narrow question, and I would ask you to ask, on relevance, the Premier to come back to the question: why is the childcare regulator excluded from the government's review?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I did not hear the end of that from the Manager of Opposition Business.

**Bridget Vallence:** On relevance, Deputy Speaker, for the Premier to come back to the very narrow question: why is the regulator excluded from the review?

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

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

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): Nothing we do in this place is more important than protecting children. That is our first duty and our greatest responsibility, and it must guide every decision that we make. The allegations, as revealed by Victoria Police a few weeks ago, are sickening, and they demand nothing less than urgent and decisive action. Parents around the state – around the country – must be able to leave their children in the care of others without fear, and I will do everything in my power to make sure they can. That is why we have commissioned an urgent review into early childhood education and the working with children check. That review will report on 15 August, and we will adopt every recommendation and implement them as quickly as possible.

But we are not waiting for this report to act. We have already moved to establish a Victorian register of early childhood educators, capturing more than 90 per cent of staff in long day care settings and in kindergartens. The register will track employment history and patterns and link to a national system once established. But I will make it clear: we are not waiting for that national system to be established; we are moving immediately. And we are bringing forward a ban on personal devices in childcare centres to take effect on Friday 26 September. Centres who fail to comply with this requirement will face fines of up to \$50,000.

It is important that I finish by thanking the early childhood educators who continue to care every day for our children with dedication and kindness. The actions of one individual do not reflect the many educators and staff who show up every day caring and going above and beyond for our children, and it is important that we remember and thank those workers.

**Early childhood education and care**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. In 2022, three years ago, the Ombudsman recommended that the government strengthen the working with children check system. Since then, horrific allegations of child sexual abuse in Victorian childcare centres have come to light. Why did the government fail to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): In thanking the member for Kew for her question, I reiterate my earlier comments around the priority of the safety of children, which is why a number of months ago we moved to strengthen the working with children check, which is why the Worker Screening Regulations have been strengthened and we will see that people who have been banned in those early childhood education settings can have their working with children check revoked. As a result of the rapid review that we have called, led by Jay Weatherill and Pam White –

**Bridget Vallance:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, the Ombudsman recommended this in 2022. It is a very narrow question: why has the government failed to implement this recommendation?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business knows full well that points of order are not an opportunity to repeat the question. She has already done that three times now, and we are less than 15 minutes into question time. I ask that you rule her point of order out of order and counsel her against wasting the house's time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** A point of order from whichever side is not an opportunity for debate. The Premier was being relevant to the question on the working with children checks, and I ask her to continue.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was saying prior to the taking of the point of order, the rapid review is being undertaken by Jay Weatherill and Pam White. I do not want to anticipate what that review will recommend to government, but if it makes recommendations around strengthening the system, then we will act on those recommendations.



**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:14): Premier, why was reform to the system designed to keep our children safe not a priority for the Labor government in 2022 or in the three years that have since passed?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I want to be absolutely clear that I reject in the firmest of terms the allegations that have been put by the member for Kew. It is not politics that will strengthen the system; it is a commitment and taking action.

**Bridget Vallence**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a serious topic. Children do not deserve another review. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to the very narrow question, on relevance.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN**: I have been clear that the system does need to be strengthened; it needs to be strengthened here in Victoria and around Australia. It is why the urgent actions that we have taken – not waiting for the national forums to bring about the actions around having a register of childcare workers and the bringing about of a ban on personal devices – will be in place here in Victoria in coming weeks, across August and September. We have already moved to strengthen the working with children check system, and we will go further on the advice of the experts that will come from the rapid review.

#### Ministers statements: bail laws

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:16): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's continued action to put community safety first. This morning I joined the Premier and the Minister for Police to announce our second tranche of tough new bail laws, because Victorians deserve to –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: I need to be able to hear the minister.

**Sonya KILKENNY**: These reforms we have announced this morning are squarely focused on protecting the community from high-risk and serious repeat offenders. These reforms send a clear and unequivocal message to those accused of serious repeat offending: if you commit violent crimes while on bail, you will face the toughest bail test in the country. This will apply to six high-harm offences: aggravated home invasion, aggravated carjacking, armed robbery, aggravated burglary, home invasion and carjacking – the kinds of crimes we know are causing real fear, anger and distress in the community. We are also introducing a second-strike rule, because you cannot keep reoffending on bail. Our message to these offenders is: if you are on bail and you reoffend, it is going to be much tougher for you to get bail again. You will face a presumption against bail unless you can demonstrate compelling reasons. These are tough and strong changes, but they also need to be fair –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonya KILKENNY**: is that right, opposition leader? – so we are making sure that lower level nonviolent offences, often driven by poverty, mental illness, homelessness or addiction, are not swept up in these reforms, ensuring we target the serious risk to community while avoiding unnecessary harm to vulnerable Victorians. This builds on the significant changes to bail we introduced in March – reforms that are already working. Bail revocations are up and remand numbers are increasing.

#### Early childhood education and care

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): My question is to the Premier. Alleged childcare abuser Joshua Brown was the subject of two complaints in 2023 and 2024, which were investigated and substantiated by the centre's operator. Both were reported to the government's regulator, yet his working with children check remained in place. Despite this, the regulator is

specifically excluded from the terms of the Premier’s review. Why is the Premier unwilling to review a regulator which failed to stop a man from allegedly committing 73 offences against children in child care?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): In answering this question I reiterate my earlier comments that it is incumbent upon all of us – all of us in every forum, those of us who have the privilege to be able to have a public platform – to do nothing to compromise the Victoria Police investigation or to run allegations through whether it is the parliamentary forum or other public forums. I want to be absolutely clear about this. I will not cut across that Victoria Police investigation. I support the Victoria Police investigation.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, the question is so narrow. It is asking why the Premier is unwilling to review her own regulator. I would ask you to ask her to come back to that question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The question was reckless. It was reckless in containing assumptions about actions that may or may not have been taken by an independent regulator. I say again: we acknowledge that the system needs to be strengthened here in Victoria and around the nation. The rapid review will give that further advice to government, and those recommendations will be acted on.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): Given the Premier has excluded the childcare regulator from the government’s review, is the Premier asserting that no changes are required to this regulator?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): I reiterate: we have a rapid review. That rapid review will be received by government.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Polwarth is warned.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Polwarth, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** The rapid review is underway. It will be received by government in coming weeks, and we will act on all those recommendations to strengthen the system here in Victoria.

#### **Ministers statements: community safety**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:22): Our vibrant multicultural state is a place where Victorians can live, work and play free from harassment and intimidation. But over the winter break we saw a series of shocking criminal acts where a small minority of extremists chose to threaten the safety of others, attacking people for their religious beliefs, who they are or where they come from. The scenes we have seen at places like the NGV and the East Melbourne synagogue or neo-Nazis at Northland have no place here in Victoria. Under this government we will not stand for hate. Arrests have been made in relation to many of these incidents, and I want to thank Victoria Police for holding these cowards to account.

I stand alongside my cabinet colleagues, alongside the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, community leaders and the Chief Commissioner of Police, who are very pleased to serve on the Premier’s Anti-Hate Taskforce. The taskforce is a call to action to protect and advance the rights of Victorians to gather, worship and celebrate free from fear. The taskforce had its first meeting in the days after the attack on

the East Melbourne synagogue. It brought together leaders of the Jewish community to listen and act on their concerns.

Our landmark anti-vilification laws have passed the Parliament, no thanks to some, and will commence in September. The work is underway to make sure that protests are a place for Victorians to peacefully express their views, not a place for hatred, for threatening behaviour, for bullying or for intimidation of others. I thank for their hard work Victoria Police, who to this day are keeping Victorians safe.

Can I say also that those who have been engaged in Operation Park at Victoria Police, a dedicated taskforce to combat hate, have completed over 22,000 shifts at protests and demonstrations, made nearly 150 arrests and undertaken 517 investigations. The chief commissioner has been very clear that extreme elements whose behaviour seeks to cause harm at either end of the political spectrum will be dealt with. That behaviour is unacceptable, and we will meet it head on. Our government stands with Victorians who value democracy and respect for one another and who call out extremist behaviour. We will hold these thugs to account.

### Early childhood education and care

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. Last sitting week the upper house passed a Greens motion requiring the Labor government to release key documents relating to regulation, complaints and enforcement in Victorian childcare centres. Under the rules of Parliament those documents were required to be released, with of course any sensitive or identifying information redacted to protect children's privacy. But the deadline has now passed, and the government has not released any of those documents relating to child care. Parents deserve transparency when it comes to abuse in childcare centres and how the government is handling complaints and enforcement to keep our kids safe. Premier, when will the government release these documents?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier cannot stray into the business of the Council, but she can respond as far as government policy goes on the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): Thank you for that guidance, Deputy Speaker. I say to the Leader of the Greens political party: this is not about the Greens political party, it is about the safety of children. I say to the Leader of the Greens political party that I make no apologies for ensuring that compliance with any motion that is passed by the Legislative Council, in the transmission of government documents to that chamber, does not compromise the personal details of children and families. The Greens might want that to be the case; I do not, and I make no apologies for the time it is taking for the government to process the hundreds of thousands of documents. The Greens political party know this; they know the scope of this documents motion is broad. In going through those documents we are not going to compromise personal details. I say this to the Leader of the Greens political party: if she is that committed to strengthening the system of children's safety, she would be focused on the policy, not the politics.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:27): My supplementary is to the Premier. Premier, we agree that privacy and child safety must come first, and that is exactly why the motion was carefully worded to ensure that any sensitive information would be redacted. In New South Wales similar documents to what we have requested here in Victoria were produced under the same rules by the deadline, with transparency and privacy both upheld. But the fact is the Victorian government has never once complied with the standing orders requiring documents claimed under executive privilege to be provided to the Clerk and to the motion mover. Why do Victorian parents deserve less transparency than in New South Wales? Will the Premier at least give a deadline as to when these important documents will be released?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier on the question on the end.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28): I think the member for Melbourne is being perhaps a little disingenuous in her jurisdictional comparison. The volume of documents that has been requested through that motion is enormous. The resources that it is taking to process those documents, and do it in a way that complies with the motion but also protects the private information of families and children, is requiring significant departmental resources – resources, I might add, that are also needed to be focused on the task of protecting children. So again, I make no apologies for the time it is taking to ensure that in compliance with the motion we are placing children’s safety first.

**Ministers statements: community safety**

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:29): I rise to provide the house with an update on the highly successful machete sales ban taskforce led by Consumer Affairs Victoria. In May this year the Allan government implemented a nation-leading interim ban on the sale of machetes, and it is this decisive action that has taken these dangerous weapons off the shelves. This action has dried up the market ahead of the permanent ban on machete possession in September, which is being championed by my colleague the Minister for Police. I want to acknowledge and thank the dedicated members of the taskforce who have been out on the ground working tirelessly to ensure compliance and to protect our communities. Their work has delivered real results.

Since the taskforce began, Consumer Affairs Victoria has conducted 467 in-person inspections of retailers, and I am pleased to report that we have seen strong compliance across the board, with more than 98 per cent of these inspections finding retailers are complying with the law. In addition, 2400 market stalls have been inspected during weekend operations, with only one machete being found, and it was confiscated immediately – a clear sign of the taskforce’s effectiveness. More recently, an inspection at the Corio weekend market, one of seven markets inspected in the last month, found no machetes for sale, which I know the member for Lara will welcome, and since 30 May our inspectors have also engaged with 78 different online platforms and retailers, with infringement notices issued against five smaller retailers. Even global giants like Amazon have responded, ceasing sales of machetes not only here in Victoria but across Australia thanks to this government’s actions. This government has zero tolerance for machete crime. We remain focused on the safety of all Victorians.

**Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Danny O’BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:31): My question is to the Premier. The Treasurer has revealed in the other place that half a billion dollars of the \$3 billion in increased emergency services tax will be collected over the forward estimates from rental providers. Why is the government adding additional costs onto renters at a time when they already face a rental affordability and availability crisis?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): Let us be clear: the biggest challenge for renters being able to find a property to rent is the question of supply, which is why we are getting on and building more homes right across the state, and it is why I note that consistently the coalition in partnership with the Greens like to team up and oppose those efforts to build more homes right across the state. So if the Leader of the National Party was so focused on and concerned about making sure renters have access to a property, they would back our housing reforms, they would back the changes like the activity centres –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, I ask you to bring the Premier back to the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Deputy Speaker, on the point of order, the Premier was being entirely relevant to the question, which asked about access to rental properties for renters. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and let the Premier get on with answering the question.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Again, if the Leader of the National Party was so concerned about ensuring that renters had access to properties, why did the National Party support the attempts to stop the building of more homes near train and tram zones, like we saw in the upper house during the last session?

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. This has got nothing to do with what the Premier is trying to deflect with; it is about the emergency services tax hurting renters.

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

**Jacinta ALLAN:** We will remain focused on making sure that we are getting on and doing everything we can to build more homes so more renters can have access to a property where they want to live.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:34): What modelling has the government undertaken to show what the impact of this new \$500 million tax grab will be on renters already struggling with soaring rents during a housing crisis?

**Dylan Wight** interjected.

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

**Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): Let us remember that this is all about providing more support to our fire and emergency services.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual in her responses; I would ask you to ask her to be so.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier and all members are expected to be factual at all times. The Premier was being relevant to the question, and it is not for the Chair to dictate what a minister or member says.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Taking that existing levy and ensuring that it covers our emergency services, who protect us in times of –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Well, I think those people who work in the State Control Centre, who worked to protect the community of Pomonal when the fire was raining down on that community, are all about supporting the community. Let us not denigrate those public services. The question from the deputy leader again reminds us that there is a giant cut coming to our emergency services from those opposite. They have not said what would fill their black hole.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order on the question of relevance, Deputy Speaker, the question was about both modelling and rent, and the Premier has not gone remotely close to either of them.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant but had strayed at the end. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Ministers statements: education system**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:36): I rise to update the house on the expansion of principals' powers to expel and suspend students at government schools. The Allan Labor government is committed to giving principals the tools they need to keep our schools safe. From the start of this term, principals are now able to suspend or expel students for behaviour that happens outside the school gates, indeed online when it happens outside in people's homes. We know what schools have to deal with every Monday morning. When I talk to the principals and the students: what happens online? What happens on the weekend? We want to give the principals the powers to suspend and expel. We also want to make it very clear that this is a power that should be used as a last resort.

We know how important school is and how important education is. That is why on this side of the chamber we are investing in the schoolwide positive behaviour program. Deputy Speaker, you may recall that you and I got to see that firsthand at a recent visit to Ashburton Primary School, where the principal outlined how this investment is teaching positive behaviours and is making sure that students that need extra help are getting it as well. We know that creating safe spaces is so important. That is why the last budget invested an additional \$10 million to expand the schoolwide positive behaviour program to another 400 schools. These changes strengthen and build upon the nation-leading mobile phone ban we put in place, the Safe Socials work that the Premier has been leading and the Alannah & Madeline eSmart initiative that we are rolling out in Victorian government schools. We continue to get on with the job of what we need to do.

The contrast could not be more important. While we are supporting schools that teach positive, supportive and inclusive behaviours, we know those on the other side are modelling the very opposite of this. They are giving us all a lesson in division, infighting and backstabbing. Perhaps some of those on the other side would benefit from the schoolwide positive behaviour initiative.

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, both you and the Deputy Premier are very aware that question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no need to reflect on the Chair in your points of order. The Deputy Premier does know that ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

**Ben CARROLL:** I was just very clearly trying to model what is good behaviour and what is poor behaviour, and that is what we are trying to do.

*Constituency questions*

**Nepean electorate**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:40): (1190) You will not find a more important issue to the people of Nepean than health and with that, Rosebud Hospital. On 15 May I put a question on notice to the Minister for Health, who responded on 28 July. I was asking the Minister for Health when she last made a visit to Rosebud. You would have thought in her remit as the Minister for Health, with a hospital that needs to be redeveloped, she would have. In her response the minister said she had undertaken visits right across Victoria – health services, ambulance stations, community health services, controlled health services, women's health clinics, sexual and reproductive health, urgent care and even to schools about Smile Squad – but there was not a single mention in her answer about an official visit to Rosebud Hospital. I think the people of the southern peninsula, the people of Nepean, who are in desperate need of a redevelopment of their hospital, need not only a visit from the Minister for Health but at least an answer as to why she does not come down and visit that hospital. So my question to the minister is: when will she come down and see the state of Rosebud Hospital?

**Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:41): (1191) My question is to the outstanding Minister for Education. Minister, what is the latest information on construction timelines for this government's upgrade of

Diggers Rest Primary School in my electorate? As the minister knows, this is a significant and important contribution to a terrific local school. It builds upon the \$3 million invested in a previous budget, and I certainly know that the school, the teachers and the wider school community are very much looking forward to upgrades at this school. I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge everyone that has played a significant and important role in advocating for what is an important project, and I look forward to the minister's response.

#### **Ovens Valley electorate**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:42): (1192) My question is to the Treasurer in the other place, and I ask on behalf of Ruth Hackett of Katamatite, who wants to know how the Treasurer can justify the ridiculous price tag on a block of land of \$51,000 for land tax purposes when she only recently purchased this block of land, that was landlocked behind her property on the Tocumwal–Benalla road, for the princely sum of \$3000 – that is what she paid for it. This land is of no use to any other purchaser and cannot be built on as a standalone property. The Allan Labor government's cruel land tax slug initially valued the block at \$60,000 – when she paid \$3000 for it – for land tax revenue. After initially being questioned on the outrageous figure, the government dropped it to \$51,000 – obviously just high enough, as it still falls above the threshold for land tax. The Treasurer is clearly inventing figures to enable the government to milk the land tax cow even further, and Ruth Hackett needs justification. Needless to say, she is prepared to sell the block to the Victorian Treasurer for \$50,000 if that is the registered valuation.

#### **Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:43): (1193) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health and concerns the community pharmacist program. Minister, how will the expansion of this program benefit people seeking medical assistance in my electorate of Narre Warren South? I was recently thrilled to see the Allan Labor government's investment of \$18 million to make the community pharmacist program permanent, as announced in the Victorian state budget. I have met with local representatives of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia. I know they are very happy with this result, and I thank them for their very, very strong advocacy. Like many across the state, people in my electorate are battling cost-of-living pressures, and I am sure this health service will be appreciated by the local community too. This program of course stands alongside the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department and Nurse-on-Call services, which are helping so many. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

#### **Croydon electorate**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:44): (1194) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: why has the Department of Transport and Planning not completed the scheduled cleaning of the kerb and channel along Croydon Road, Croydon? Minister, my office wrote to you a couple of months ago after my constituent Liz contacted me, completely frustrated after she had been trying unsuccessfully since November last year to get the department to clean the gutters and drains along Croydon Road. In response to this correspondence you advised us that the department had programmed the cleaning of the kerb and channel, including the pit and cross culvert outside Liz's home, to be completed in July 2025. Minister, it is now the end of July, and these works are still not done. Liz and her neighbours are completely fed up with the road flooding every time it rains, due to the failings of the government in not being able to stick to a regular maintenance schedule on roads they are responsible for.

#### **Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:45): (1195) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Kay Chan, a parliamentary intern who was with me from Monash University, recently completed a research report on how sustainable tourism growth can be supported in the Bellarine region. The report highlighted the Bellarine's strong tourism assets, including its natural

beauty, its food and wine offerings, signature events, the small businesses that support the tourism industry and strategic geographic locations. However, despite the strong tourism assets, the report also found that seasonality is a challenge for the area, with visitor activity heavily concentrated in summer and school holidays, which has led to some issues around accommodation, infrastructure and connectivity in its off-peak season as well. Minister, how is the Allan Labor government supporting the Bellarine's tourism industry to achieve year-round tourism growth?

#### **Warrandyte electorate**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (14:46): (1196) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, why has the government cut millions of dollars from the maternal child health sleep and settling program, including in my electorate of Warrandyte? I am a new mum, and I have got my baby Bobby here with me today. I will be the first to say that he was not the greatest sleeper when he was first born and for the first few months, and I have personally accessed these services in my local electorate. I know how much of a lifeline they are, and as any new parent knows, sleep deprivation is one of the most brutal parts of parenting. It is the number one issue that gets talked about in any mothers group chat. The mental health impact of your baby's sleep is so real. That is why it is shameful that the government is so broke that it has had to cut funding for the sleep and settling program when it is, to quote one of my local councils, a crucial support for families when they are at their most vulnerable. This speaks to the issues in this government and how wrong their priorities are. Shame on them for shutting down this program, and shame on them for abandoning new parents and their babies.

#### **Werribee electorate**

**John LISTER** (Werribee) (14:47): (1197) My constituency question is also for the Minister for Health. Can the minister outline what investments we are making to meet the health needs of the growing community I represent? The electorate of Werribee and Wyndham as a whole have experienced significant growth in the past decade, and our health system has been growing with it. Over 20 per cent of people in Wyndham have a long-term health condition, and our population is now younger than it ever has been. Federal and state Labor governments have invested in different measures to meet our changing health needs. Over the past few months I have met with many of our amazing paramedics and health workers, who work hard to keep Wyndham healthy. My electorate know that the Allan Labor government is on their side when it comes to meeting their health needs, and I will continue to work with government, fighting for my community.

#### **Morwell electorate**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (14:48): (1198) My question is for the Minister for Planning, and my question is: why is the minister refusing to explain the rationale for the valuer-general's outrageously inflated land valuations for the purpose of land tax assessments? I have written to the minister on several occasions, but I am yet to receive an answer as to how the valuer-general can feasibly claim that the value of a parcel of land without any capital improvement or other adjustments can double and in some instances even triple in the space of a year. One small local business, Australian Char, which makes the iconic heat beads, has been told its site in Morwell is supposedly valued at \$1.25 million, more than double the reported valuation that was issued just 12 months ago. It absolutely defies all logic that Victorians are receiving massive land tax bills for parcels of land that have supposedly and miraculously more than doubled in value year on year. Minister, why are you refusing to explain the rationale for the valuer-general's outrageously inflated land valuations?

#### **Greenvale electorate**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (14:49): (1199) My question is for the Minister for Water in the other place and relates to the \$3 million of investment I have secured on behalf of my community to reopen the Greenvale Reservoir Park. This investment is, as we speak, delivering much-needed upgrades to enable the southern part of Greenvale Reservoir Park to be safely reopened later this year for community use and enjoyment. Greenvale Reservoir Park is such a special place for so many in



our community. It is a beautiful park that has created great memories, and it surrounds a reservoir that supplies Melbourne's west and north with the freshest drinking water in the world. This investment is unlocking nearly 40 hectares of accessible green space for residents in Greenvale, Meadow Heights, Roxburgh Park and beyond while protecting critical drinking water supplies. The works currently taking place in the southern section of Greenvale Reservoir Park are delivering new and upgraded walking trails, water fountains, toilets, electric barbecues and barbecue pits for community use and enjoyment. Can the minister please let me know how this investment benefits residents across Greenvale and beyond?

**Martin Cameron:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker. I am sorry that I have to stand up and do this, but I am still waiting on answers to question 1985 to the Minister for Health for the Minister for Mental Health; question 2195 to the Minister for Victims; question 2405 to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure for the Minister for Housing and Building; question 2406 to the Minister for Police; question 2407, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; 2408, same again, Minister for Roads and Road Safety; and question 1209 to the Minister for Planning. I just ask, Deputy Speaker, if you could please follow these up. I will hand them in.

**Tim Read:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have got 10 unanswered questions. I am happy to supply the numbers to the Clerk, if that would help.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That would help a lot.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I know that before the break you raised that a number of outstanding questions had not been dealt with. I note that questions 984, 1049, 1060, 1094 and 1120, I think all of them to the Premier, remain unanswered. Question 984 was asked in February and was due in March. It is shocking to think that the Premier does not have the capacity.

The rules around questions were changed; clearly they are not working. The fact that you read out and requested that ministers respond and not one response was received throughout the break is outrageous, and I ask: what is actually being done to make sure that these questions are being responded to? Because this is, frankly, an abuse of the house.

**David Southwick:** I raise a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on a number of unanswered questions: firstly, question 1008 to the Minister for Housing and Building in relation to the Grosvenor Street development; 1054, the Premier, in relation to Chabad Youth; 1180, emergency services, in relation to the Glen Eira SES; 2018 to the Minister for Police on Victoria Police attending Port Phillip council; 2468, again to the Minister for Police, on police figures in electorates; and lastly, question 900, which goes back to November of last year, to the Premier. I note the Minister for Police stood up about combating anti-hate laws and fighting to combat antisemitism. This was a question back in November about Victoria Police resources on anti-hate laws, and I ask that this question be taken as a matter of priority. It is not good enough standing up here and talking about these things; we need action and we need answers.

**Bridget Vallance:** I have a point of order, Deputy Speaker, also on many unanswered questions, dating back to April: questions unanswered by the Minister for Public and Active Transport, 2309, 2312 and 2314; to the Treasurer, 2419, 2420, 2421, 2422, 2423, 2424, 2425, 2426; to the Minister for Finance, 2429, 2430, 2431, 2432, 2433, 2435; to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC – questions which still remain unanswered – 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2443, 2444, 2445, 2446, 2447, 2448, 2449 and 2450; further questions unanswered by the Treasurer – 2512, 2513, 2514, 2515, 2516, 2517, 2518, 2519 and 2520; further questions unanswered by the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC – 2522, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2526, 2527, 2528 and 2529; 2535 is unanswered by the Minister for Consumer Affairs; further questions unanswered by the Minister for Finance, 2550 and 2551; and questions unanswered by the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, 2566, 2567, 2568 and 2569. Seriously, residents in my community and across the state of Victoria deserve answers to these

questions, and these ministers are absolutely delinquent and failing their obligations in this Parliament. I ask you again to ask them to answer their questions within the set timeframe.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** If the member for Evelyn could pass that list to the Clerk, we will follow it up as we do the others.

**Sam Groth:** I might as well have a go, Deputy Speaker. On a point of order, I have unanswered questions: adjournment 1121, question on notice 2536, question on notice 2537, question on notice 2541, question 1130, question on notice 2540, question on notice 2343, question on notice 2350, question on notice 2539, adjournment 991, question on notice 2339, constituency question 1162, questions on notice 2544 and 2533.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Could you also pass the list to the Clerk, member for Nepean.

### *Rulings from the Chair*

#### **Member conduct**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (14:56):** Before we move on, on the last sitting day, I suspended the member for Narracan from the house under standing order 124 for 90 minutes. As he left the chamber, the member continued to interject in a very disorderly way. The member's comments were a reflection on the Chair, and I ask the member for Narracan to stand and apologise to the Chair.

**Wayne Farnham:** I apologise to the Chair.

### *Bills*

#### **Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025**

##### *Introduction*

**Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:57):** I move:

I move that I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Worker Screening Act 2020 in relation to the screening of persons who work with or care for children and for other purposes.

In introducing this bill, the normal start from the opposition would be that we are introducing this bill because we know action needs to happen now. But the one thing we are sure of on this side is that action needed to happen three years ago. We have had three years of delays in introducing legislation in here to tighten the Worker Screening Act 2020 and to ensure that children in Victoria are protected. We have seen too often in the media recently that working with children checks have literally been given to people or remain with people when they have complaints or investigations against them, and from this side of the house, we will not sit here and let that continue.

I note the work of the member for Kew and the member for Malvern, who are not waiting for a review but are putting in place actions to make the protection of children here in Victoria our priority. Not once have I sat down with the member for Malvern or the member for Kew and heard them say, 'We have to wait for a national response', because here in Victoria we have a responsibility to Victorian children and Victorian families, because what we have seen in the media is simply too much. Every single person across the state has watched as thousands and thousands of families have been impacted by the actions of someone working in child care who had allegations and complaints made against them but still their working with children check was in place. This has seen children having to go through the absolutely disgusting process now of undergoing tests for STIs here in Victoria. We have said continuously that at no stage would we on this side want to put politics into this. This is about protecting children.

**A member** interjected.

**Brad BATTIN:** I will answer. What am I doing now? I am doing what the government should be doing. We should be introducing legislation that should have been introduced by the government after

the Ombudsman's report back in 2022, and for someone on the backbench of the Labor Party to turn around now and say the issue is us introducing it, the issue is this government is trying to kick the can down the road and have another review. Worse than that, the person they have got heading up this review is the one who had to apologise to the South Australian community for overseeing one of the biggest crises they had in child care in South Australia. Former Premier Jay Weatherill should not be leading this investigation. It needs to be held totally independently.

But the fact remains, this bill is important and needs to go through this Parliament today. We need to make sure that we have given the powers for the things that we can do to make the changes that we can make to working with children checks so that action can be taken upon information that includes a working with children applicant or holder who poses an unacceptable risk to the safety of children, regardless of whether criminal charges have been laid.

That is one of the priorities, because when you see complaints go through, you cannot wait and hope that long term we are going to end up not seeing that complaint come to fruition, and we have seen the outcomes of what it is. This will also give immediate effect to the decision to refuse, suspend or revoke any working with children certificate here in Victoria. It will provide direction or refuse the working with children where giving a clearance would pose an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children. The priority in everything we are doing in this is about children. It will list the working with children applications on the law enforcement program – known as the LEAP database – to ensure that concerning interactions with Victoria Police such as alleged criminal behaviour, family violence incidents or missing persons reports trigger early warnings.

Now, I cannot believe, in today's day, with the technology we have, that we do not have working with children certificates, working with children checks, available on the LEAP system, because Victoria Police are going to come into contact with people who are potentially putting children in danger and putting them at risk. We have got people who are in settings that are working with children that could be found out by Victoria Police if we had a working with children check come up on that LEAP system. They would react differently; they would investigate differently. This legislation today that I introduce is an absolute priority for this state. It is a priority for the kids. It is a priority to protect the children and a priority to also protect the workers so that they know that every person working in a centre has the checks that they undergo to ensure that it is a safe workplace and they can trust everyone around them.

We know how important child care here is in Victoria, and the only way to fix it is for the Labor Party to vote with our bill and ensure that this bill goes through this house in the interests of protecting children in Victoria today.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (15:02): Well, I am hardly surprised that the Leader of the Opposition has tried to introduce this bill. What has happened here – and I have got childcare centres named in my electorate – is incredibly serious, and here is not the place to be playing politics this time in the afternoon, with a kneejerk reaction from the opposition to try and introduce a piece of legislation and have it debated here. This is not the time nor the place to do this. A review is currently underway. A review is needed. These are incredibly serious, serious allegations that have been made. There are childcare centres in my electorate, in my neighbouring electorates. The community is extremely upset; they are worried. We will do anything that it takes – anything – and I reassure parents –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** From the conversations that I have on the streets, parents know and grandparents know this is an incredibly serious matter. There are serious reforms that need to take place.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members will be removed without warning on interjections.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** That is exactly why a review is currently underway. This is a review that will happen quite quickly, and the reforms that need to take place to prevent this from happening again will come out of this review. Here in this place we will debate them and look at putting them in place. We will do anything to protect children and families here in this place.

I cannot believe that those opposite are using this as an opportunity to time and time again use these sorts of things – you know, we have had numerous examples over the past couple of years that I have been here. They use the most horrendous incidents in our community; they bring them here into this place to toss around, toss around language, language about incredibly serious offences.

My sister, actually, and my mother, who has recently retired, are childcare workers. My sister is currently a childcare worker. We talk about the families and we talk about the children, and this is something that also the childcare workers – and there are many across our electorates, including in the electorates of those opposite – too have been traumatised by, these allegations.

This is not the place. This is not the time. This is pure politicking by those opposite to try and introduce a knee-jerk piece of legislation –

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for South–West Coast.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** of self-indulgence, again, by those opposite. I completely reject the motion and reject the legislation. I think that we need to get on and deal with the agenda that is before the house this week and let the review take place, and we should not do things in this place that will interfere with the criminal investigation that is currently underway. As the Premier has already said today, we need to make sure that justice is able to take place and that offenders who are before the law and facing time in jail over these offences get what is coming to them. This is another ridiculous opportunity that those opposite are trying to use here in this place to introduce frivolous pieces of legislation. A review is underway, and we will do whatever is necessary to protect families and children here in this state.

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (15:06): The best time for this legislation to have been introduced was three years ago. That was the best time for this legislation to have been introduced. The second-best time is now, is today. For this Allan Labor government to indicate they are going to block the introduction of legislation to help protect Victorian children tells you they are more interested in politics and optics than they are in protecting Victorian kids. And that is to their shame, because every day this government dithers, every day this government delays, every day this government fails to take the action that the Victorian Ombudsman said we needed three years ago, Victorian kids are being put at risk. Instead this government wants to have a review into a review. That is not keeping Victorian kids safe.

As an MP, but mainly as a parent whose kids went through childcare, I am sure I join all members here in saying I was absolutely sickened and horrified by the reports we have seen recently and the charges that have been brought. It is disgraceful. When I look back at this report from the Victorian Ombudsman from September 2022, I note there are four recommendations. There was a recommendation to Melbourne City Mission – accepted. There were two recommendations to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – both accepted. There was a recommendation to the Victorian government – no response. The Victorian government did not even have the courtesy to respond to the Ombudsman's recommendation as to the changes that needed to occur, and three years later, they still have not responded. Is that the action of a government and a Premier who claims to take community safety seriously? Is that the action of a Premier who says child safety is the most important thing? Three years and they could not be bothered responding. That is dereliction of duty. That is a disgrace. And for members opposite to be supporting it and cheering it on and voting for it is a reflection on them.

The Ombudsman's recommendations were very clear: Victoria's working with children system is broken. It is broken because it has loopholes that have been exploited and are continuing to be exploited by those who would do our kids harm, and those loopholes need to be closed. The recommendations from the Ombudsman laid out a very clear series of changes that need to occur to make sure that those loopholes can be closed: for example, the working with children regulators should not have to wait for a criminal conviction or a disciplinary finding in the workplace in order to suspend, vary or revoke a working with children clearance. If they are satisfied on the basis that there is an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children, then the regulators should have the power to step in straight away. And that is what this bill does – it implements faithfully the recommendations of the Victorian Ombudsman. If the government thinks that paedophiles deserve due process, they can make that argument, but the Ombudsman said Victorian kids deserve protection more than due process. That is why we are supporting the Ombudsman's recommendations and giving the regulator the power, through this bill, to step in immediately whenever there is an unjustifiable risk to the safety of children, to refuse, to suspend or to revoke a working with children clearance.

We also believe that when there is an appeal against a suspension or a revocation, that suspension or revocation must continue in force until that appeal is heard by VCAT. Then in this bill we say that beyond that initial test of an unjustifiable risk to children there should be a further test of the public interest. So we are going to make it harder for VCAT to overturn a decision to refuse somebody a working with children check, because once again the protection of children should come first.

This is a 'line in the sand' moment for this government. They talk about protecting kids, but they did not do anything for three years. They talk about protecting kids; they could not even bother responding to the Ombudsman's recommendation in the last three years. They talk about protecting kids; let us see how they vote on this bill to protect kids, to close the loopholes they were told about three years ago, to close the loopholes that may well have been exploited by people who are trying to do Victorian kids harm. This is going to be a test not just of the politics of this government but of its morality.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (15:11): I admire the opposition's passion for and commitment to protecting children, and I admire the people on this side of the chamber as well, who have stepped up and said, 'We will not wait for an Australian or a national-based response to this. We will ban personal devices. We will introduce a national register.' I say that from the perspective of someone who, like a few other MPs in this house, is an out-of-home carer. Recently I had some children leave my care to go to a therapeutic home who had been horribly, horribly abused, and that was just before this story came out.

While I share the passion of those in the opposition, I cannot support this bill, because too many times we have seen legislation that does not close all the gaps. What I want to see here is a review that recommends legislation put forward by this government that makes abusing children something that just becomes unthinkable, that makes the cost of abusing children unthinkable and that makes sure there are no gaps in the legislation.

While I will say that the review is going forward, and I am confident in that, we also have a situation where I think there are questions to be raised around rules that are already in place in childcare centres. The first thing that I thought of when this came to light, as a former teacher, a former special development school teacher, who changed children, who gave rectal valium to children while they were fitting, was: how was this person alone in a room with children? How was this person alone in a room changing children? I am guessing, I am assuming, that is where we are at. There are rules in place in these centres that prohibit that. How was this person using a personal device anyway? While I do not want to step out there and be sub judice in any way, I think that beyond this bill being put forward today by the opposition there are questions that need to be answered, and those questions will be answered in this review. I say, 'Get it done properly. Leave no gaps. Make sure this is not a box-ticking exercise.' We need to lift standards, but we also need to support educators, and with that comes well-constructed and well-consulted legislation that, as I have said, leaves abusing children as something that is unthinkable and leaves operators of these companies thinking this is something that

they are responsible for and this is something for which they need to make sure every single box is checked and children's safety is first. So while I commend the house coming together, uniting today in solidarity, I think that once you have commissioned a review, that review should go forward.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I do not think, as I heard a member interject, that this will take three years. This review is due very soon, and already by Friday 26 September we will have a ban on personal devices. I think the will is there. I think the motivation is there. I think there is no-one in this chamber, let alone in our community, who looks at this and thinks that we should not be doing something. But there is also something to be said for well-considered legislation that comes out of a review of what actually went wrong.

At the moment we really only read in the *Herald Sun* what probably went wrong, but I guarantee you there are things that went wrong internally in these childcare centres and there are processes that should have been followed that were not. We need to make sure that that is in this review as well. We need to make sure that our legislation captures that, as I said, to make sure there are no gaps where people can abuse children and make sure that people think and perceive that abusing a child is so unthinkable and the price you pay is far too much. That is how we protect children, and I stand here today as someone who supports the reform that this government will put in as part of the review that is going forward at the moment, but I cannot support this bill.

**Jess WILSON (Kew) (15:16):** The working with children check system in Victoria is broken, and we cannot wait for another review, a review of a review, to make the urgent changes that are needed today to keep children safe in Victoria. The bill that the Liberals and Nationals have put forward today is a commonsense, practical bill that will make critical changes to ensure that the working with children check system is actually delivering for children in Victoria.

The horrific allegations that have been revealed over recent weeks in Victoria have shattered trust in Victoria when it comes to our childcare system. It has demonstrated that we do not have a system that is delivering for Victorian families. When parents drop their kids off at child care in the morning, they have an expectation that they will be safe, that they will be looked after, that the most vulnerable in our community will be protected by this government, because when we are elected to this place, our number one priority and our number one duty is to protect the vulnerable, to protect children.

The Allan Labor government is kicking the can down the road. It has failed to implement recommendations from the Ombudsman that were made in 2022. This is not a kneejerk reaction. This is responding to the Ombudsman's report from three years ago. Three years ago the Ombudsman told the government that the system is not working, that it is not keeping our children safe. Yet here we are three years later and those opposite – the government – are refusing to stand with us, to put politics aside and to put children's safety first. That is the number one job of every one of us in this place. If there is more to be done after the so-called rapid review, we will stand with the government and we will pass that legislation as a matter of urgency. But today children are not safe because the working with children check system in this state is broken.

A number of examples of how the working with children check system is broken have come to light over recent weeks. There was an example of a man, an offender, in Horsham who was convicted of holding child sexual abuse material. The police raided his home years ago and took this material, but he continued to hold an active working with children check. He continued to visit childcare centres, kinders. If the Ombudsman's recommendations had been adopted in 2022 by this government, the secretary would have been able to take into account the fact that that offender had risk factors that made it unacceptable for him to continue to hold a working with children check. Does the government need a clearer example as to why we need to pass this bill today? There is the example of how the system is broken.

We saw with the alleged offender in Melbourne's west a number of allegations being substantiated yet he continued to hold an active working with children check.

The system is not working, and that is why we have put forward a number of commonsense reforms: adopting the Ombudsman's report; putting in place mandatory training for employees who have to work with our most vulnerable, ensuring they understand the child safety standards and ensuring that they know their reporting obligations; working with the Australian Childhood Foundation and survivor-advocate Emma to ensure that there is training around what child sexual abuse red flags look like so we can pick them up early; and making sure that the working with children check system is actually attached to the police database so, if police look up a person and see that they have an active working with children check, that is a red flag and can be picked up on immediately. Today is the day for the government to put politics aside, to stand with the opposition and to work constructively to put children's safety first.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (15:21): I agree with the member for Kew that we do have a duty to protect the most vulnerable. However, we are conducting a rapid review into working with children. We are conducting a rapid review with Jay Weatherill and Pamela White into the system as it stands. From that review we will adopt every recommendation. The Premier and the ministers have been unequivocal on this. I cannot imagine that there is a single person in the state of Victoria who has not read about what the allegations are, and I will choose my words very, very carefully here. We tread on really dangerous ground, but I will be very careful. These allegations are beyond horrific. I think we all had a visceral response when we heard them, and as more have come out, we have all felt this really, really deeply. I have sat here and listened to everyone speak on this so far, and it is undeniable that every single one of us in this place wants to see a better system and never wants to see another child in care harmed or a child harmed full stop. Whatever we can do as a government, we will do it. We will accept every recommendation.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am loath to interrupt my colleague on her feet making a very considered contribution, but the ongoing interjections from the member for South-West Coast are simply disrespectful and unacceptable, and I ask that you call her to account.

**James Newbury** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! Without assistance, member for Brighton. I would ask all members to listen to other members with respect. I ask the member to continue in silence, please.

**Daniela DE MARTINO**: As I was saying, it is undeniable that there is considerable passion on everyone's behalf here, and probably most of us know someone who in some way has been affected throughout their lives by abuse of the most horrific nature. All I can say is I understand why the opposition have brought this bill in, but I have confidence that the review that we have commissioned and are conducting as quickly as possible will be thorough and considered and will have the outcomes that we need to keep our children safe. We will adopt every recommendation, and I think it is important that we let that process play out in a considered and careful manner. I do implore and beseech everyone to try and keep, wherever possible, politics out of it. I say that without accusation but I say it with conviction, because I have stared in the face of a convicted paedophile and I have given evidence against that person – without giving away too much – so I can tell you that I feel this incredibly deeply. But I have absolute faith in our government and those conducting the review that they will act with the utmost integrity and with the greatest faith in their hearts to make sure that the outcomes are what our children deserve in this state.

We are already forging ahead, without the federal government, to ban mobile devices. That will take effect on 26 September. I hope that is already rolling out across centres as we speak; it should be. We have got that national register already, and the first phase has been implemented. That is pretty quick when you consider this was weeks ago. I am saying here: do not doubt the passion of those on this

side; I do not doubt the passion of those on that side. We all want to see a better result for every single child in this state today and tomorrow. I do beseech everyone: please, keep the politics out of this. We will go ahead as a government with what we have planned, what is already being implemented, what is already being undertaken, to ensure that our children are safer.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (32):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowsell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

*Noes (49):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

**Bail Further Amendment Bill 2025**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (15:31): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Bail Act 1977 and the Summary Offences Act 1966 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (15:32): I ask the Attorney-General to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (15:32): This bill builds on the government's tough bail reforms earlier this year to introduce the toughest bail test in the country, to make it very hard for people who allegedly commit violent offences while on bail to get bail again and to ensure those who allegedly commit indictable offences while on bail are subject to a tougher bail test where they must prove compelling reasons to justify bail to ensure respect for the rules. This new rule will be subject to carve outs to ensure those charged with some low-harm, non-violent offending are not remanded unnecessarily.

**Read first time.**

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

*Business of the house*

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

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (15:33): General business, notices of motion 3 and 10 to 11 and orders of the day 3 and 8, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.



*Petitions*

**Regional health services**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) presented a petition bearing 645 signatures:

**URGENT ACTION NEEDED FOR APPROPRIATE FUNDING OF OUR REGIONAL HOSPITALS & IMMEDIATE HEALTHCARE IMPROVEMENTS**

Our region – including Corowa, Rutherglen, Wahgunyah and surrounding towns – relies on Albury Wodonga Hospital and smaller facilities like Corowa Hospital for life-saving care. Without appropriate investment, we risk:

- An inadequate hospital for our growing 300,000+ population.
- Overcrowded emergency departments.
- Longer wait times, poorer health outcomes, and added pressure on local services.
- Difficulty attracting doctors and healthcare professionals.

**The Facts**

- The current \$558 million commitment to upgrade the Albury hospital is insufficient.
- Many medical professionals, Health Associations and Local Councils support the 2021 Clinical Services Plan (CSP) for a single-site Greenfield hospital.
- Smaller hospitals like Corowa need urgent funding to ease pressure on Albury & Wodonga Hospitals.
- Without action, our region faces a worsening healthcare crisis.

**We, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly to call on the VIC Government to commit to working with NSW and Federal Governments to:**

1. **Fully fund a single site Albury Wodonga hospital to meet the 2021 Clinical Services Plan**
2. **Provide federal support immediate healthcare improvements to the Corowa and Urana hospitals to ensure adequate healthcare for our region.**

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

**Toorak Road, Camberwell, road safety**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) presented a petition bearing 23 signatures:

**Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly a proposal for a safe and convenient for the crossing of the Anniversary Trail over Toorak Road in Hawthorn – a Strategic Cycling Corridor and longstanding concern to trail users.

In early 2015 Boroondara Council (Council) conducted a feasibility study and public engagement in relation to this matter, the outcome of which was confirmation that the preferred solution was the construction of a bridge. In 2018 Council submitted a concept design for the bridge to the Victorian Government requesting funding for the design and construction.

In late 2022, the Victorian Government conducted additional public engagement on solutions for the Anniversary Trail connection over Toorak Road but ignored community feedback that favoured the construction of a bridge.

In December 2024, Active Transport Victoria advised that while the option preferred by surveyed respondents was for the walking and cycling bridge, they are proceeding with a route that largely replicates problems with the current route.

**Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Victorian Government to proceed with the design and construction of the community-preferred solution. Namely, for a bridge over Toorak Road for the Anniversary Trail, meeting accessibility and path design standards, including safety improvements to the existing rail crossing to the north.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 9*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:34): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 9 of 2025, on the following acts, bills and subordinate legislation, together with their appendices:

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Amendment (Right to Housing) Bill 2025  
 Corrections Legislation Amendment Bill 2025  
 Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025  
 Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025  
 Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025  
 National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025  
 State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025  
 State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2025 – house amendments  
 SR No. 125 – Firearms Amendment Regulations 2024  
 SR No. 129 – Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) (Ticketing) Amendment Regulations 2024  
 SR No. 130 – Residential Tenancies and Residential Tenancies (Rooming House Standards) Amendment, (Minimum Energy Efficiency and Safety Standards) Regulations 2024.

**Ordered to be published.**

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

Auditor-General – Developing Fishermans Bend – released on 26 June 2025  
*Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* – Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025  
*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* – Order under s 17B granting a licence over Alexandra Gardens Reserve  
 Integrity Oversight Victoria:  
     Inspection Report September 2023 to April 2024 under s 37D of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*  
     Inspection Report May 2024 to October 2024 under s 37D of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*  
 Ombudsman – Annual Plan 2025–26 – released on 25 June 2025  
*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:  
     Alpine – C70  
     Bayside – GC244  
     Boroondara – C386, C388, GC265  
     Casey – C284, GC238  
     Corangamite – C65  
     Darebin – GC238  
     Frankston – GC238, GC265  
     Glen Eira – C251, GC226  
     Greater Dandenong – GC226, GC238

Greater Geelong – C387, C468  
Greater Shepparton – C117  
Hobsons Bay – C137, GC238  
Hume – GC238, GC265  
Kingston – C229, GC226, GC244  
Knox – C184  
Macedon Ranges – C154  
Maroondah – C148, GC265  
Melbourne – C403, C405, C478  
Melton – C231, C243  
Monash – C179, GC226, GC244  
Moonee Valley – GC238, GC265  
Moorabool – C112  
Mornington Peninsula – C304, C309, C310  
Stonnington – GC238, GC265  
Swan Hill – C79  
Victoria Planning Provisions – VC258, VC275, VC286  
Warrnambool – C219  
Whitehorse – GC244  
Whittlesea – C269, GC265  
Yarra – C332  
Yarra Ranges – C223

*Professional Standards Act 2003* – The CPA Australia Professional Standards Scheme (*Gazette S315, 19 June 2025*)

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008* – SR 69  
*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* – SR 62  
*Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021* – SR 68  
*Court Security Act 1980* – SR 61  
*Crime Statistics Act 2014* – SR 65  
*Emergency Management Act 2013* – SR 50  
*First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000* – SR 58  
*Gene Technology Act 2001* – SR 51  
*Major Crime (Investigative Powers) Act 2004* – SR 49  
*Marine and Coastal Act 2018* – SR 70  
*National Parks Act 1975* – SR 64  
*Port Management Act 1995* – SR 54  
*Private Security Act 2004* – SR 53  
*Rail Safety National Law Application Act 2013* – SR 66  
*Residential Tenancies Act 1997* – SR 63  
*Road Safety Act 1986* – SR 67  
*Safe Drinking Water Act 2003* – SR 60  
*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – SRs 56, 57  
*Tobacco Act 1987* – SR 52  
*Transport (Safety Schemes Compliance and Enforcement) Act 2014* – SR 55

*Water Act 1989 – SR 59*

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:*

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 48, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 68

Documents under s 16B in relation to the:

*Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 – Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025*

*Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Ministerial Direction on the Preparation and Content of Green Wedge Management Plans*

*Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 – Order Making Declaration under Section 12B(1)*

Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal – Members of Parliament (Victoria) Annual Adjustment Determination 2025

Yoorrook Justice Commission:

Third Interim Report (six volumes) – released on 1 July 2025

Final Report: Truth be told – released on 1 July 2025.

**PROCLAMATIONS** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

*Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 – Parts 1 and 2, s 42 and Parts 7 and 8 – 1 July 2025 (Gazette S322, 24 June 2025)*

*Consumer and Planning Legislation Amendment (Housing Statement Reform) Act 2025 – Parts 1 and 13 – 23 June 2025 (Gazette S308, 17 June 2025)*

*Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2025 – Whole Act – 25 June 2025 (Gazette S322, 24 June 2025)*

*Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Act 2024 – Remaining provisions – 1 July 2025 (Gazette S308, 17 June 2025)*

*Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Act 2025 – Parts 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 14 – 1 July 2025 (Gazette S322, 24 June 2025).*

### ***Bills***

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

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

*Council's agreement*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:37):** I have received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Appropriation 2025–2026 Bill 2025 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026) Bill 2025.

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

*Council's agreement*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:37):** I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025, including the amendments made by the Legislative Assembly on the suggestion of the Legislative Council, without further amendment.

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

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

#### **Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025**

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

*Royal assent*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (15:37):** I inform the house that on 24 June 2025 I presented to the Governor the Appropriation (2025–2026) Bill 2025 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2025–2026)

Bill 2025, to which the Governor gave royal assent. I also inform the house that on the 24 June 2025 the Governor gave royal assent to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 and the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2025.

**Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025**

**Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025**

**National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025**

*Appropriation*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (15:38): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Domestic Building Contracts Amendment Bill 2025, the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 and the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025.

*Committees*

**Privileges Committee**

*Membership*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (15:38): I have received the resignation of Kim Wells from the Privileges Committee, effective from today.

*Motions*

**Motions by leave**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Multicultural Affairs for refusing to condemn an antisemitic protest targeting the National Gallery of Victoria for accepting a donation from one of Victoria's most generous Jewish philanthropists and reminds the minister her portfolio demands calling out hate for all communities, and this includes the Jewish community.

**Leave refused.**

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

That this house recognises the Gandel family's extraordinary contribution to Victoria across health, education and the arts, condemns the antisemitism of those who target them for being prominent Jewish donors and notes that vilifying those who have spent a lifetime helping others is not a protest, it is hate.

**Leave refused.**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (15:39): I move, by leave:

That this house notes:

- (1) the World Health Organization has issued a code red alert over mass starvation in Gaza;
- (2) the estimated 61,800 Palestinian people killed since October 2023 does not include those killed by lack of access to food, water or medicine, nor does it include those thousands of people buried under the rubble, which would put the death toll in the hundreds of thousands;
- (3) that nothing has been done to stop this genocide is a moral failure and will define this era and this government; and
- (4) urges, pleads, begs, beseeches this government to immediately cut diplomatic, commercial and military ties with Israel.

**Leave refused.**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:40): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the new Commissioner of Police's remarks identifying Victoria as the protest capital of the nation, and further notes that Victoria remains the only state without a protest permit system and urges the government to consider protest permits and stronger move-on powers to help restore public safety.

**Leave refused.**

### *Business of the house*

#### **Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:41): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 31 July 2025:

Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025

Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025

National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (Vicgrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025.

It is great to be back after a break. I want to take this opportunity to wish you and the parliamentary staff all the best for the next session, as we now approach the sixth quarter – I am not sure of our term. As always, our Labor government has been hard at work, focusing, as we always do, on the things that matter most to Victorians. Let me be clear that here in Victoria, the people of the community that we so proudly represent know and fully understand that our Labor government has their back. We are always on the side of Victorians. They also know that under the Liberals they are on their own – I mean, history repeats time and time again. If you want to understand the values and the priorities of those on the other side of this place, we only need to look at what they have done in the rare occasion that they have had the opportunity to govern in this state in the past 30-odd years or so and we will see their values writ large, and they contrast with ours.

I know, because I have seen the list, that people on this side of the house cannot wait to get up and speak about the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. Since 2014, Local Jobs First has been applied to over 3000 projects, worth over \$197 billion in government investment. What this means in real terms for real people is job opportunities, but not just any old job – good jobs with good career prospects, good training prospects, well-paid jobs. The Local Jobs First Amendment Bill delivers on our 2022 election commitment to strengthen the Local Jobs First Act 2003 by enhancing the powers of the Local Jobs First commissioner, unlocking opportunities for Victorian jobs and businesses on Victorian government projects.

We talked about the winter break. I had the opportunity to do some really terrific things during that time. One of the highlights for me was joining the Premier and the member for Melton at the site of the new Melton hospital. On that day we talked about the number of jobs that are to be created in the building of that hospital and all the fantastic opportunities that that presents, to which of course the Local Jobs Amendment Bill will apply. Can I say this: it is not just jobs that will be created in construction, but as the member for Melton knows and my friend the member for Sunbury knows as well, this is such a great opportunity for the young people that we represent to grow a career in health care close to home. That was an incredible experience. Whether it is working on the construction site or indeed working in the hospital once it is built –

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I am going to take up some interjections over there. In my office we have been trying to find the last time that the Liberal Party planned, built and opened a hospital, and I will tell you what: we are still looking.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** If the very chirpy member on the other side now would like to inform me, I would be happy to know. I am going to throw that out to you as a challenge. You can come back to me and tell me the last time the Liberal Party planned, built and opened a hospital. I am looking forward to it.

We will also be debating the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill. Once again, I congratulate the Attorney-General on the work that she is doing, along with the Minister for Police and the Minister for Corrections in the other place, in terms of the diligence that they have applied, making sure that we have got the right settings in place to drive down crime in this state and to make sure that young people understand and experience the consequences of their actions. Performance crime is a crime that is enabled by social media. Therefore it is appropriate that we legislate to ensure that we can stamp it out.

The last item on our agenda for the week is the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. Once again our Minister for Energy and Resources, the most consequential minister for energy in Australia, is bringing a bill to the house to complete our transformation of power in this state.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (15:46): You would think, after a five-week break, this Allan Labor government – this tired, 10-year-old Allan Labor government – would have spent their five weeks wisely to set aside the chaos and to have some sense of order when it comes to their government business program. But what do we have? We still have chaos and failure when it comes to the priorities that Victorians need addressed and the action that Victorians deserve right now.

There are bills sitting on the notice paper that were introduced back in April and May of this year, months and months and months ago. The Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025, as an example, was introduced in April and is still failing to come up on the government business program for debate. I would hazard a guess that the reason the government is shy about debating the Wage Theft Amendment Bill is because it is an admission of failure, because they know that the wage theft bill they introduced is unconstitutional. That is perhaps a reason that they have put it on the back burner. It has been sitting on the notice paper for months while this government has introduced other bills for their government business program.

A government that is tired should be shown the door in November 2026, next year. This government should be dealing with the most urgent and critical issues that are facing Victoria right now. In the most recent times, after the devastating and disgraceful alleged commission of offences against children in Victorian child care as a result of system failures under this Allan Labor government, why is this Labor government not introducing legislation to strengthen this broken system today? You would have thought, after one of the most horrific set of crimes that is alleged to have occurred to our most vulnerable children in childcare centres, that the first order of business for this Allan Labor government would have been to introduce legislation this week. But no, the legislation they are introducing is about other things, about election promises from years ago, not legislation that will strengthen the system and protect our children from having to suffer these heinous crimes ever again.

How could any other business be of more import or greater priority for Labor than the bill sought to be introduced by the leader of the Victorian Liberals just before, the Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025 that the Victorian Liberals and Nationals, in good faith, introduced into this chamber only moments ago? That is what this Parliament should be debating and promoting and pursuing today. But shamefully this Labor government blocked it. They blocked this important proposal to implement the Victorian Ombudsman's recommendation from 2022, three years ago, to strengthen the working with children check system. That is something that we should be debating today.

I cannot think of anything more critical or more important than debating that today, and yet this Labor government blocked that in order to do a lesser important program, and that is utterly shameful. What

this government wants to debate this week is the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025 and the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, and also the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025. On that last one – the VicGrid bill – we sought to go into consideration in detail with the government. This Labor government did not even deny a request to go into consideration in detail on this bill; they did not even respond. That is how disrespectful this Labor government has become. As a result, we will be opposing this government business program, because it is not debating the most urgent and most critical legislation required – legislation to protect our children in child care, in state care. That is something that we should be debating this week, not this program, particularly when this government yet again fails to allow us to scrutinise bills through consideration in detail.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:51): It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Evelyn. I am not exactly sure what that contribution was all about. I do know it did not really go very far towards the government business program. I am not sure how much the member for Evelyn touched on the government business program. You can stand up and make points of order on relevance, but honestly, they are that incoherent you may as well just let them go. One bit that I did pick up, though, in that contribution was I heard the word ‘chaos’, and I can only assume that the member for Evelyn was talking about the party room in which she sits.

**A member** interjected.

**Dylan WIGHT**: A big five weeks – given in the last five weeks the second leader of the Victorian Liberal Party in less than three years was sued by somebody in their own party and then you want to come in here and lecture us on chaos. Like I said, you could stand up and make points of order, but what is the point? Just let them go.

It always is a pleasure to stand up and make a contribution in favour of the government business program, because it is quite a program. The Leader of the House outlined it in detail, and it is no wonder that the Liberal Party – or the opposition, sorry – oppose it. When we go through the bills that are included on it, it is no wonder that they oppose it. The first bill that we will get to this afternoon is the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. The Victorian Liberal Party has never met a Victorian worker that they have not wanted to sack. I am not surprised that they will not support this bill. I am not surprised that they do not support the government business program. This is a party that, when they have had the chance to govern, have sacked thousands of Victorian workers and frontline workers as well – teachers, nurses, doctors, paramedics and firefighters. They have closed hospitals. They have closed schools. They have never met a Victorian worker that they have not wanted to sack.

I can understand why you are so offended by today’s government business program, considering that we have the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 on it. This is a bill that strengthens Victoria’s commitment to the amazing workforce that deliver the projects that we need for this state. Even the opposition cannot argue with this: we are a government that builds things, and when we came to power in 2014 we knew that that would be a defining feature of this government. But it is not enough to just build things. You have to have that value add as well, and that is what our Local Jobs First Amendment Bill is all about, and the previous iterations of it – to make sure that we have got Victorian apprentices on these jobs, to make sure that we have got Victorian workers on these jobs and to make sure that we are protecting local content.

So when you build something like, for instance, the West Tarneit station, which will be coming to Tarneit in 2026, an incredibly popular election commitment from us in 2022 – when we build those projects we know that there is local content; we know that there are local apprentices, we know that there are local workers on those projects. It is absolutely amazing.

We have obviously got the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025 as well. We know the Victorian Liberal Party, or the opposition, speak a big game on crime. They speak a big game on bail, but they come in here every single time, when they have got an opportunity to be bipartisan about



something – just to be bipartisan about something – and they move silly little reasoned amendments. They shift the goalposts every single time. They have got no interest in policy in this area; they are only interested in politics. So I understand why the opposition would be so offended at a government business program that has this bill on it.

In closing, the third bill is the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (Vicgrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, you know, legislation that is obviously going to help us move renewable energy around Victoria more efficiently. We obviously understand why that is so offensive to the opposition, because half of their party room do not believe in renewable energy; they take every chance they get to do a drive by on the industry, and they do not think that global warming is real. But it is a fantastic government business program here this week, and I commend it to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (15:56): I rise today to talk on the government business program. It is great to be back, and as a person that has employed people in this great state of Victoria – whether they be fully qualified tradespeople or whether they be apprentices that I have actually had the privilege of watching grow from a 16-year-old person coming through, learning the trade of being a plumber, moving on to own their own business – it is truly great to be back in the chamber to represent those people to the best of my ability. I like the point that we are opposing the government business program, because I do get a little bit shaky when we decide to not oppose it; it just does not seem right. With my 2½ years in the chamber, it just does not seem right. I think that we need to be able to stand up for what we think is relevant and what we do value. So, you know, we do have three bills on this one. I will be speaking on all three bills again this week, because I feel it is part of my role as the local MP down in the Latrobe Valley to represent my community and talk on everything that the government does put up, whether it be some good and some bad, and represent my community to the best of my ability.

So the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, which we will eventually get to today, as other members have said, talks about jobs in the community and supporting our local community, and I am looking forward to being able to talk on this, because at the moment right now in the Latrobe Valley we are going through a change where key jobs for people in the valley to go to work at and to earn money at the moment are being scaled down. So we are going through a change and going to other energy formats, and what I need to be able to do at every opportunity I get is stand up in the chamber and ask relevant ministers where those jobs are going to be coming from and when they are going to start, because unfortunately at the moment there is not a lot of guidance and forethought as to winding up one type of power industry and moving to another one where those workers are actually going to be able to get certain jobs and a certain paying job also that they can continue their lifestyles on.

We also have the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025. Crime is very relevant down in the Latrobe Valley. We have just wound up a major court case in Morwell with the mushroom case down there – that has just wound up. We are not shielded from people that are breaking into houses and stealing cars, and unfortunately people are losing their lives because of a crime rate that sometimes is out of control and that we need to rein in, so I will be really pleased to be able to talk on that. Then we have the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025, where we can talk on energy. The Latrobe Valley provides energy to the state – it has for 100 years, and it will continue to do that – so I will get to talk on that too.

The Leader of the House said that Labor have the backs of the people of Victoria, but unfortunately at the moment they have their backs up against a brick wall, because every day the government are trying to stick their hand in their pockets and take money out to make sure that they can pay for blowouts in costs with tunnels in metropolitan Melbourne, while still forgetting to look after people in regional Victoria. That is where it is great to be able to stand up and talk on the government business program to remind the government that we do need to look after all Victorians always. Even though we are in opposition to the government business program, I am looking forward to talking on the three bills at hand.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (16:01): I am delighted to rise to speak on this incredibly important government program, but I would just like to make a few comments about the previous speaker, who suggested that this government in some way does not care about regional Victoria. I can assure the member for Morwell that having a regional caucus of 18 members, which is almost the size of the Liberal party room, we certainly represent people in the regions. In fact we represent most of the people in the regions. Our Premier is from the regions, our Treasurer is from the regions and our wonderful Minister for Health is from the regions, so any suggestion that we do not in any way represent the regions is fairly strange. But even more than that, the comments from the member for Morwell that he does not want to support the government program – or is agreeing that they should not support the program, solely based on the fact that it does not seem right to – seem to me to reflect everything that those on the opposite side stand for, which is absolutely nothing. The reason that they are opposing this program, according to the member for Morwell, is just because they ought to oppose everything this government does. I think it is a sad reflection of those on the other side that they cannot work together to make the best policy for Victoria.

In opposing this bill, the member for Evelyn said that it was not important – that there were more important things to talk about. We have got some pretty extraordinary infrastructure going up in Ballarat, including our wonderful hospital, but also, really importantly, we have Alstom, the train manufacturers. I am really delighted that they are building the X'tropolis 2.0. The reason that I bring this up is because those people are working on jobs that the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 applies to. Those people are incredibly important to me – the working people in Ballarat who will gain from this legislation, ensuring that that incredibly important legislation is acted upon locally.

The member for Morwell also talked about his love of apprentices and guiding apprentices through, and one of the really fundamental parts of this bill is ensuring that apprentices are on the worksites of jobs first construction. It seems odd to me that the member for Morwell can say that he cannot wait to get up and speak on all three bills. He said he is really looking forward to speaking on all three bills. If he is really looking forward to them, then surely he should be supporting the government business program, because he wants to get up and talk about these things. But sadly, no, he is in full agreement with those on the other side, who just want to use this house as some tawdry game of politics rather than actually creating policy that is good for Victorian people. I want those on the other side to remember that they are opposing a bill that is about supporting local content and local jobs.

Even more tragically, they are opposing a program that includes legislation to crack down on performative crime. We all know the terrible, terrible damage that gets done through social media as those crimes are sent out to all and sundry and young people are influenced. But no, those on the other side do not think that is important enough to debate. The member for Evelyn says that it is not an important government business program, and I want the people of Victoria to know that those on the other side do not think that protecting Victorians from performative crime is important. They do not think that providing local jobs and using local content is important. Instead what they think is important is some performative action that they bring to the house to play pure politics. I wish those on the other side would get on board and back some good legislation for Victoria.

**Chris CREWTER** (Mornington) (16:07): I rise to speak on the government business program. Firstly, the bills on the agenda for this week are the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid Stage 2 Reform) Bill 2025 and the Crimes Amendment (Performance Crime) Bill 2025. This week's program shows a revealing mix of reactive legislation, heavy-handed enforcement and political catch-up. It includes a draconian VicGrid energy bill that strips landholder rights and centralises control, it includes a weak attempt to tackle youth performance crime which fails to match interstate standards and it includes a local jobs bill which threatens to burden small businesses with compliance penalties in the name of local content without offering meaningful support. Overall this program reflects a Labor government scrambling to assert control after years of neglect, mismanagement and public backlash, more concerned with appearances than effective governance.

Meanwhile, we may be debating the take-note budget motion this week, and maybe we will not. We have little clarity on this. Is the government embarrassed by its own budget – a budget that shows zero intention of putting the state's finances on a sustainable trajectory, a budget that shows Victoria having one of the worst debt burdens of comparable jurisdictions around the world, a budget that is bad for individuals, families and all Victorians not just now but for future generations? At the same time this government has just blocked the important Worker Screening Amendment (Safety of Children) Bill 2025 brought by the member for Malvern in conjunction with the member for Kew, who I acknowledge for her amazing work in the last two weeks on these issues. This would have brought greatly enhanced safety for children in child care and more broadly. This was brought in good faith, and it was backed by the Liberals and the Nationals. Even the Greens backed it. But Labor shamefully blocked it. I can see nothing more important this week than debating this, and this should be on the government business program. Particularly, having had two children in child care myself for nine years in a row, I know how important child care is and how important childcare safety is, so really we should be debating this today and passing this bill this week.

Going to the government business program in particular, we have the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, which raises serious concerns about its disproportionate impact on small and regional businesses.

Labor's so-called deprioritisation scheme threatens to blacklist businesses that cannot meet local industry development plan targets, even when workforce shortages or market conditions make compliance impossible. We have civil penalties of up to \$100,000, site inspection powers and vague compliance obligations, all without a proper framework for mitigating circumstances – basically, all stick and no carrot. What is even more concerning is under questioning Labor have refused to disclose how much this will cost to enforce – no modelling, no answers, no transparency. This is not how we support local jobs and businesses. It is in fact how we kill them with bureaucracy and bury them with red tape – red tape and costs that are already greatly impacting businesses, say, on the Mornington Peninsula, who have to pay higher payroll tax than Geelong and elsewhere due to its metro classification by the state government. I also know how hard it is running a small business, having run my own small business in the past, particularly during the COVID years, when it was extremely difficult.

We also have the national electricity bill. We have yet another draconian bill disguised as reform. As mentioned by the member for Evelyn, we sought consideration in detail, but we got no response altogether. The government claims it is streamlining energy infrastructure planning, but what it is really doing is bulldozing rural communities, stripping landholder rights and handing VicGrid sweeping powers to enter private land and use force to do so. It is an unmitigated power grab.

Lastly, we have the crimes amendment bill. This bill is too narrow, too weak and too late, only covering a handful of offences, and if the person doing the offence does not actually share it, well, their mate can share it themselves, and there will be no consequence. Whereas other states like Queensland have introduced strong, targeted laws, Victoria's approach is weak, so we will be opposing the government business program.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (49):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

**Motion agreed to.**

***Members statements***

**Parliamentary staff**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (16:17): Today I want to acknowledge the wonderful parliamentary staff who support us. Everyone who works here is equally important, providing a critical service to keep this place running like clockwork. Firstly, there is the building and grounds team who take such pride in keeping these historic landmarks functional, accessible and maintained, and not to mention the property teams who service our local offices across the state. Then there are the clerks, ushers, Hansard staff, librarians and research staff who help us to ensure our information is accurate and that process and protocol are upheld – thank you. And the catering team and hospitality staff – the service is always exceptional, and everyone always remembers that I need a straw. Finance, payroll, security and IT – we are so fortunate to have access to the very best people guiding us. Wellbeing and inclusion, payroll, HR, learning and capability, and WHS – your support and care in keeping us healthy, active and engaged is so warmly welcomed. For the modifications that have been put into place to accommodate my rapidly changing personal needs, I am forever grateful. It would be very difficult for me to continue in my role without them. I want to thank so many of you individually for the support you provide, but there are far too many to mention. I am sure I have left some teams out, but I have not forgotten them. My heartfelt thankyou to you all!

**Community safety**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (16:19): Seven months ago, after the horrific firebombing of Adas synagogue, we were promised, here, stronger protest laws, stronger hate laws, and what have we seen from this government? Absolutely nothing. No drafts, no information, absolutely nothing. Now, after another firebombing just up the road at East Melbourne synagogue, after more attacks, after a school is targeted by just visiting a museum, what do we see now? Another review. We are sick of reviews. We want action. On the day when we see a new police commissioner come into power, instead of saying we need more powers for protests, this commissioner says, 'Well, Victoria is the protest capital of the nation'. Every other state has protest laws, but do not worry about Victoria; we will just keep doing what we are doing.

Well, wake up, Victoria. Wake up, this government. You are failing Victorians, you are failing our community and it is time you actually did something. It is time we had these laws. It is time we had move-on laws. These thugs turn up at the National Gallery of Victoria targeting people at the gallery. Jewish philanthropists, who have given more to this state than probably everyone in this Parliament combined, are being targeted simply because they are Jewish. That is disgusting. And where was the Minister for Multicultural Affairs? Well, she said, 'These people are allowed to protest.' That is absolute rubbish, and she should be apologising to the Gandels for her failure.

**Tarneit electorate work experience student**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (16:20): My office recently had the pleasure of having work experience student Lorelei from The Grange P-12 in my office. She wrote this members statement for me, and I will read it from her perspective:

As somebody passionate about civic participation and community development, I was excited to be involved in local events and workplace activity.

One of my highlights of the week was visiting Brinbeal Secondary School with Dylan and his team, attending their end of term assembly where he spoke with the students and teachers to share the news of funding to expand their rapidly growing school.

I was also proud to see that my own school, The Grange P-12 College, is also receiving funding to improve their facilities and learning environment.

Being part of that announcement made me realise how much of a difference responsive government investment can make and it is encouraging to see that the government is investing in the future of young people across the west.

Another significant moment was witnessing the announcement of legislation that will provide free public transport to all Victorians under 18. While I wasn't the original creator of this policy, I had the privilege of supporting it through this year's Youth Parliament Program.

The initiative responds to data showing that over 50% of young people cite transport costs as a major barrier to accessing education, employment, and extracurricular opportunities.

This experience has strengthened my passion for public service and has shown me how youth voices can genuinely shape Victoria's future.

Lorelei, it was an absolute pleasure to have you.

### **Heyfield Timber Workers Hall of Fame**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:22): I rise today to pay tribute to the men and women of the Gippsland timber industry, specifically those who were recently inducted to the Heyfield Timber Workers Hall of Fame. There were 12 inductees on the day, but I specifically want to congratulate those from the Gippsland South electorate. The Leeson family of Rosedale were inducted as the first multigenerational hall of fame members – currently three generations in and counting. The Leesons have had a strong history in the timber industry broadly and are currently key players in the plantation softwood industry and major employers across our region. Frank Balcombe from Toongabbie and the late Ernie Hug Snr were other inductees, and it was great to see Mr Hug's family members there, including daughter-in-law Kaylene Wheeler and her children Bernadene Voss and Ernie Hug Jnr. The timber industry remains strong, despite the Labor government's disastrous policy to shut down the native sector, and it will endure thanks to the people like those behind the hall of fame.

### **Charlie McCallum Scholarship**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (16:23): Four Gippsland students have recently returned from the experience of their young lives, trekking the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea as recipients of the Charlie McCallum Scholarship. Sam Clarke and Koupah Guenther from Yarram Secondary College, Kate Edgar from Gippsland Grammar and Hamish Meddings from Maffra Secondary College have all undertaken the gruelling trek in memory of the heroes of this pivotal World War II battle. The scholarship was established by local veteran Craig Guthrie and the Sale RSL in memory of Charlie McCallum, a Central Gippsland local killed in action during the campaign. Charlie was recommended for a Victoria Cross for his bravery in the Battle of Isurava. Well done to these young people and those who have supported them to ensure our war heroes are not forgotten.

### **Islamic Community Milli Gorus Meadow Heights Mosque**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:23): Parliament might have been in recess, but it has been such a busy and productive time around the Greenvale electorate. It has been a pleasure meeting, speaking with and listening to so many constituents at stations, mobile offices, doorstops and doorsteps, citizenship ceremonies and so many wonderful community events. What a joy it was to be at the Islamic Community Milli Gorus Meadow Heights Mosque for their recent winter market. From beautiful arts and crafts to homemade candles, fragrances and amazing Adana kebabs, it was such a wonderful community gathering, which showcased the very best and the extraordinary and generous voluntary service that so many at that wonderful ICMG Meadow Heights Mosque provide for the betterment of our community.

**St Charbel Parish, Greenvale**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:24): I also had the privilege of celebrating the Feast of St Charbel with the Maronite community at St Charbel Parish in Greenvale with my friend the member for Broadmeadows. I want to thank the Maronite Youth of St Charbel for their community service and Reverend Father Abouna Charles Hitti, Father Rami Choullami and Father Nour for a beautiful mass. Many congratulations to Father Nour on the 18th anniversary of his priestly ordination.

**Our Lady Guardian of Plants Chaldean Catholic Parish**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:24): The 20th anniversary of Our Lady Guardian of Plants Chaldean Catholic Parish earlier this month was an inspiring and deeply significant occasion. I was grateful and humbled to join hundreds of parishioners in sharing mass, alongside again my good friend the member for Broadmeadows. This is a resilient and growing community, a faithful community. It has grown significantly since 2005, in large part because of persecution and oppression in other parts of the world, which has led many Chaldean families to find and make new homes in Australia. But the pastoral ministry of the team at Our Lady Guardian of Plants means there is a home for Chaldean identity, history, language and faith in our community.

**Country Fire Authority Chirnside Park brigade**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (16:25): I wish to pay tribute to the Chirnside Park CFA fire brigade, which just celebrated its 10-year anniversary, serving our community with distinction. In its short 10 years the Chirnside Park CFA has punched above its weight, demonstrating an exceptional level of service protecting our community in times of emergency, including recently fighting the Montrose bushfire and the Grampians bushfires. We thank them, and we thank their families for supporting their important work.

Only a few weeks ago the Chirnside Park fire brigade was presented with the prestigious Country Fire Authority chief officer's commendation for their outstanding contribution during the June 2021 storms that ravaged our Yarra Ranges community with cyclonic conditions alongside all district 13 brigades and in support of the Lilydale and Emerald SES units. The brigade also received the prestigious chief officer's unit citation for exemplary service commendation in 2022 for their courageous efforts to save two children from a traumatic house fire alongside Mooroolbark CFA and the FRV. We owe a massive debt of gratitude to these volunteer firefighters, and I pay tribute to outgoing captain Ben Cash for his tireless advocacy, which has seen the expansion of the station to include modern facilities and toilets for women firefighters as well as a new tanker truck. I wish incoming captain Paul Simpson all the best as he continues to take the brigade from strength to strength. Congratulations also to Jeff Forrest and Peter Morris, bestowed with CFA life membership – a fabulous achievement.

**Springvale Reserve**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (16:26): I attended Springvale Reserve to officially open the netball court, oval, pavilion and play-space upgrades made possible by the Victorian Labor government, which I am sure the Springvale Districts Football Netball Club and Silverton Cricket Club are delighted with. Importantly, the netballers now have two new competition-ready courts to play on both day and night, with 200-lux LED lighting as well as four player and two scorer shelters, netball goalposts and fencing. And it is not just the netballers that will benefit; there is 150-lux LED lighting around the oval along with two new coaches boxes. The pavilion has also had an upgraded kitchen and canteen and a new play space – a real win for the local clubs and the community.

**Bright Moon Buddhist Society**

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (16:27): I also had the honour of attending the Bright Moon Buddhist Society temple with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and my neighbouring members of Parliament, including the member for Clarinda. As many would be aware, in 2023 the Bright Moon Buddhist temple was destroyed by a significant fire that broke the hearts of many in the community,

a community that originally built this temple on the backs of donations. As mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong at the time of this devastating fire, I saw a community in shock and grief-stricken. It was therefore pleasing that the Victorian Labor government's Chinese Community Infrastructure Fund grant will help build traditional-style walls and gates as part of the temple restoration project.

### **Stephen Charles**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (16:28): On 13 June Australia lost one of its strongest, clearest and most principled voices in integrity with the death of the Honourable Stephen Charles AO KC. Stephen was a retired barrister and judge, but for a retiree he worked very hard. As a founding board member for the Centre for Public Integrity and a co-author with Catherine Williams of the influential book *Keeping Them Honest*, he fought tirelessly to improve transparency and integrity in Australian politics, an uphill battle if ever there was one. He was a key voice in establishing Victoria's Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission as well as the federal National Anti-Corruption Commission, and he spent his last few months speaking out against the failures of the weaker version of the NACC that eventuated. It is uncommon for former judges to speak out on public affairs, and so it is to the Australian people's benefit, and to Stephen Charles's great credit, that he felt called upon to break that mould. All of us in this room owe Stephen a great debt of gratitude for his life of service, and we all have a duty to continue his work in improving transparency and integrity in government.

### **Australian Turkish community**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (16:29): It was a great honour to host lunch at the Victorian Parliament during Anzac Day week for my good friends from the Australian Turkish community and a visiting dignitary from Türkiye, the esteemed Justice Mr Inch of the Turkish Constitutional Court. He has previously held positions as district governor of the Edirne governate and Kırklareli-Sutalute, as well as many positions in ministries of education and personnel. He was accompanied by his wife Mrs Bayman Inch. The visiting party was made up of Mr Ramazan Altintas, president of the RSL Turkish sub-branch, and his wife and great community contributor Mrs Hulya Altintas; Mr Sucettin Unal and his equally active wife Mrs Perihan Unal; and Consul General Mr Doğan Ferhat Işık. It was a very productive meeting as we exchanged views on politics and world affairs and I gained a better understanding of the Turkish legal system. I hope Mr and Mrs Inch were equally impressed with the Victorian Parliament and are now more familiar with the legal and political system in Victoria.

### **Kati Mata Mandir**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (16:30): It was a great pleasure to attend the Kati Mata Mandir Hindu temple and meet with the temple religious leader and executive members. It was also very exciting to hear of their plans to establish a meditation and spiritual education centre in the Thomastown electorate. Thank you to Nath Bhawana Puri, Pramila Tandon, Abhishek Mudgil, Achal Batra and Vijay Goel for giving your time to provide me with a greater understanding of the temple and the Hindu gods that you worship.

### **Sandringham electorate schools**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:31): Today I wish to acknowledge a number of school principals in the Sandringham district. Being a teacher is a wonderful, wonderful vocation – it is an opportunity to plant the seed of inquiry into the hearts and minds of young people – but the vocation of principal is something just a little bit more special. I want to sincerely thank Debby Chaves, the foundation principal at Beaumaris Secondary College for her work. She has been there since before day one, playing a pivotal role in the establishment of the school's strong culture and reputation. I want to acknowledge the interim principal Peter Bartlett for his contribution as interim principal. Peter led the school through a particularly challenging time, including the recent tragic methanol poisoning in Laos. I want to wish Stephen Bourbon, the newly appointed principal at Beaumaris Secondary College, all the very best.

At Sandringham College I want to acknowledge David Hall. He is a former St Bede's boy, but that is not the only reason I want to acknowledge him. He has been a strong advocate for the school and one of our exemplary educational leaders in the Sandringham district. I hope that the Department of Education trusts him with the leadership of another school in the not-too-distant future. We will welcome back Amy Porter shortly.

#### **Tim Noonan**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:32): As I was entering the chamber I was made aware of the recent passing of Tim Noonan, a former principal at St Patrick's primary school in Mentone. I am sure I join with the member for Mordialloc in mourning Mr Noonan's passing. To his wife Anne and to their children Ben and Melanie, we pass on our sincere and heartfelt condolences. Tim was a great man, a great educational leader and set up St Patrick's primary school in Mentone for the next generation.

#### **Darebin Creek**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (16:32): I would like to congratulate everyone involved in planting nearly 2000 native plants along Darebin Creek on Sunday as part of a long-term restoration project taking place near the Plenty Road bridge. In particular I would like to recognise the Darebin Creek Management Committee, including Danny Reddan, Annette Salkeld, Peter Grenfell and Talia Sawers; the Darebin Council Bush Crew, including Michelle and Tim; Uncle Dave Wandin of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation; Margaret de Kam and the Friends of Darebin Creek; Nick and the 10th Ivanhoe Scout Group volunteers; the team at OzFish; and finally Microsoft and the federal Labor government for their financial support.

#### **Reservoir Italian community**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (16:33): I would also like to recognise the north-west Reservoir Italian seniors club for their work in our community, led by president Elisa Iacovitti and treasurer Lina Aguiaro. I also express our condolences on the recent passing of St Joseph the Worker parish priest Father Emmanuel Bonello.

#### **Aashini Rastogi**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (16:33): I would also like to congratulate Aashini Rastogi, who did work experience with our office and who recently won the Parliament Prize for an excellent piece on the impact of AI on schooling.

#### **Ruthven train station**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (16:33): I would like to thank Christine Banks, Douglas Leitch and the Ruthven Station Gardening Volunteers for their work in revitalising three garden areas at the station, with more to come. I would also like to thank the Minister for Public and Active Transport for coming down recently to check out their work and to discuss the western car park and other local public transport issues.

#### **Darebin City Council by-election**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (16:34): Finally, ballots are due this Friday for our local Darebin council by-election, and I wish the best of luck to Labor candidate Daniel Scoullar.

#### **Lowan electorate bushfires**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (16:34): I again urge the Premier and the Allan Labor government to make a referral to the inspectorate-general of emergency management to undertake an inquiry into the bushfires over last summer in my electorate, specifically around the Grampians bushfires and the Little Desert bushfire. There are critical issues that have gone unaddressed and unanalysed as a result of those fires, whether it is around the coordination of the emergency response, the planned burns which



happened during the fires and which took out large expanses of old-growth areas of the forest and the devastating impact on our wildlife as well as our bird life. Whether it is about how we manage our parks and forests so that we can avoid these large-scale fires into the future, there are so many people with different viewpoints who want to have their say, and it is clear we can manage our parks in a much better way.

So I again urge the Premier to make that referral to IGEM so that all locals can have their say and we can manage our fires better into the future.

I also urge the Allan Labor government to expand and extend the business bushfire recovery grant. Unfortunately, there are many businesses which are ineligible for that grant or simply have not had the time to apply. The goalposts are too narrow, the period that has been selected to show a loss of revenue is over a much different period than the one the bushfires impacted and it is really putting too much pressure on our businesses. Please, Premier Allan, support our businesses and extend that funding grant.

### **Tim Noonan**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:35): I was going to do a members statement on some infrastructure works in Mordy, but the contribution from the member for Sandringham has me wanting to acknowledge the sad passing of a principal that we have known for some time, the former principal of St Patrick's primary school, Tim Noonan. He had an amazing career across Catholic education as a wonderful leader of the St Patrick's community in Mentone and Parkdale and most recently at the Catholic education office. He was a wonderful person, and it just shows the love and affection that both the member for Sandringham and I have, having toured that school on a number of occasions. It was wonderful to see the building journey that he achieved and really drove and muscled when the Catholic education office, the education minister and the department at the time were deciding their priority budget list. He was part of that journey. He was so dedicated and passionate about education in our state across a range of different areas, and it was great to see him go into the Catholic education office and see what he was achieving. Sadly, his passing is such a massive blow for our community. I want to offer my heartfelt condolences to his wife Anne and to their beautiful family. He was a massive supporter of VAFA, the amateur football league – I saw him down at Parkdale Vultures – and, for his sins, a West Coast Eagles fan. We always joked about having the Tim Noonan Centre established. Vale to a wonderful man, Tim Noonan.

### **Planning policy**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (16:37): The Allan Labor government needs to come clean on the financial implications of its chaotic housing policy and planning takeover. I refer specifically to the activity centres that are slowly being gazetted, including areas like Camberwell in my electorate. It is important for Victorians to know that with the declaration of these activity centres we are seeing the introduction of planning controls in the form of built-form overlays and housing choice and transport zone planning controls. With those changes come windfall gains tax implications. The government said in its budget papers from May that the windfall gains tax take last year was \$90 million. It will go up to \$1.35 million, then to \$1.4 million, to \$1.47 million and to \$1.55 million by 2028–29, but that vastly understates the impact of this windfall gains tax across huge swathes of Melbourne that will be affected by these changes. It is the same with the Suburban Rail Loop precincts, which the government is lowballing in relation to the windfall gains tax implications that will affect households, businesses and local councils. We see today more chaos in the government's financial oversight of this project with the idea of hypothecated taxes, which are being discussed. The government has yet to come clean on how it is going to provide the debt for that – the tax changes and the Commonwealth contribution, which is still forthcoming. Remember that Moody's has said the cost of the SRL has nearly tripled.

### **Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Queenscliff flotilla**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (16:38): It was a great honour to officially hand over the keys of a new marine search-and-rescue boat, *Rescue 203*, to Queenscliff coastguard just a few weeks ago. This incredible state-of-the-art vessel was co-designed by the coastguard volunteers and features cutting-edge technology and enhanced safety measures. It represents a significant investment in our region's marine safety and supports the vital work of our coastguard volunteers. In my excitement, I actually went to the top of the rip and watched the new vessel come in for the first time, and it handled the calm waters on that day with ease. But beyond that, on other days, those waters and that rip can be absolutely, notoriously treacherous for boaters and for the coastguard who go out in them.

The coastguard has over 50 volunteers and all give up their time to support the boating public 24/7. Last year the coastguard responded to 93 on-water incidents, and some of them were very much life-and-death situations.

This vessel, built by Inverloch-based shipbuilder Alumarine and designed by Victorian firm Chris Tucker Marine Design, has done an incredible job. They will mark 50 years next year, the Queenscliff coastguard, of their service to our community. Thank you to all those past and present who have given their time and service to our community. For every hour you give, for every rescue you carry out and for every life that you have helped protect you are a quiet but very powerful force behind the safety of our coastline, and we are deeply grateful. May your new vessel serve you well and bring everyone home safely.

### **Inner Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network**

**Rachel WESTAWAY** (Pahran) (16:40): I rise today to recognise the outstanding work of the Inner Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network and their vital school to work program operating in my electorate of Pahran. Under the leadership of CEO Andrew Neophytou and head of partnerships and programs Tracey Fenton, IELLEN has forged partnerships with secondary schools in Pahran, creating genuine pathways from education to employment. I want to particularly acknowledge nine exemplary employers in the Pahran district, who are making a real difference in young people's lives through their commitment to structured, work-based learning and work experience placements. These employers are AVFX audiovisual effects, Colin Moxey Hairdressing, Hello Music Studios, Kimmba Bilingual Early Learning Centre, Melbourne Gymnastics Centre, Nicholas Day Architects, Podiatry Healthcare Group, Rare Earth Hair and South Yarra BMW. Remarkably, three of these businesses – AVFX, Hello Music Studios and South Yarra BMW – have together hosted over 300 student placements over the past seven years. This represents hundreds of young people gaining invaluable real-life experience, developing the skills and confidence needed for their future careers. These partnerships demonstrate what can be achieved when business, schools and community organisations work together.

### **Knox Sport and Leisure Awards**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (16:41): I would like to recognise some individuals and local clubs in the Bayswater electorate who were recently recognised at the Knox Sport and Leisure Awards. The Club of the Year award was awarded to the Knox Obedience Dog Club. The Best Club-initiated Program award was awarded to the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club for their Christmas toy and food drive program. The Club Person of the Year – Adult was awarded to Kristi Disney from the Templeton Cricket Club. I also want to acknowledge the six recipients of the Club Person of the Year – Junior awards. Years of service recipients for 20 years were Andrea Le Marquand from Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club, Simon West from the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club, Jan Grice from the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club; 30 years, Ellen Johnson from the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club, David Murrihy – Murra – from the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club; 50 years, Mick Kimmitt from – you guessed it – the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club and Kay Kimmitt from the Boronia Hawks Football Netball Club; and a massive 40 years to Rick Turcinovic

at the Basin Cricket Club. Congratulations to each of those individuals and clubs, who make our community that much better and make Knox what it is: the proud community we all love and know.

#### **Boronia train station**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (16:43): And of course it is great to see geotech work completed at Boronia station, which will pave the way for major works to start later this year, with the project complete around September next year, 2026. A landscaped plaza, a major upgrade to the station, new CCTV and lighting – it is going to be on for young and old.

#### **Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School, Manifold Heights**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (16:43): As the member for Geelong I have the privilege of meeting many children and young people passionate about their community and who advocate for positive change. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Holy Spirit Catholic Primary School in Manifold Heights recently, where the Waste Warriors – year 6 students Millie, Pippa, Poppy, Mila and Amber – shared an insightful presentation with me. The Waste Warriors and their teacher Maria have been collaborating with Deakin University on a project known as GALS – Girls as Leaders in STEM. This initiative allows the girls to tackle real-world industry challenges and develop potential solutions using the STEM design process.

For this project the Waste Warriors focused on addressing the issue of microfibres in our oceans. They proposed creating a website through Google sites to educate their school community about microfibres and encourage them to purchase filters for their washing machines to minimise the number of microfibres entering our waterways. The Waste Warriors aspire to advocate for legislation that would require all washing machine manufacturers to include filters in their products. Their proposal also suggested the government might provide subsidies to households to help them acquire these washing machine filters. I thank them for their commitment and research into protecting the environment and our local oceans and waterways.

#### **Elderslie Recreation Reserve**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (16:44): On another matter, I was proud to announce funding through the Regional Community Sports Infrastructure Fund for Elderslie Recreation Reserve. *(Time expired)*

#### **Motor neurone disease**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (16:45): It was terrific to join local constituent Brooke Smalley and her amazing team at Mate's Crew a couple of weeks ago as they raised vital funds for MND after the passing of Brooke's father. It was terrific to have the opportunity to don the boardies and the floaties and be dunked for a good cause. I want to acknowledge the work that has been done locally by the community.

#### **Sunbury level crossing removals**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (16:45): On another matter, it was absolutely terrific to mark the removal of the 87th dangerous and congested level crossing at Calder Park Drive recently. I want to also acknowledge the local member, the outstanding member for Sydenham, for her advocacy on this project, as I mentioned, making it 87 dangerous and congested level crossings removed as we march towards that figure of 110 by 2030. This forms part of a broader package of work on the Sunbury line and makes sure that we continue to honour the commitments that were made in ensuring that those level crossings continue to go.

#### **Ryan 'The Brickman' McNaught**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (16:46): Finally, I want to thank the Minister for Creative Industries, who visited my electorate some weeks ago to meet with 'The Brickman', aka Ryan McNaught, at Lego headquarters – a terrific opportunity to catch up with Ryan. Thank you to the minister for the work that he does.

**George's Gymnastics Program**

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (16:46): Congratulations to the 2025 George's Gymnastics Program, a community-based initiative led by Tash Brusco from Monash University's Rehabilitation, Ageing and Independent Living Research Centre. Over five weeks 200 children living with a disability from seven special schools took part in an inclusive gymnastics session, including Vermont South Special School and Glenallen from my area. Its moving finale served as a powerful reminder of how sport can create meaningful opportunities for every child. Thank you to Tash for her outstanding leadership, and a big thankyou to Tanya, Colin, Anita, Aisha, Noel, Kath, Niamh, Olivia, Amelia and Sarah from Waverley Gymnastics Centre and to Tan, Emma, Isabella, Kaya, Natasha, Taya, Kirsten, Moma, Diaz, Caitlyn and Beck from Monash University for their support in making this program a reality.

**Jennifer Bons**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (16:47): I acknowledge the retirement of centre director Jennifer Bons after 16 years at Syndal Preschool. Guided by her unwavering belief that decisions should be made in the best interests of children, Jennifer has helped shape Syndal Preschool into a welcoming space that local families cherish. Her recent legacy includes leading the creation of an inclusive outdoor learning area, made possible through the Labor government's Building Blocks grants program. I also want to acknowledge the committee of management, led by president Dr Rachael Roberts, for their role in bringing this project to life and for their ongoing contribution to the preschool's operations.

**Bills****Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Colin Brooks:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (16:48): I rise to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, and from the outset can I thank the minister's staff and the department for their willingness to put on a briefing for the coalition and to follow up on any questions we asked in that bill briefing.

This bill makes a number of amendments to the Local Jobs First Act 2003. This is a program that was established in 2003 and requires contractors on government-funded projects to actively support local businesses, workers, apprentices and trainees. It has two key components: the Victorian Industry Participation Policy (VIPPP) and the Major Project Skills Guarantee (MPSG). The Victorian Industry Participation Policy applies to government projects valued at \$1 million or more in regional Victoria or \$3 million or more in metropolitan Melbourne for statewide tenders. It requires companies who are tendering for work to include a local industry development plan and embeds a 10 per cent weighting in tender evaluations for industry development. The Major Project Skills Guarantee, on the other hand, applies to any publicly funded construction project valued at over \$20 million and requires contractors to ensure that at least 10 per cent of total labour hours are performed by Victorian registered apprentices, trainees or cadets.

In 2018, following on the establishment of this program in 2003, the office of the Local Jobs First commissioner was established to oversee and promote compliance with these requirements under the Victorian industry participation policy and the *Major Projects Skills Guarantee*. Essentially we are looking at the policy in terms of making sure that for major government projects, both in regional Victoria and here in metropolitan projects, when they are put out for tender there is a requirement for local content in terms of the supplies but of course in terms of sourcing labour as well when it comes

to local apprentices, making sure that we are using the skills here in Victoria and particularly, where we can, engaging small and medium-sized businesses that are Victorian based, Australian based, and of course the definition does go as far as being New Zealand based to be part of major government contracts and to give those firms and those businesses an opportunity to not only provide skills but supplies and content for those projects.

The bill before us today makes further amendments to the Local Jobs First Act aimed at enhancing compliance measures, including through additional enforcement powers for the commissioner and new civil penalties and other consequences for noncompliance with the scheme. The bill will require suppliers to meet their commitments made in their Local Industry Development Plan. Those commitments are already required under the existing act, and what this bill before us today does is look at how there can be tougher penalties, if you like a greater compliance regime, to apply to the *Local Jobs First* and industry policy so that those commitments are taken up by the contractors. It will also bestow new powers on the Local Jobs First commissioner, including additional investigation and reporting powers, a new power to conduct site inspections, and a role to advise and support contracting parties to resolve noncompliance issues.

Finally, the bill establishes two new avenues to penalise suppliers for noncompliance. First, it establishes something called a deprioritisation scheme, which is a process which allows the commissioner to penalise a company in future tenders for government work if they are deemed to have been noncompliant in previous jobs. So when a project reaches practical completion, the commissioner may issue a deprioritisation notice to a supplier if the supplier does not submit a completion report within 90 days of practical completion or the completion report indicates that the supplier did not achieve one or more of its Local Industry Development Plan commitments. Secondly, it introduces a civil penalty mechanism to enable the commissioner to apply to a court for a civil penalty order, or a fine in other words, and these are significant fines of up to or around \$20,000 for an individual and around \$100,000 for a corporation for those suppliers who fail to meet their obligations under the VIPP and the MPSG. As I said, the bill does take quite a punitive approach in terms of the maximum penalty of 100 penalty units for an individual and 500 penalty units for an organisation, equivalent to approximately \$20,000 and \$101,000 respectively.

I will be moving a reasoned amendment to this bill on behalf of the coalition today, because we do have serious concerns about some of the measures contained in this bill. Now, let me state very, very clearly to the house that nobody in this place would argue, I would hope, against the logic of promoting local industry development within government projects. It is appropriate for government-funded projects, wherever possible, to incentivise local job creation and local businesses, and they support our apprentices and trainees with opportunities to learn their trade with on-the-job experience. But this bill is not about whether or not we support the Local Jobs First program but whether or not we support punitive action being taken against businesses that are not able to meet their industry development targets.

It is very important that when we have government-funded projects – and in Victoria we have seen over the past decade major projects and increased spending in terms of public sector infrastructure that is looking to, as much as possible, find opportunities to incentivise local job creation and contract local businesses to be part of the delivery of those major projects. That important on the major projects that we see not only here in Melbourne – whether that might be major train projects, like the Metro Tunnel, major road projects, like the North East Link, the West Gate Tunnel – but also in regional Victoria, where we know there are small businesses, medium-sized businesses and often family businesses that are struggling under immense pressure. To provide opportunities to be part of government projects – projects that are funded by the taxpayer – provides that job creation and provides the incentive for people to remain in those regions, to be part of those local communities, and for local businesses to provide supplies, manufacturing opportunities, innovation opportunities and to really value-add to major projects that are funded by the taxpayer here in Victoria.

But unfortunately the government has not made the case for change when it comes to the bill before us today. They have not provided the case studies or examples of businesses flouting their noncompliance. They have not made the case that projects are consistently departing from their local content requirements, that local apprentices are being denied work on government sites, that subcontractors are missing out on government work. They have not provided one single example of where the current framework has failed. In fact in response to questions from the Liberals and Nationals members about data on previous breaches and civil actions against contractors that has led to this so-called policy response before us today, the department advised and the government advised that they are not aware of any breaches or actions in relation to specific jobs first deliverables.

The coalition has consulted with suppliers to government, and I will share their feedback for the benefit of the chamber. But before I do, I want to thank my colleague the member for Narracan – in his absence I would like to thank the member for Narracan – for helping us to consult industry on this bill and really bringing to the table a number of contacts he made throughout his previous experience in the building industry and in regional Victoria in particular, because the member for Narracan of course has his own lived experience as a builder tendering for government work. I look forward to his contributions on the bill later today. But the feedback we have received from industry has been stark. We have been told that where local requirements are able to be met, they are generally being met across industry. Where they are not being met, it is typically because they are unable to be met, not due to the lack of effort or imagination on the part of the tenderer. But instead of working alongside the industry and taking into account market conditions, this bill introduces a great big stick with which it is going to whack businesses, and particularly regional businesses, here in Victoria.

I am particularly concerned to hear feedback about the difficulty many businesses operating in regional areas face when it comes to meeting the requirement that 10 per cent of total labour hours be performed by Victorian-registered apprentices, trainees or cadets. I want to be very clear that the coalition is very supportive of this target, which provides a very important opportunity to make sure our apprentices have the opportunity to get that on-the-job training that they need and deserve to be able to pursue their careers. But what we are concerned about is this government is proposing to penalise businesses that, through no fault of their own, are unable to meet that requirement.

I want to make a number of points here. First, we have had strong feedback in relation to the limited number of apprentices, trainees and cadets available to work on sites in regional areas. Being an apprentice in a regional area is a different kettle of fish than here in Melbourne, in metropolitan areas, particularly because of the significant distances involved in travelling between jobs. We know there are broader issues when it comes to trying to find jobs in regional Victoria and when it comes to the supply of housing and local infrastructure. All the things that we often take for granted here in Melbourne are not always readily available in regional Victoria, and that has to be taken into account, so what we are seeing is apprentices leaving for metropolitan Melbourne and in particular the lure of the Big Build here in Victoria. Speaking of the Big Build, we know that the price of building things in this state is under significant upward pressure. We know that under the Allan Labor government and under the past 10 years of Labor in this state we have seen nearly \$50 billion worth of cost blowouts when it comes to government projects – \$50 billion of taxpayer money has gone in waste – because this government is unable to manage budgets and unable to manage major projects. The Big Build continues to cost the Victorian taxpayer every single day.

When it comes to this bill, we need to be aware that the threshold amounts for projects that are captured by the industry participation policy or the Major Project Skills Guarantee are not indexed. As I said earlier, the VIPP applies to government projects valued at \$1 million or more in regional Victoria or \$3 million or more in metropolitan Melbourne or statewide tenders, and the MPSG applies to projects valued at over \$20 million. What that means is that increasingly more and more government projects will be subject to the Local Jobs First Act 2003, so more companies will be liable for penalties under the bill if it passes this Parliament. I want to reiterate that it is not the targets that we are concerned by; it is the fact that the government wants to give itself more power to beat up on regional businesses that

are already doing it tough. We have been told that the increased compliance costs associated with this bill will disproportionately impact smaller businesses that do not have the capacity of larger contractors to absorb the additional cost. Further, we have been given feedback that the increased regulatory burden will require more staff and administration, favouring large firms while placing extra pressure on small operators who are the backbone of industry.

Let me just speak to some of the feedback we have received. I refer to Master Builders Victoria, who stated about the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 that the proposed changes are likely to:

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create more burden than benefit for many small and medium builders.

As part of that they noted that it was deeply disappointing and that:

genuine industry consultation on these reforms has been so limited.

They said they received an email from the department referring to a meeting held on 17 June 2024 as part of the department's so-called targeted consultation. When we asked the government for a list of stakeholders that had been consulted as part of these reforms – because we were told there had been very thorough consultation and that industry had been brought through this journey and had been able to contribute, provide feedback and were comfortable with the changes – unfortunately, not surprisingly, there was a reason why that could not be provided: it was confidential. So we do not have any visibility as the opposition as to how many businesses, industry associations and unions were consulted as part of the proposed changes before us today. Master Builders Victoria stated that as part of the department's targeted consultations that informed the development of this bill:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

In our view one meeting over a year ago does not constitute genuine or adequate industry consultation in relation to reforms of this scale and impact.

Feedback from their members highlighted the following concerns with this bill: as I have said, the increased compliance costs will disproportionately impact smaller businesses that do not have the capacity of larger contractors to absorb the additional cost, and in addition to the compliance costs, the increased regulatory burden will require more staff and administration, favouring large firms while placing extra pressure on small operators who are the backbone of our industry.

We on this side of the chamber know how tough our small, medium and family builders are doing it in this state as a consequence of the policies of those opposite, which are making it harder and harder for those businesses to continue to operate in this state – increased labour costs as a result of the inflationary impact of the government's Big Build and the \$50 billion worth of blowouts on those projects. We have seen over the past three years a number of family builders collapse in this state, leaving many aspirational first-time home buyers unable to complete their homes as a consequence of the pressure on the building industry in this state. When I look to the master builders for their feedback on the bill before us today, I come to this point that they make:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

We consider it manifestly unfair to impose enforcement and financial penalties on head contractors who are unable to meet the local requirement due to insufficient workforce diversity and availability or product availability for the project. The introduction of enforcement risks severely disadvantaging regional areas where there are simply not enough firms available to meet the requirements.

For that reason we are moving a reasoned amendment highlighting the fact that the bill before us today will only place an additional burden, an unfair burden, on regional businesses that are doing everything they can to make sure they meet the various requirements under the Local Jobs First program but there simply is not the supply of labour or the supply of supplies available to them to meet those requirements through no fault of their own.

One of the other concerning aspects of this bill is that the process by which the commissioner is required to take into account mitigating circumstances before applying penalties to noncompliant businesses is insufficiently robust. Suppliers will be reliant on a benevolent commissioner to appropriately use their discretion when either applying for a civil penalty order or initiating a deprioritisation process to mark a company down against future tenders. There needs to be much greater clarity in the bill before us today and guardrails around the application of these penalties to suppliers who may be noncompliant due to circumstances, as I have said, well outside their control. As I have said previously, this is not a matter of a lack of commitment to local industry but a case that local subcontractors or apprentices are not always available in all areas at all times to meet these requirements. It would be deeply, deeply unfair to be penalised in these circumstances, and the bill is insufficiently clear about what are grounds for penalty action for the commissioner to take. That is why I am moving a reasoned amendment on behalf of the coalition. I move:

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

- (1) addresses the potential financial impact on Victorian businesses, particularly small operators in rural and regional areas; and
- (2) provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in this bill.’

I will come back this to shortly.

As I highlighted, the second aspect of the reasoned amendment that I just moved on behalf of the coalition relates to the appalling lack of transparency from the government in terms of the cost to implement the measures in this bill. Under questioning from the coalition members during the bill briefing, departmental and ministerial staff were unable or unwilling to provide any detail around the forecast budget impact of the measures contained in this bill. It stands to reason that increased auditing, compliance and enforcement activities would require greater resources for the office of the Local Jobs First commissioner, particularly in terms of headcount. We are talking about expanding powers so that the Local Jobs First commissioner is able to investigate and inspect sites, so it stands to reason that you would expect that if the government is serious about bringing in this reform, there would be greater resources put behind the commissioner’s office.

Perhaps this would not be so concerning in normal times, but Victoria’s budget is in such a dire state that it is incumbent upon us all in this place to carefully consider the financial impact of any piece of legislation we are asked to pass. Let me just put some facts on the record: net debt will reach \$194 billion by 2028–29 as a result of the past 10 years of financial mismanagement in this state. That equates to an annual interest payment of \$10.6 billion, \$28.9 million a day in interest repayments or \$1.2 million an hour. The opportunity cost of this debt is absolutely staggering, as the *Age* has in fact has pointed out, and we have seen today plans for the Allan Labor government to siphon off funds from education, health care and public transport into a fund to fill that black hole to fund their pet project that is the Suburban Rail Loop. But as the *Age* pointed out, Victoria will spend \$36 billion over the next four years in interest. That amount could help cover the projected cost of the entire first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop, yet we are paying that in interest repayments.

As I said, that is a project that the government still has not explained how they plan to fund. It has a line item in the budget that literally says ‘TBC’, and every year over the forward estimates there is no detail as to how it will be funded. But every dollar spent on debt is a dollar that cannot be spent on our schools, on our hospitals, on our ambulance service, on housing or on infrastructure. So in this context, given the Labor government’s abysmal track record when it comes to managing money, it is entirely reasonable to ask for greater clarity around exactly what the measures in this bill will cost and how they will be paid for. That is why the coalition’s reasoned amendment moves that this house does not consider this bill until the government provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in this bill.



I have outlined the coalition's concerns in relation to the bill before us today. We do not have an issue with the local content requirement when it comes to taxpayer-funded government projects. It is important in terms of local job creation and it is important in terms of encouraging our manufacturing industry and our innovation sector to make sure that we are looking locally, that we are looking here in Victoria – and as I said, as the definition applies to Australia and even New Zealand – for the skills, for the labour and for the supplies on government-funded projects. But what we have seen once again is the government putting forward a bill without the detail as to how it will be implemented, putting forward a bill that looks to put greater pressure on businesses in regional Victoria in particular, which are already doing it tough. We hear time and time again that businesses cannot keep up with the pressure the government is putting on them in this state, whether it is our tax system – looking at the increased number of taxes on our business, we have seen payroll tax continue to increase, the COVID debt levy and the mental health levy, all on our businesses at a time when they can least afford it.

We now have a situation where we have the government putting in place land tax hikes on our businesses in this state. We have a situation where this government continues to hike up WorkCover charges on this state. These businesses in regional Victoria cannot keep the additional financial pressure coming, and the bill before us today will only increase that pressure. It is a big stick that does nothing to actually ensure that local businesses in regional Victoria have the support of this government. I say again: we cannot keep having bills come into this place and legislation come into this space where we do not understand the budgetary impacts. Victoria's budget is in an appalling state – \$194 billion of net debt in the coming years. \$1.2 million every single hour will be paid by the Victorian taxpayer in terms of the interest repayment – \$50 billion worth of cost blowouts. Yet we have another bill coming in here that does not identify how it will be paid for. How will these additional powers of the Local Jobs First commissioner be resourced? Will there be an additional headcount? What will be done in terms of site inspections? What greater resources are needed to actually implement this bill? Until we understand the budgetary impacts, it is not acceptable that we are asked to come to the table and support this piece of legislation. The Victorian taxpayer deserves better than a government that continues to disregard the value of its taxes.

Before I finish I want to reiterate the coalition's support for the objectives of the Local Jobs First program. It is absolutely worthy that we foster local industry and local job opportunities through government projects. Unfortunately, as I said, as with much of the legislation that Labor bring to this place, they have failed to make a compelling argument for why these changes are necessary. They have failed to fully examine and appreciate the potential financial impact to Victorian businesses that this bill could have. They have, as so often they do, neglected to consider the impact on the people and small businesses of regional and rural Victoria, and they have failed, as per usual, to ask the most basic questions about what these measures will cost and how they will be funded. The Liberals and Nationals will always support sensible reform, and we support the aims of the Local Jobs First program. We understand why we need to incentivise job creation and manufacturing support in this state when it comes to local businesses, but we cannot support a bill that does not answer the basic questions that Victorian industry would expect us to ask.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (17:18): I am delighted to rise today to speak in support of the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, a vital piece of legislation that builds on our government's unwavering commitment to creating good, secure jobs for Victorians and ensuring that public investment delivers maximum benefit to our local communities. Before I get into some of the details and some of the facts and figures, I do want to start off and reflect on some of our projects. The lead speaker for the opposition did talk about debt, I guess decrying the debt that has been used to fund some of our most important and long-overdue major infrastructure projects. If we look at the debt, there has been a proportion of debt that was accrued during COVID, and I do not think that anyone who went through that period and businesses and households were arguing at the time that they should not be supported. There are a significant number of major projects, and almost every electorate probably has stood to benefit from the investment that we have made in infrastructure projects,

whether it is the West Gate Tunnel, Metro Tunnel, North East Link, Suburban Rail Loop or level crossing removals, to name just a few.

A meeting that I had with a local constituent says a lot about where the Liberal Party is today. I was just coming back from shopping actually, and he followed me in the street. He said he had made up his mind, he was finally joining the Liberal Party. I said, 'Oh, okay. That's all right. Now, why have you made that decision?' He explained that he had never been politically minded, but he had decided to join the Liberal Party. He said, 'I just want the infrastructure not to be built.' He felt that the best way to get infrastructure not built was joining the Liberal Party, which I think says a lot about where the Liberal Party stands on a lot of these matters.

It was very interesting to reflect back this morning when we were doing the condolence motion for Brian Dixon, a member of the Bolte and the Hamer governments, and even reflect on some of the words that he had used in his inaugural speech about using the power of government and the revenues of government and the financial power of government to invest in the future for Victorians. I think that we could all learn a lesson from that. I think that our government for 10 years – for almost 11 years – has really taken that to heart in terms of investing in the infrastructure for the needs of the population both today and in coming years.

How is this related to the current bill at hand? Obviously all of these major projects require a significant amount of local content. I was very fortunate to be out at the North East Link site earlier last week to see the absolutely astounding progress that they are making on that project, particularly on the tunnelling between Bulleen and Greensborough. I know for my community in Box Hill that is going to be a game changer when it comes to getting to the northern suburbs and getting up to the airport. It is fantastic that we have local manufacturers and local suppliers that are supplying to that project and making sure that the whole supply chain has a significant local component, and it is only legislation such as the Local Jobs First Act 2003 and that entrenchment in legislation and in projects over a long period of time that has really reinforced that local jobs creation, retaining Victoria as a manufacturing and construction base and an engine room for the entire country.

Since we came to government in 2014 more than 900,000 new jobs have been created across the state, and this is the highest number of new jobs that has been created by any state in Australia during that period. It is a testament to the investment that I have mentioned not just in infrastructure but also in education, health and industry development. Our total employment has reached almost 4 million people, with both the participation rate and the employment share hitting record highs.

I just want to also reflect on some of the other numbers particularly in relation to the Local Jobs First policy and how that has been applied. Since December 2014, since the government was first elected, Local Jobs First has applied to 396 strategic projects – 222 in the metropolitan area, 83 in regional Victoria and 91 statewide projects. We are having a combined value of almost \$200 billion and supporting over 60,000 local jobs. The Local Jobs First commissioner is currently responsible for 299 strategic projects. The Major Projects Skills Guarantee has been applied to 480 projects, employing almost 20,000 apprentices, trainees and cadets. A total of 27.7 million hours for apprentices, trainees and cadets have been committed, of which 21.9 million hours have been worked. This includes 129 regional projects, which employed over 3000 apprentices, trainees and cadets. I think this just goes to show how much of an impact that this is having right across the community. If you are talking about those sorts of numbers, about 60,000 jobs, and on the range of projects that you are talking about right across Victoria, it is affecting every single community. Every single community is going to have businesses and manufacturers who are employed somewhere on the supply chain.

There would be rarely a week that goes by if I am doorknocking or calling people in the electorate that I do not have somebody who is in some way connected, particularly to the Big Build but in other ways connected to government projects and government services, and there is no doubt that this has been helped along by the Local Jobs First policy. There it is. It is clear that the Local Jobs First policy has

been working, and it is important that where there is an opportunity to strengthen and reinforce that policy, as was committed to at the 2022 election, we take that opportunity and make those changes.

I want to go through again some of the changes that are proposed in the bill. The bill does introduce new powers for the Local Jobs First commissioner to conduct audits, issue compliance notices and refer serious breaches to relevant authorities. This will ensure that commitments made by suppliers are not just aspirational but also enforceable. There were comments made by the lead speaker for the opposition, as well as by some of the members opposite during the government business program debate, about where perhaps the supply of workers or the supply of materials is unavailable and therefore companies are not able to be compliant with the legislation. The legislation already allows for that variation in the contract to occur, for the company to notify the commissioner about the changing circumstances and the difficulty that they are encountering, because sometimes that may in fact be a real issue. But we cannot create a situation or do not want to lead to a situation where agencies and employers, particularly major contractors, are not fulfilling their end of the bargain just because it is easier, cheaper and simpler not to do so.

As part of the changes to the legislation, agencies will also now be required to publish annual reports detailing their performance against Local Jobs First targets. This will include data on local content, apprenticeships and engagement with small and medium enterprises. Transparency will drive accountability, and this measure will help ensure that public procurement delivers real outcomes.

Finally, I just want to reflect on the strengthening that the bill provides to support priority cohorts, including young people, women in trades, First Nation workers and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. There are a number of changes in this bill. It is very important that it strengthens our Local Jobs First policy. It is working and the legislation will strengthen it further.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (17:28): I rise today to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. The bill proposes changes to legislation introduced back in 2003, which requires contractors on government-funded projects to actively support local businesses, workers, apprentices and trainees. On the surface the principle is one that we do support on this side of the house, but this bill goes a lot further than that, and we do have some serious concerns, particularly for small businesses, as we heard from the member for Kew. They are behind her reasoned amendment, which is very practical, with a particular impact on regional contractors.

At its core the bill hands sweeping new powers to the Local Jobs First commissioner. These powers include the ability to carry out site inspections, conduct investigations, enforce compliance and issue a range of civil penalties for noncompliance with local industry development plans. One of the most concerning changes is the proposed deprioritisation scheme, which could see local businesses blacklisted from future government work. These penalties could be enforced by the courts, regardless of whether the business did everything it could to comply. Just to be clear, we do support the goal of giving local businesses every opportunity to win government work, but this is not the way to go about it. We will oppose this bill in its current form because right now it is all punishment, no support and limited reward. I do think that we need to support the member for Kew's reasoned amendment. As it is, it supports jobs, it supports businesses and it supports regional Victoria to thrive.

We have received strong feedback from industry groups like Master Builders Victoria, who have said what so many of us already know, in particular about the impact of closure of businesses in regional Victoria. In most cases local targets are being met, but where they are not, it is usually due to real structural challenges like regional skills shortages and certainly not a willingness to try and comply. You cannot punish a small builder in Benalla because they cannot find a local subcontractor when the workforce simply is not available, but that is what this bill does in its current form. The enforcement regime being proposed does not take these factors into account. There is no clear pathway for the commissioner to consider mitigating circumstances before hitting a business with a penalty, and there is no fair process to determine whether a shortfall was genuinely beyond a business's control. This is especially dangerous for smaller operators like local family businesses who do not have compliance

teams or administrative capacity, and I have heard from so many local businesses about these challenges lately. They are already battling rising costs, labour shortages and an endless, suffocating amount of paperwork, and the last thing they need is to be penalised for failing to meet unrealistic targets.

We also have to question the government's complete lack of transparency when it comes to the cost of implementing this bill, which we heard about from the member for Kew. When asked what the expected budgets and impacts were, there was absolutely no modelling, no finance and no data. But it is straightforward – we know this. If you are expecting the commissioner's responsibility to include inspections, investigations, complaint handling, issuing penalties and facilitating dispute resolution, it is going to cost money. It is going to cost taxpayers. Where is that money coming from? Let us hope it is not more taxes, because there are also concerns over why we are investing in new enforcement powers when the department confirmed it was not aware of any past breaches or civil actions related to Local Jobs First requirements. The question has got to be asked: what problem is this legislation actually fixing? From where I stand and from what I am hearing across our region, the bill does not look like smart reform; it looks like bureaucratic overreach, but there are no surprises there.

That is why our side has put forward these reasoned amendments – amendments that would allow fairer processes for assessing compliance, particularly in regional areas, where conditions are different. We would support clearer, more practical guidelines to reduce confusion for small businesses, but we cannot and will not support a bill that does set them up to fail. That is the real disconnect here – instead of helping regional businesses succeed, the bill threatens to punish them for circumstances entirely outside of their control. We need policy that reflects the reality on the ground in regional Victoria. We need legislation that works with our local businesses and not against them, and this is what our reasoned amendment does.

Just last week we saw the devastating impact of business closures in my region. ForestOne, a major employer in Benalla, announced it will be closing its sawmill and particle board operations. This is expected to result in 140 local job losses in a community that cannot afford to lose a single one of them. These facilities produce essential materials for construction and everything from benchtops to flooring to plywood. They are shutting their doors not because they gave up but because weak markets and low prices are met with absolutely no support from government. In a statement issued by the executives, it said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Skyrocketing compliance costs, unreliable power and enormous state government tax burden is making it too hard to do business in Victoria.

They are shutting their doors – 140 jobs – and this is one of so many businesses that are just absolutely drowning under the weight of the tax regime in Victoria. It is right across Victoria. It is not just regional Victoria either; it is also Melbourne. New data from ASIC shows that more than 4200 businesses collapsed in the past year. That is a 48 per cent increase on the year prior. Over the past few weeks I have listened to small businesses across the electorate, in Euroa, Kilmore, Benalla and Broadford.

I have spoken to builders, cafe owners, manufacturers, wineries and tradespeople, and they are telling me the same thing. They want to grow and they want to hire and invest in their towns, but they are constantly held back by government.

[NAME AND QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I was sent a message this morning by Tracy, a business owner in Heathcote, who said:

Ask businesses to share what their power bills are and what their state taxes are just to show the pressure they are under. But without our businesses, we do not have a local economy, because that is who gives us jobs.

They are dealing with endless fees, delays and hoops to jump through just to keep their doors open. The message is simple: get rid of red tape and do not add more.

I recently visited Broadford paper mill, an iconic site that has been operating since the 1890s. It employs 37 people and remains the only manufacturer in Australia producing angle board for our fruit and veggie growers. They are now focusing on their investment in Queensland. Why? Because Queensland is doing what Victoria refuses to do: it is cutting red tape, it is lowering costs and it is welcoming business. The mill is facing thousands of dollars in land tax due to split titles, a six grand charge for a modern slavery certificate, monthly power bills jumping from \$12,000 to \$16,000 and layers upon layers of regulation from every tier of government. And meanwhile we are importing all white and copy paper from overseas – make it make sense – often from countries with absolutely no environmental standards. This is not environmentally friendly, and it is certainly not good economic policy. This is not paperwork, it is government constantly getting in the way of economic growth. If we want to protect jobs, we have to stop punishing the people who create them. Too often I hear from business owners when they are already at breaking point, forced to step away from their work to voice their frustration and desperation.

But I want to meet with them early, and I want to ask them what we can do now on our side of the house to make better conditions in Victoria, because the Allan Labor government certainly is not listening. That is what brought me to meet Simon Meyer of Mitre 10 Kilmore. Since taking over in 2018 Simon has doubled the size of the business and now employs 30 locals. They work with some of the biggest builders in the country. From the outside it looks like a hardware store, but behind the scenes they are bringing local employment and housing to our region. Another example is ATG group in Seymour, with modular classrooms. Some of them can be seen at Seymour College. They are reducing construction times and improving outcomes. There are also hospitality leaders like Kim Short of Red Lion in Kilmore, Munari Wines in Heathcote, Kilmore Wellness Centre led by Travis Sullivan, and Suzanne and Jim Gall of Faithfulls Creek in Euroa. I will continue to listen, because this is what our community needs and this is what it deserves: a government that listens and supports business growth in Victoria.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (17:38): It is a pleasure to rise on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, a really important piece of legislation adding to this government's significant record in supporting local content and jobs in our state. I am going to take the Parliament through some of the stats that we find ourselves confronting as the engine room of the nation's economy, putting jobs and skills and training at the heart of everything that we do, because these government projects, some 396 strategic projects in fact – 222 in metropolitan Melbourne, 83 in regional Victoria and 91 statewide – are the backbone of how we support the jobs of Victorians and train the next generation with our skills guarantee.

But before I go a little bit more into that, the member for Kew has come back almost on command, which is great. She has come back after a great contribution that talked a lot about different things and the reasoned amendment that I will get to in a minute. But the member for Kew put a rhetorical question to the Parliament and said, 'Well, who would be opposed to local job content? Who on earth would be opposed?' Well, I have got an answer for the member for Kew: it is Liberals. That is who is opposed to local content. You do not have to go further than the heroes that those opposite lord over, the New South Wales Liberal crew, to find Korean trains costing \$2.3 billion that were funded without any local content or creation. It was Liberals, it was for some of those opposite their heroes: Mike Baird and the then member who became Premier and Treasurer, Dom Perrottet. Those heroes outsourced the trains to Korea and then they did not fit. Remember that? Remember that saga that was put forward? It took a Labor government being elected in New South Wales to put local jobs and local content back on the register. But I thought, 'Well, maybe I'll go a bit further. I'll go into a bit more detail for this bill preparation.' You can imagine I have spent hours just agonising over the content and detail.

I went back to the archives and I thought, 'How many strategic major projects' – I have said before, there have been 396 from the Andrews–Allan governments – 'did those opposite have in their four years?' Now, it is a quiz. Anyone can interject and come up with a number.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim RICHARDSON:** One says, ‘Four.’ That is just a little less generous. It was eight strategic projects. I wonder about the commissioning of stickers at Southern Cross station to try to find the airport – and yes, those opposite have their heroes, like the former Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. Remember that? Remember the absolute hero of the member for Kew there? I do not know how many strategic projects were put forward. Maybe I will give a bit of credit to the former Treasurer. With AUKUS I think there might have been a local jobs component to that, but the member for Kew and the member for Sandringham are a bit of a double act over there with their lack of appreciation of the importance of local job content.

I read this reasoned amendment, which is not as long as we expected from the member for Kew. Normally there is a bit more density to this, but I will go through it. It says:

addresses the potential financial impact on Victorian businesses, particularly small operators in rural and regional areas ...

That is a way of trying to outsource this bill and local content creation into the never-never. That is a consult into the never-never and never support local jobs and content in our state. And it adds:

provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in this bill.

Well, the budget impacts are shown right here, with the investment just over the last 11 years. Some \$190 billion has supported 60,000 local jobs. That is 60,000 Victorians who are making a crust on major infrastructure projects who did not have the job before, because I say again, that number was eight strategic projects of local content. I mean, remember the member for Bulleen was hoping to rezone things and create all this wonder of cities everywhere, left, right and centre – dare we forget Fishermans Bend? That might have been one of them if it ever had seen the light of day. Maybe one of them, or the east–west link – remember that? Remember that one that they took to, what is it, six elections, or seven elections? Where is that whole thing, I am just wondering. The time clock is about July now or August, just 15 months out from a state election. It is time to justify the east–west link again, isn’t it? Isn’t it time to turn on the east–west link justification again?

**Brad Rowswell:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker –

**A member** interjected.

**Brad Rowswell:** I will get to my point of order in the fullness of time. As much as I have regard for the member for Mordialloc, and as much as he and I are often seen as – the joke goes, Acting Speaker, and you may be aware of this, that if Simon Love, the member for Sandringham and the member for Mordialloc were in the same room together, people would not know the difference. Setting all of that aside, and as much regard as I have for the member for Mordialloc, I would like the member for Mordialloc, with your guidance, to demonstrate to the house what point in the bill he is actually referring to, because on relevance, it is quite clear that the member for Mordialloc is way off track. He sees the member for Bulleen, a distinguished member, a former minister in this house, sitting at the table, and sees it as an opportunity to attack a former distinguished member. On relevance, please, I would encourage you to give the member for Mordialloc a bit of guidance.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe):** If you could please come back to the bill, member for Mordialloc.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** I was going to go on the point of order, but you have ruled. If the east–west link was not a strategic project of those opposite, in a local content frame, on a local content bill, I do not know what this bill then is about, because that is literally a major infrastructure project that we are requiring local content on and narrating the need for local content. But anyway, I digress from that because I think there are eight strategic projects that I would love for those opposite to maybe account for or name – we have got 396, so it would take me a few weeks to get through the significance of those, but there are many in the electorate of Mordialloc.

One of those was the Mordialloc Freeway, one that employed hundreds of per cent over its targets in support of veteran communities and First Nations communities in its Local Jobs First approach. Its 10 per cent cadet and traineeship requirements were substantially exceeded, and they dominated those targets and numbers. This is where you can make a project that is over \$500 million invest back into the community and require local content. The level crossing removal programs along the Frankston train line have substantially benefited communities. Remember that we have got obviously local content and procurement all the way through to 2029 with the Frankston line being level crossing free. Each and every one of those level crossing removals is a strategic project, a significant contribution to our community

Just the other day I met one of the chaps who was out there on the Suburban Rail Loop site. They were previously on the Parkdale site. They had a four-week-old bub, and the most beautiful conversation we had, looking at the SRL site, was when they said, ‘You know what, Tim? I could imagine my son being on this major infrastructure project and being able to work with my lad in the future.’ And I thought, ‘Well, do you know why that is the case? Because we have a government that looks intergenerationally in its investment, not at what is the latest thing to do.’ The member for Kew criticised one of the most strategic, significant projects in the Suburban Rail Loop. If you only ever listen to the *Herald Sun* and 3AW, you might have thought that this had 5 per cent approval. No, it has got majority Victorian approval because they see that not acting is actually being negligent in the duties that we have to Victorians. You cannot build any more lanes on Warrigal Road, you cannot add any more to the Monash Freeway or to EastLink and not have significant impacts and not get people where they need to go. We need to invest in heavy rail. We need to do it now.

I know those opposite in their commentary – and I have listened intently to the member for Bulleen. He has gone from being opposed – to shelving it – to the other comment, which was almost like it was a nice-to-have. You know, it is like the extra gift in your stocking you might have, a bit of a nice-to-have on Christmas. No, this is a strategic infrastructure project. Maybe he has charged back into being the number one seed in 2026, and there will be a bipartisan approach to the Suburban Rail Loop to get around it. He has done a few selfies, which have got hundreds of thousands of views, in tunnels in New South Wales. This is an offer across the aisle to the member for Bulleen: join us on the rail commute. Get in the tunnel with us. It will be fantastic. It will be fast, it will be efficient. I reckon it would even get your heart beating. It would just get you up and about. Then the local content, because it will be generations that need to deliver this massive and important project – the local content, the job creation, is massive. But it is not just in rail infrastructure. Just think of the 59,000 jobs that will be created out of the re-establishment of the amazing State Electricity Commission. Just think of all the jobs in those strategic projects and where they interact with government and the people who are getting that opportunity to train up and skill up in Victoria.

This bill and its intention here is about making sure that one of the biggest investors meets the requirements of training the next generation, supporting jobs and making ends meet in Victoria for so many. This is what it is all about, and this is what this bill delivers. It is well and truly in our values as a Labor government, and under the Allan Labor government we will keep investing in our state’s future and supporting the jobs of those Victorians that underpin our wealth and prosperity.

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (17:48): I must say, I do enjoy the member for Mordialloc. He is very entertaining. He is like *Hey Hey It’s Saturday* in the chamber. It is live, it is impromptu and it is without notes – not scripted.

**A member:** If *Red Faces* was still around, he’d get a gig.

**Matthew GUY:** There might be that. He gets the chamber going, and I enjoy it. In fact some of the comments I want to make on this bill are very similar and in line with the member for Mordialloc. I was pleased that he was actually starting to talk quite a bit about local content, because I think that is central to certainly parts of this bill. I think the member for Kew eloquently put why we on this side of the house feel the need to move a reasoned amendment to the bill to certainly improve it, but with

the base point being that we do not oppose the local content and local content provisions, whether it is seeking it in government contracted work or, importantly, in government work itself, which is a point that I want to talk about.

I did note the member for Mordialloc quite correctly talked about trains and rolling stock – oh, dear to my heart is talk about trains and rolling stock. So I would love to talk, like the member for Mordialloc, about rail and rolling stock and local content, because I find it fascinating that in this bill this government wants to penalise private industry for being misleading about whether they have actually got local content or the extent of local content or not. Yet if we walk to the front of the Parliament, you will see big signs on the side of trams, or indeed in Parliament station the side of trains, which say ‘Made in Victoria for Victoria’. It is interesting. Some of these signs I think I have seen in government press releases, others on some of the rolling stock that is running around on the Victorian rail network – most importantly on the high-capacity trains, which are new, and they will service the Metro Tunnel when it opens.

The high-capacity trains the government is in many ways spruiking as Victorian-made vehicles, which is interesting because they are actually made by CRRC, which is the Changchun rail company in China – a Chinese train. They make rolling stock. They are the biggest in the world. They make them for South Africa, they make them for Argentina quite a bit, actually they make the Pyongyang metro and now they are supplying for Melbourne. When something arrives as a chassis and then a good portion of the rest of it – not all, but a good portion – is in flat packs and is assembled in Victoria, should the government be able to then say it is made in Victoria by Victorians – when it is arriving in flat packs, delivered to a factory and then put together? I do not knock that at all. It is better doing that than having the whole unit come from overseas – not at all. But I would like to talk about how we used to do things in this state – under, I might add, both parties – compared to where we are now when it comes to local content.

That is just the high-capacity trains. It is the same with the Siemens trains, which were made in Germany and ordered under a previous Labor government. They were all done in Germany. They did not even meet the requirements on the loading gauge, on the width. They did not meet the brake requirements. This was a German train ordered under a previous Labor government. Or dare I talk about the X'Trapolis, which is the largest number of trains in terms of vehicle volume on the Melbourne network. Again, the Labor government spruik in their press releases that they are made in Victoria, and yes, they are assembled, from memory, in parts in Ballarat – great, no worries. I do not knock that. On the contrary, it is great news. However, X'Trapolis is not a Victorian product. In fact if you go to Valparaíso in Chile you will find two-car X'Trapolises operating on the Valparaíso metro, and they are X'Trapolis 100s, identical to what you see operating in Melbourne. You must ask: are we exporting trains? Given that the Labor government says these are made in Victoria, are we exporting trains to the Valparaíso metro in Chile? I am hoping to go and see them in a couple of weeks time. No, we are not, because they are a French vehicle. The government, under its provisions, can say, ‘Made in Victoria,’ but it is not; the majority of it is constructed elsewhere and assembled in Victoria.

I do not knock for one moment the concept of putting together or assembling, providing local jobs as much as we can, and I certainly do not knock, in industries such as rail rolling stock construction, that we want to be able to do this. But do not pass a bill through the Parliament to penalise the private sector, which is what this bill is doing, when the government is doing in fact quite the opposite. As I said, whether it is the Siemens trains or whether it is the X'Trapolis 100s – the first 10 three-car sets were entirely French-built when they were delivered under the Bracks government. The high-capacity trains, which as I said, the government spruiked as being Melbourne made, might be Melbourne assembled, but the trains are from CRRC in China. Again, I do not knock the quality of vehicle or quality of assembly or whatever. That is no problem. But do not say they are one thing when they are not.

That is trains. What about buses? Under the government's plans to put EV requirements on bus contractors, what we are seeing is that our bus construction companies, particularly in the Minister for



Public and Active Transport's seat, such as Volgren, cannot provide what the government wants in terms of EVs – or they will not be able to. You will not get companies ordering them, so you are going offshore to Brazil. Hopefully I might go and see those soon too, with the member for Narracan maybe, over to Marcopolo in Caxias do Sul in southern Brazil, where they make thousands of buses, and we might have to import them to meet the EV requirements. But the government claim they have got local requirements on buses, which they now do not and they are about to sacrifice. Yet this bill we are debating is actively penalising businesses those who do the same.

We have talked about buses. We have talked about trains. Let us talk about trams. The A- and B-class trams, the older ones, were all built by Comeng down in Dandenong in the 1980s, and they were ordered mainly by the Cain government, to their credit, but also the B-class later by the Kennett government. But what we find now is that under successive Labor governments a number – not all – of those new trams have been, like the trains, coming from overseas, whether it is the D-class trams, which were from Austria, or the C-class trams from La Rochelle in France. Again you have got the government claiming one thing and then penalising others for doing something completely different.

In the past, when large, large volumes of trains have been ordered – like the new deal for country passengers, which was ordered under a Liberal government – they were rolling stock that was entirely built in Victoria. The N-car carriages, which have just recently been retired, were all built in Victoria. They were built and ordered by a Liberal government. The A-class locomotives, which were refurbished B-class locomotives, were refurbished in Victoria with motors from Adelaide in South Australia. They came in from northern Adelaide and into Victoria. The N-class locomotives which then hauled them, the 25 units, were Victorian made. When we ordered, under the Kennett government, XPTs to replace the diesel-hauled stock, they were built in Dandenong to replace what were then diesel-hauled rolling stock in the past. So we have had an industry that has built quite a deal of rolling stock in the past.

Now, my view is that a lot of that should be reinvested in. Reinvesting is maybe not assembling it and then claiming you are building the whole unit in Victoria; maybe it is actually a bit more than that – particularly if you are then going to penalise private business and say, 'Well, you're not doing something that you're claiming, so we're going to haul these ridiculous fees at you,' which the member for Kew has talked about, when the government itself is doing the same thing. The government itself is indeed doing exactly the same thing. As I said before, whether it is Volgren buses in the transport minister's own seat; whether it is the ordering of high-capacity trains, the majority of which arrive in a flat pack and are assembled in Australia but are actually a Chinese product; whether it is X'Trapolis 100s, which are actually a French product assembled in Australia; whether it is the Siemens Nexus train that came in the delivery under the Bracks government, which is a German product; do not roll up as Labor MPs and have a go at everyone else in the world and say, 'Oh, your mates in New South Wales' – actually, how about yourself?

But that is the problem with this bill too, because again this government is talking about everyone else but not looking at themselves. In fact the biggest offenders we are finding in terms of local content are probably the government. If they were really keen about local content, then maybe, like they are doing with VLocity railcars – they are not a bad product; they do not suit long haul, the interior, but they are actually not a bad product – they are building them in Victoria. Why don't we do from scratch with suburban trains what we are doing with that? I just simply say, when the state government comes into the chamber and seeks to put even more regulation on private businesses – particularly private businesses that are paying more tax at any stage of existence than they have been ever before under this government – and then want to penalise businesses for claiming that they are not getting local content when in many cases they cannot actually supply that local content, because it does not exist, because of the tax regime of this government, then I would say the government are the worst offenders and should stop behaving like the hypocrites which they actually are.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (17:58): I too rise to make a contribution to the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, and in doing so I know that I am making a contribution to the Allan Labor

government's commitment to strengthen the Local Jobs First Act 2003. It is interesting, following the member for Bulleen – and what a fabulous performance that was, one that I am sure his partyroom colleagues are taking particular note of. As we all know, there are a fair few jitters in that party room at the moment. But back to the bill: we know it enhances the powers of the Local Jobs First commissioner, unlocks opportunities for more Victorian jobs and business on Victorian government projects and clarifies local content requirements. It puts Victoria first by prioritising Victorian workers, businesses and our state's future by ensuring that money invested here remains here. Throughout our time in government we have been using our buying power to prioritise local jobs and businesses across the myriad of projects that we have completed and continue to build. From level crossing removals and the Suburban Rail Loop to new school builds and new hospitals, this government is investing in the projects that our state needs while creating the safe, secure jobs that will benefit Victorians and actually support business and industry right across the state.

There is a vast difference between the opposition and the government in that the government will always do what it says it is going to do. The fact that we are delivering on this amendment bill confirms an election commitment that we made back in 2022. But it is interesting when you look at what the Libs say and what is actually occurring. I heard the member for Kew in her contribution and indeed the member for Euroa saying that there was this massive burden that would be created on regional contractors, that small regional businesses would struggle to meet the bureaucratic requirements, that there is so much red tape and that this would exclude them in fact from major projects. But the truth is the policy objectives which will now be enhanced through this bill will actually encourage the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises which are based in regional areas in projects undertaken and funded by the state.

We have heard from the opposition that this bill will actually create extra red tape and further costs for business and hence we need the reasoned amendment that has been put forward by the member for Kew. Actually, the code will promote further job security and workplace equity and diversity for workers. It recognises good employers by ensuring that only businesses that treat their workers fairly are rewarded with major government contracts or business grants, and the code complements other initiatives to promote local secure jobs and support ethically and socially responsible businesses, including Local Jobs First.

Indeed the proof is in the pudding when you have a look at the application of the current Local Jobs First Act from back in 2003, brought in by the Bracks government, ensuring that future generations would be looked after when it came to local content and local jobs, building for the future. I am so happy to say that from December 2014 through to July 2025 Local Jobs First has been applied in 396 strategic projects, 222 of them in metropolitan Melbourne, 83 of them in regional Victoria and 91 of those statewide. There was a combined total value of \$190.39 billion, which supported over 60,000 local jobs. The Local Jobs First commissioner is currently responsible for just under 300 strategic projects. Between its introduction in 2016 and 30 March 2025 the Major Projects Skills Guarantee was applied to 480 projects. It employed over 19,000 apprentices, trainees and cadets. A total of 27.7 million hours of apprentices, trainees and cadets have been committed, of which 21.9 million hours have been worked, and this includes 129 regional projects, which employed 3139 apprentices, trainees and cadets. It is the reason why we need to have this type of regulation. You cannot let the system regulate itself when it comes to skills training. We know how loosey-goosey it gets when that is the case, because we know that employers in the private sector just will not invest in future skills training. There is a commitment in this to allowing this to occur, and as I said, the proof is in the pudding.

Through strengthening compliance and enforcement outcomes, this bill will boost jobs and maximise the use of local content in the state's infrastructure projects and other procurements. It will reinforce Local Jobs First in the development of and support for critical sovereign capabilities. It will integrate local businesses into supply chains and raise the awareness and use of local suppliers by major contractors.

The bill does put Victoria first – our workers, our businesses and future generations, importantly. It will ensure that money invested here stays here, creates jobs here and supports local businesses here.

It is really interesting when I look at the period between 2010 and 2014. Under the Local Jobs First Act 2003 – I am talking about those Baillieu and Napthine years – between 2010 and 2014 there were only eight projects throughout that time that were declared strategic with mandatory local content set. Either they could not even have enough projects to fill that gap or they used the definitions to their advantage to restrict it to only eight projects in that time. We know that the opposition only care about cutting, closing and cancelling, while this government in its time has invested in projects that create jobs and will bring benefit to future generations – and benefit to future generations is something we care very, very deeply about in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

In Narre Warren South Local Jobs First projects have included the Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road intersection upgrade, which is using 94 per cent local content. The Casey Hospital emergency department expansion is preferencing solutions that maximise the use of local materials, finishes, products, goods and services in construction, including furniture, fittings and equipment, wherever possible. Early learning centres and schools have been built in the outer south-east, particularly in Cranbourne North in my electorate, with our new school opening there next year, Kala primary school – spelled K-A-L-A, for the benefit of *Hansard*. The works at the early learning centres and new schools opening in 2026 are prioritising Victorian pre-construction services, construction and furniture, fittings and equipment. The reforms follow extensive consultation with unions, industry associations and other key stakeholders, with the aim of creating more good local jobs, strengthening regional opportunities and giving Victorian small and medium-sized businesses a fair go right across the state of Victoria – through our urban fringes, well into the city and of course throughout regional and rural Victoria. With the current uncertainty in the global environment, it is more important than ever that we prioritise local jobs, local industry, local workers and local materials, and I am very proud of this government and its investment in this bill. I commend it to the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (18:08): I rise to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. The nicest possible way to describe this bill is that it is half-baked. In fact it is really just window-dressing. I heard the former speaker say that there was investment, but when we asked the government and the department how much investment, they actually could not answer that question at all. This bill seeks to paint a very thin veneer over gaping cracks and damage this tired Labor government has done to our manufacturing and primary resources industries. When you actually read the bill – and I would encourage members of the government to actually read what is in their bill that they are speaking on today – you quickly find that it will actually do nothing to ensure local content requirements on government-funded projects will actually be complied with. The so-called new enforcement and investigation powers are akin to slapping any contractors who fail to comply with a wet lettuce leaf. For over a decade this tired Labor government has allowed contractors to treat local content requirements as a joke. On this Labor government's watch – and the minister is sitting at the table – we have continually seen materials imported from overseas on project after project, at the expense of local jobs and manufacturing businesses here in Victoria. As someone who comes from the manufacturing industry, I find this devastating.

The government's obsession with its Big Build projects, which have blown out by more than \$40 billion, has allowed contractors to thumb their noses at contractual obligations and allowed foreign suppliers, big foreign-owned corporates, to undercut and take away contracts from local suppliers. And what has the Labor government done in response? Absolutely nothing. It has just stood by and allowed costs to skyrocket, with head contractors that are foreign owned and local jobs to be lost. Is it really any wonder why Victoria's net debt is forecast to keep increasing and skyrocket to a record, staggering \$194 billion. Is it any wonder that unemployment in Victoria now stands at 4.6 per cent, the highest in the country, and has been the highest in the country for some 13 or 14 months now. So much for this government's much-touted fiscal strategy, of which none of its measures have been met.

This tired Labor government has completely lost its way. As of today, the government's *Local Jobs First* policy requires that government projects must have a minimum of 88 per cent local content, yet this policy has been completely ignored and never been achieved by this Labor government. According to the latest annual report of the Local Jobs First commissioner, the government has only achieved an average of 76 per cent of local content in government projects. That is more than 10 per cent less than what this government has promised but failed to deliver. The most recent figures are even worse: of the 133 projects commenced in metropolitan Melbourne in the 2023–24 financial year, there is only an average local content of 61 per cent; of the 71 projects completed in metropolitan Melbourne, there was only an average local content of 67 per cent; of the 138 projects commenced in regional Victoria, there was only an average local content of 65 per cent; and of the 97 completed projects in regional Victoria, there was only an average local content of 69 per cent. Now, what these figures show is that this government is consistently failing to meet its local content target by almost 20 per cent despite being in power for 10 long years. This is utterly embarrassing and demonstrates how hopeless and negligent this Labor government has been in allowing its local content requirements to be completely ignored, with Victorian jobs suffering as a result.

The figures get even worse when you look at the statewide project figures. Of the 63 projects commenced, there was only a local content average of 54 per cent. Even worse, of the 20 statewide projects completed, there was an astonishing local content average of 35 per cent. This Labor government should be utterly ashamed of these figures, but they should come as no surprise, because back in 2017 when the former Premier Daniel Andrews announced the West Gate Tunnel Project, he promised that that project would consist of 92 per cent local steel. You can go back and check the media release in April 2017. On 2 April 2017 the then Premier promised the West Gate Tunnel would be open in 2022. Well, we are in 2025, halfway through 2025, 3½ years after from the promised completion date, and we still do not have a West Gate Tunnel that is open. Also, we have a situation where they did not comply with their own obligation to use 92 per cent of local steel. Just two years after that media release, it was announced that 33 000 tonnes of Chinese steel would be pumped into the West Gate Tunnel, accounting for about 17 per cent of the total steel used. The announcement was labelled a disgrace by the Australian Workers' Union, a Labor union, who said it felt like a bombshell to those in the industry who had been making investment decisions based on Labor government promises that were then broken. This was just another example of Labor breaking its promises, failing to deliver. At the time the now Premier Jacinta Allan, then transport infrastructure minister, said that she was very disappointed by the decision to break the local content promise of 92 per cent Australian steel and said that government would be 'looking at all our options under the contract' and did not rule out penalties. What happened? Absolutely nothing.

There have been no consequences for the multimillion-dollar contractors who work on government-funded projects and continue to breach local content requirements. When we asked specifically during the bill briefing if there have been any actions taken in terms of penalties or otherwise for contractors failing to comply with local content requirements, the department said there had been none. So all the Premier's commentary about disappointment and exploring options – nothing. Instead, on the Premier's watch Victorians were left with a project that is 3½ years late and costing them \$12 billion, which is double what the original cost was.

Last year we saw another repeat of the Labor government paying lip-service to its own local content requirements. In October 2020, local steel manufacturers were devastated after learning the government had allowed 11,000 tonnes of steel from China to be used on the North East Link. Local steel fabricators, who said they had been promised the contracts, said they would have no choice but to cut jobs and downsize. This government is absolutely duplicitous and has destroyed local manufacturing. The proposed new enforcement regime in the bill is an utter joke. The government has been spruiking a new penalty regime, but this regime has nothing to do with penalising contractors who fail to comply with local content requirements. Rather, penalties are for if they have failed to comply with an information request or an inspection notice. There are absolutely zero penalties under

this bill if a contractor fails to comply with their content obligations. It will do nothing to ensure local content obligations are met.

Also there is a deprioritisation notice – it is worthless in this bill. When we pressed the department on what the consequences of a deprioritisation notice would be, all the department could say is that they would be a matter to be taken into account when the contractor tendered for another project. The department was quick to say that this contractor would not be banned. So what does the deprioritisation actually mean? It is an utter joke.

This government is not serious about protecting local content; all it cares about is the media spin. If the government was serious, then it would be prepared to tell the Parliament and the Victorian people how much all these new compliance powers will cost Victorians to enforce, which is precisely why the member for Kew has moved the reasoned amendment, which I support. When we asked the department how much additional funding would need to be allocated to the Local Jobs First commissioner to undertake these new inspection and compliance functions, the department was unable or unwilling to provide any details at all on how much these new bureaucratic functions would cost the budget and Victorians, and let us not forget, it does nothing to ensure or enforce compliance with local content obligations.

The fact the government cannot or will not provide these cost details speaks volumes. Either the government have failed to properly cost how much these measures will cost in the budget or how many additional resources are required or they are just simply failing to be transparent with Victorians. Either way, the government are yet again attempting to play Victorians for fools, and we will call them out and hold them to account every day of the week. This bill is another media slogan. It does nothing to protect local Victorian jobs. It does nothing to enforce the government's own obligations on local contractors for their local content requirements. It is devastating that they have taken the opportunity to introduce a bill without any costing, any detail and with regulations that are on the never-never, and really it is pure spin.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (18:18): I want to talk about the difference between talk and action. Talk and action are actually different – to talk is one thing, to act is another – and I think those opposite need a lesson in the difference. I first met Mel when she was up a ladder, an apprentice sparky on the Mernda community hospital site since the very beginning, gaining invaluable skills to become a fantastic tradesperson in our state. She spoke of the pride she felt contributing to building a hospital in Mernda. Speaking to Daryl onsite about who had been working there, he said that they had been exceeding the Major Projects Skills Guarantee (MPSG) with their apprentices. They had six apprentices working on the Mernda community hospital at that time. Mel was there as a second-year sparky. They also had plumbing apprentices and mechanical – people developing skills while we develop our community. What a fantastic thing that this government is doing. But it is not just Mel that I know on that site.

At the Whittlesea community market, a mother approached me. She was very excited. Her son Chris was going to be starting a preapprenticeship at the Mernda community hospital – a local schoolboy developing fantastic skills. Now we can call him 'Chris the Chippie'. How good that we have a pipeline of work for students to see and know that they can develop skills and contribute to their community. That is just one project – just one project in my community.

There is a difference between talk and action. If the Liberals had been in power when this bill was introduced, it would not have made any difference, with the exact same bill. That is because they did not have local projects. They do not have projects for people to be employed on. That is the difference between talk and action. In fact I do remember that the Liberal Party wanted to stop the Mernda community hospital from being constructed. They wanted to rip up the contracts – I recall that – in 2022. That is why I was saying earlier that 100 per cent of zero is zero. If your target is 100 per cent but you do not have any projects, well, well done to you.

I have also met with Nick at the Wallan East primary school. He is the project manager there, and he spoke about the great pride he has knowing that his children are going to see the work he has done on schools all across the state. He said they are a little bit sick of hearing it – ‘Oh, Dad, not another school’ – when they drive past. But the local jobs mean local pride, and it is a local vision for children of what they can be. Nick knows that you cannot build a school with talk, but talk is something that my father-in-law is pretty good at. Mike is a diesel mechanic, and in the same vein, every time we drive up the Calder: ‘I built that. I built that bit of road.’ He has been so proud of it ever since he worked on that project with Cooks. We have the jobs because we have the projects. Those opposite can talk all they like, but we are the ones that are acting.

Some talking might have benefited the member for Evelyn and the member for Kew if they had bothered to speak to each other before speaking on this bill, because they are actually saying the opposite thing. The member for Kew said that we have been penalising businesses in Victoria. That is what the member for Kew said. The member for Evelyn said we have just been a wet lettuce and we are not punishing businesses. I think they need to get on the same spreadsheet, as it were. The member for Evelyn said local content requirements are flouted, while the member for Kew said there is no evidence that businesses have not been meeting the requirements. I suggest that they talk and then act, because action is what the people of Victoria want to see, not more talk from those opposite, who do not know how to deliver.

I want to give an example of what the difference is between talk and action. We heard a shocking statement from the member for Kew backed up by the member for Euroa, and they spoke about beating up on regional businesses. Well, I will tell you what, I have still got mud on the boots that I am wearing right now – apologies to the local Parliament house cleaners – from a sod turn at a local school with funding from our government. I was so happy to see the team there from Raysett Constructions from Riddells Creek. I had seen them at another building sod turn a couple of years prior that had also received funding from this government. ‘You again,’ I said. ‘You keep getting a lot of work. Well done.’ Sitting here and listening to those opposite I thought, ‘Oh, I’ll just have a quick check of their website – see what sort of work this regional business, which apparently is suffering so much from our government, is getting.’ I will tell you what, if you go by the Seymour hospital, the Sunbury early parenting centre or a dozen schools across Victoria, there are so many fabulous things that this regional business is contributing to. I do not want to put words in their mouth, but surely if you asked a regional business if they would prefer to be operating under this government, which has a continual pipeline of projects, or under those opposite, who could only rustle together eight projects under such conditions, I think I know who they would choose, especially when you factor in the reductions in payroll tax for regional businesses that this government continues with. I think that the choice is very clear.

The local content requirements are important, and it is something that we absolutely stand by and we absolutely back, because we are in the business of creating jobs. We are in the business of creating jobs through our projects and through our pipeline of work.

Another big project I was at recently, actually last week, was the North East Link M80 completion. If you have ever been on the M80 and got to a set of lights and said, ‘Hang on, wait. What? Why is there a set of lights here?’ we are fixing that with the M80 completion project. I spoke to one of the big bosses there. He was a civil engineer. He is not originally from Victoria, but he moved here roughly 12 years ago. Do you know why? He literally said to me, ‘Because this is where the projects are.’ The talent of a highly skilled civil engineer was drawn to Victoria. He has lived locally ever since, and his son, who has been raised here and schooled here, has started university as, yes, a civil engineer. We have created a pipeline of projects, which means that young people, or all people across Australia, see the opportunity and the potential of being in Victoria. This is where people want to be.

If I just list some of the projects that these rules apply to, it is a long list. I cannot hold it up because that would be considered a prop, but I can say Yan Yean Road upgrade project, Plenty Road upgrade project, North East Link early works, North East Link, Bridge Inn Road upgrade and Epping Road upgrade. We have got the Mernda rail extension project, the kindergartens on school sites and the early

learning childcare centres – there is a fantastic one at South Morang. If I continued to list all of the projects, I would run out of time.

But I do not want to do that, because I do want to point out just one little Russian doll, I think they are called: the school upgrade at Whittlesea Secondary College that we are delivering, with the new STEAM centre and trade centre for young students, like Chris the chippie from Whittlesea. Whittlesea Secondary College will have fantastic new facilities for young people to see and develop skills to work on projects that will require young people like Chris the chippie to work on those sites. So you see that it is a self-reinforcing and self-supporting policy that continues to strengthen that pipeline of not only projects but talent in Victoria.

I know that there are so many families that rely on these projects and the fantastic, secure jobs that come with a Labor government. We know those opposite do not value jobs. It seems one of their main concerns about this bill is that if it passes there might be some more people that get a job. They are worried we might have to hire people if we do this, and they are a bit worried about hiring too many people. They do not actually want those people to have jobs. I think that shows how small-minded they are – that they are focused on the tiny drip of year by year instead of looking at the intergenerational projects being delivered by this government and the intergenerational benefit of supporting apprentices into good, paid jobs.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (18:28): I am pleased to rise today on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. I think what is important to start off with is what the definition of ‘local content’ is, because this is where I have a real problem with this bill. The definition of local content is anywhere in Australia or New Zealand; that is the definition. So when we talk about local jobs I think of regional Victoria, and I think of what happens in the way this is set up now. I am the only person in this chamber that has had to work to this. My brother still works to this at the moment. What increasingly frustrates regional builders is that when we talk about local content it is not postcode driven, it is Australia wide. If you are in regional Victoria, whether you are in Warragul or Warrnambool, for example, there is nothing more frustrating than seeing a Melbourne city builder come into regional Victoria and bring all their subbies with them. If you want to weight projects – if you want to have a weighting on projects to create jobs – then weight them by postcode and weight them by LGA. If a builder comes into regional Victoria and employs a local plasterer and employs a local electrician, that should carry more weight – not city builders coming into regional areas and bringing in all their workforce with them and then everything goes out of the town again. That does not create jobs in regional Victoria.

I have employed many apprentices over the years between my father and me – I have got no idea how many, but it is a lot. Apprenticeships are important, but all this bill is doing now is whacking builders that literally cannot meet the compliance of what they are after. We are talking penalties of I think \$20,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for businesses if they cannot meet it. In regional Victoria it is hard to meet it. This is the problem with the bill. This is one of the reasons why we put forward the reasoned amendment and why we are opposed to the bill, because they are not factoring in all of Victoria. It is all right in the city; you have got plenty of opportunity to meet the requirement. But in regional Victoria we do not have that opportunity, and that is problematic. My brother is still a regional builder. He cannot meet the criteria, just cannot. If he has to meet the criteria, he has got to drag in subbies from Melbourne to meet that criteria. That is taking jobs away from locals, so why would he do that? And it is going to be more expensive.

When you tender a project, you actually want to be competitive. You want to win the project, because it takes you three weeks to tender a project and can take up to six depending on the size. That is a lot of time and money invested in something that you know you may not win. This is the problem. The government does not get construction. They do not get how it works, and this is why I have a problem with this bill. When we talk about local content, I tell you what, if the government introduces a bill on local content and says we will give more weighting to the builder that employs people in that local government area, I will support that bill every day of the week, because I am sick and tired of seeing

in my local area where you get the city builders come in, build it, and everything goes with them. It does not create opportunity, does not create employment. They are employing apprentices, but they are not local apprentices. Why don't we start putting more weight on these tenders when they are actually LGA specific, not 'Australia and New Zealand'? That is a problem with the local content. That is a very big problem.

If anybody has ever had to fill out the paperwork on a government project, it is phenomenal. It takes you days. That is at the front end, and then you have got to do it at the back end, and a lot of small and medium builders do not have that capacity. It is really quite simple. Look, if you are a Hutchinson, if you are a Lendlease, if you are a Multiplex and you are doing a billion-dollar tunnel, okay, you have the staff behind you. You have got hundreds of office staff to deal with the paperwork and deal with purchase orders and deal with all the other crap you have got to go through, and you will have probably two or three people sitting there doing these reports. Smaller regional builders do not have that. And I always get a little bit bemused by those opposite when they get up and speak on a bill, but they actually do not do the real research. The real research is sitting down with stakeholders like Master Builders and hearing their input. There will not be one MP over that side that sat down with Master Builders on this bill – probably other than the minister, but no-one else. Do your own research, listen to industry, listen to what industry is saying about this.

The one thing they said when I sat down with Master Builders on this bill, which I did for about 2 to 3 hours, was if the government were actually serious about this, they would put in a mechanism that could train builders, especially small to medium builders, to deal with the Industry Capability Network, the reporting part of it. The bigger builders, your Hutchinsons et cetera, are all over it. They have the staff. The smaller builders are the ones that actually employ people directly. The bigger builders are all using labour hire now. It is the smaller builders and the medium builders creating the opportunities for the future generation. The bigger builders are going labour hire. They will have high admin staff but very few onsite staff. So rather than whacking the living suitcase out of these builders, why don't we start to encourage them? Why don't we start to train them in how it all works? That is where you are going to get better results. That is where the government will achieve better results.

To just turn around and bring another stick in to whack the builder – every bill that has been brought into this Parliament since I have been here has just decided to whack the building industry again. There has not been a bill that has come in to encourage the building industry. You have got builders frustrated, builders going broke and no support from government, and this is just another bill that whacks builders. It is not about local content. It is not about local jobs. It is about increasing fines again, because a builder may not be able to achieve the results that the government wants. Give them a break. You can only whack this industry so much before you do not have an industry. It is that simple.

I do not care about the big builders. They can look after themselves. I could not give a toss. I do not care. The multiplexes, all of them – I do not care. I care about the small to medium builders. When we talk about local content, I had this conversation with the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education about school packages coming out into regional Victoria: 'We're going to use tier 1 builders. We're going to package up six at once. It's going to go to tier 1s and they're going to build them because they can do them cheaper.' Well, I will call BS on that every day of the week, because I have priced against bigger builders and I wiped the floor with them every time. But here is the problem. Here is the attitude: 'We're going to use tier 1s to build schools in regional Victoria.' No, do not do that. Sure, package it up with the tier 1s, but let the local guy actually have a crack at it, and if he beats the tier 1 on that school, give him the job: 'Sorry, Mr Multiplex. You missed out on that one.'

If the government wants to start to look after this industry, the government has to stop whacking the hell out of it. Every bill that has been brought into this Parliament this year has been whacking builders. How about you start to encourage builders? Let us really get down to local jobs by LGA. Weight it heavier on a builder that is going to employ local subcontractors – because if you employ the local subcontractor, he will put on the local apprentice. It is no use dragging apprentices from Melbourne.



They go back to Melbourne – they do not stay in Warragul; they drive back down the highway. If you want to create employment opportunities, if you want to create better opportunities in regional Victoria, if you want to have a better building industry and if you want them to report on this, provide training and encouragement. Stop whacking them left, right and centre at every opportunity you get. This is all the government has come up with this year – this term. There has not been anything encouraging in construction. We have seen building legislation after building legislation go through this place that just, again, fines people. My suggestion to the government is: listen to the reasoned amendment, because it does talk about regional. But geez, stop whacking the living hell out of this industry and start to encourage them.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (18:38): Thank you to the member for Narracan for his very passionate contribution. I have great respect for him. Unlike the member for Narracan, I have not spoken to the MBA about this, and I plan to probably never speak to the Master Builders Association. However, I have taken the time to speak to unions – shop stewards, delegates, OH&S delegates – and also workers, the people who do the job each and every day. I have got to say that they are excited about this bill because ultimately it means additional jobs – it means bread on their tables – and that is the thing that is most important to them. As many members on this side of the house have said in their contributions, jobs matter, and that is part of what has attracted so many people to Victoria over the past 10 years since our government has been in power. We have created jobs in Victoria that are well-paid jobs where you are respected in your workplace and you can go to work and be safe.

This bill is about local jobs, and there is proof in the pudding. If you look at the stats, from 2014 to 10 July this year, the Local Jobs First Act 2003 has been applied to 396 strategic projects across Victoria. When you compare this to the Baillieu–Naphthine years of 2010 to 2014, there were only eight projects that were declared strategic, with mandatory local content, across all of Victoria. That is a stark contrast. I move that over to the many apprentices and trades men and women I have met with, and from level-crossing removals through to hospitals and schools that have been built, the local jobs act has delivered for locals, and that is what matters.

Now, this bill, the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025, delivers on Labor’s 2022 election commitment to strengthen the Local Jobs First Act 2003. This legislation before us today will enhance the powers of the Local Jobs First Commissioner, it will unlock opportunities for Victorian jobs and businesses on Victorian government projects, and it will strengthen the local content requirements to meet the Victorian people’s expectations.

By way of background, and to touch on a previous Labor government’s progressive work in this area, the Local Jobs First Act 2003 was delivered by the Bracks Labor government and is focused on promoting employment growth by expanding market opportunities for local industry and encouraging industry development. The act is Australia’s longest-standing industry participation legislation and has been supporting Victorian businesses and workers for over 20 years. Victoria is party to the Australian Industry Participation National Framework 2001 which defines ‘local’ as Australia and New Zealand. The act encourages the use of Victorian businesses and workers in government procurement processes and sets minimum requirements for local content and the use of apprentices, trainees and cadets on these projects that meet Local Jobs First thresholds. Under the 2003 act the minister must, unless exemption is granted, determine minimum local content requirements for strategic projects valued at \$50 million or more. The local content must be no less than 90 per cent for a strategic project that is a construction project, 80 per cent for a services project and 80 per cent for the maintenance phase or operations phase of a strategic project. The policy must be applied by all Victorian government departments and agencies for any type of project with a value of \$1 million or more in regional Victoria or \$3 million or more in metropolitan Melbourne or for statewide activities.

With the passage of this amendments bill today all bids for Local Jobs First projects will now be required to provide a Local Industry Development Plan which clearly identifies local content job commitments, including opportunities for apprentices, trainees and cadets within the project. The amendment in this bill clarifies that suppliers are required to comply with their commitments to local

content, jobs and the major project skills guarantee that at least 10 per cent of labour hours on large projects are completed by apprentices, trainees and cadets, and of course this is great for our young people wanting to get into trades. This resolves a current ambiguity in the act and will support and strengthen compliance and enforcement measures in the bill.

The bill provides Victoria's Local Jobs First Commissioner with an explicit investigation function to complement the commissioner's existing compliance functions and strengthen the process for identifying potential compliance breaches. It also clarifies that the commissioner can receive and investigate complaints in relation to the compliance with the act, Local Jobs First policy and the *Local Industry Development Plan* as well as many other matters which the commissioner considers relevant for the purposes of the performance of their function or powers. Further, the bill creates a general function for the Local Jobs First Commissioner to report to the minister and a power to make a non-binding recommendation to agencies on specific systemic issues. This will greatly improve the effectiveness of the commissioner's investigatory role and the ability for the commissioner to highlight the compliance concerns to the minister.

The bill introduces a civil penalty framework in relation to the commissioner's information-gathering powers and new site inspection power. The commissioner can apply to a court for a civil penalty order if a supplier fails to comply with an information notice or an inspection notice. The bill also introduces a new deprioritisation scheme: if a supplier does not deliver on the local content requirements per commitments in its Local Industry Development Plan and cannot provide a satisfactory reason why, then the commissioner may deprioritise the supplier from future government work. The deprioritisation scheme is not a blacklist; instead it aims to disincentivise noncompliance with suppliers' Local Industry Development Plan commitments and provides agencies with the information on suppliers' poor past performance on Local Jobs First applications on projects. The act currently allows the minister to determine local content requirements for a strategic project – for example, one with a budget of \$50 million or more, such as the minimum percentage of value of the total content of strategic projects that must be local content.

Strategic projects are Victorian government projects valued at \$50 million or more and other projects as declared by the responsible minister. Further amendments within this bill include increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and regional businesses.

A lengthy consultation process was undertaken during 2023 and 2024 on the reforms in the bill before us today, including with key industry associations, contractors, union bodies and government departments and agencies. It is intended that the bill will commence in two stages, with some provisions commencing before the end of this year and the remaining provisions commencing on 1 July next year, 2026. This will allow time for changes to be communicated to stakeholders and provide sufficient lead time for updates to be made to the Local Jobs First policy, guidelines and contract model clauses, as well as the preparation of regulations. The bill includes specific transitional provisions in relation to the deprioritisation regime to ensure that it will not apply to existing Local Jobs First projects that are already underway. As such it is possible that the deprioritisation provisions could apply to a project that is in the tender submission or evaluation stage at the time of commencement.

As I was saying before, between December 2014 – soon after the Andrews Labor government first came into office – and 10 July this year Local Jobs First has been applied to 396 strategic projects across Victoria. That holds a combined total value of \$190.39 billion, supporting over 60,000 local jobs. That is a huge effort, and it does not just happen. Over 60,000 local jobs is just unbelievable and something that we in this place should all be incredibly proud of.

The Local Jobs First commissioner is currently responsible for 299 projects. Between its introduction in 2016 and 30 March 2025 the Major Projects Skills Guarantee has been applied to 480 projects, employing 19,197 apprentices, trainees and cadets. That is life-changing for so many families. A total of 27.7 million hours for apprentices, trainees and cadets has been committed, of which 21.9 million

hours have been worked. This includes 129 regional projects, which employed 3139 apprentices, trainees and cadets. So while those opposite may say that we are not looking after the regions, the proof is absolutely in the pudding, and these stats simply do not lie.

While the Liberals only care about cutting, closing and cancelling, we have invested in projects that create jobs and that will bring benefit to future generations, all while setting and continuously improving the requirements to prioritise Victorian business participation and local job opportunities across Victorian government projects. Local jobs matter. This bill matters and it is important that it passes, and it will have my full support.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (18:48): Today I rise to make a contribution on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025. The bill is for an act to amend the Local Jobs First Act 2003 to clarify the obligations of suppliers and agencies under the Local Jobs First scheme and provide additional enforcement powers for the Local Jobs First commissioner. This bill introduces new civil penalties and other consequences for noncompliance with the Local Jobs First scheme, provides for additional Local Jobs First policy objectives and clarifies references to the Local Jobs First policy and associated obligations and guidelines. The act saw the establishment of the Local Jobs First commissioner, who is responsible for overseeing systemic and project-level compliance with Local Jobs First policy by both agencies and suppliers.

We have had some passionate speakers in the chamber today, and it was really great to hear from the member from Narracan, obviously as a former builder, and some of the things he contributed were so relevant. I also want to share a little bit of my experience as a former educator. I had a lot to do with small business, running some business programs through TAFE. As you know, I have a very long-term business background, 28 years in my own business, and my husband over 45 years in his business, so we understand the challenges when it comes to actually fully running your business. I think this is one of the things, when you look at trades and industries, where they have got their hands on the tools but they often do not have their hand on the lever of how to run their business. One of my roles as an educator was actually helping them manage that and with what that looked like. And do you know what it looked like – it looked like a huge challenge, because they are so focused. If you talk to the member for Narracan, they are so focused, building their houses and doing what they need to do. We see businesses fall over because they do not know how to run a business to the capacity that is needed, particularly when it comes to small business. So it is so critical that we do not put up these barriers, these challenges, these infringements that punish them. We need to educate and we need to support businesses more than ever.

We are seeing businesses in Victoria closing – the numbers are phenomenal – and we need to work harder to really help businesses, not put in place penalties and infringements that make it harder for them to get through their day to day. In my electorate we have so many fantastic building organisations. I have a few close friends that work or run businesses in the building industry. I have a girlfriend who also works in finance. A lot of her work is to do with building industries, and we talk about the collapse of industries and what that means. What does that mean to regional communities when we have a large organisation that shuts down or falls over? It is the small tradies, the small businesses, that are often the backbone to those communities. People know who they are, they trust them and when they go with that particular building organisation they know what they are going to get. One of the things that the member for Narracan said was that the definition of local jobs has never been more important than in what we are discussing here today.

We do have some concerns with the bill. As the member for Kew discussed at great length in her leading contribution on the bill, some of those concerns are around some of the things I have alluded to. The bill includes the introduction of new penalties for the commissioner to use where there is noncompliance. This could lead to suppliers being deprioritised for government tendering, as well as financial penalties for noncompliance. We heard that those penalties are significant. We need to make sure that these concerns are understood, and the concern is the potential impact on Victorian businesses, particularly smaller operators in regional and rural areas. The deprioritisation and civil

penalty schemes could unfairly penalise businesses who are unable to meet local content requirements or local industry development plans due to industry circumstances beyond their control. That could be a lack of supplies, skill shortages, a lack of staff, and we hear that all the time. It does not matter what industry you go to at the moment, there are staff shortages and there are skills shortages.

In response to questions about data on previous breaches and civil actions against contractors that has led to this policy response, the department advised that it is not aware of any breaches or actions in relation to specific Local Jobs First deliverables. Where they are not being met, as I said, there is typically a good reason, such as skill shortages in regional areas where local subcontractors cannot be engaged. We do find there may be shortfalls in some of these contracts that may not be able to be delivered locally, but we should be doing all that we can to assist that to happen, not penalising these industries and businesses. The increased compliance will disproportionately impact smaller businesses that do not have the capacity of larger contractors to absorb the additional costs, while the regulatory burden will require more staff and administration, which in effect will favour larger firms and place extra pressure on already financially strained smaller operators.

Under Labor we have seen continued rising cost pressures, which is resulting in businesses facing soaring energy, insurance, rent, wage, tax and compliance costs and regulatory burden and red tape. There are so many businesses, as I said, closing down, and the ongoing increase in the costs of running a business has been relentless, with tax after tax and increasing costs. We should be doing all that we can to assist businesses. Recent data has indicated that over 129,000 businesses closed in Victoria during 2024, including small enterprises, with an average of 530 closures per day. As we have seen, more than 3000 Victorian businesses have relocated interstate. These figures are alarming, and that is something that is happening in our state right now. Victoria does have the reputation of being the most expensive state to do business, and that has to change. We simply cannot afford to keep losing businesses. We are seeing more and more businesses relocate out of Victoria, as I said, and move interstate. The increased compliance alluded to through this bill will disproportionately impact smaller businesses that do not have a large capacity to absorb additional costs.

Another area of concern we have on this side of the house is that there are no details regarding the cost to the budget for these changes. During the bill briefing, departmental and ministerial staff were unable to provide any detail around the forecast budget impact of the measures contained in this bill. I find it quite astounding that we have something before us but we do not know how we are going to afford to pay for it. With the current financial position of Victoria at the moment, how can we have a bill in front of us that does not have any idea of what that cost is going to look like?

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** I think they need to come to my business course. I think we need to talk about that – how we actually manage a budget, how we manage a business and how a business can thrive and survive in this state. It stands to reason that increased auditing, compliance and enforcement activities would require greater resources for the office of the Local Jobs First commissioner, particularly in terms of employees. How many is that, what does that look like and what is the cost? Labor is refusing to acknowledge this fact or provide any modelling around what these measures will cost to implement. If the government is trying to strengthen an office at the same time as reducing red tape, what does this mean for Victorians and what is the cost?

Under Labor we have seen continued rising cost pressures, which is resulting in businesses facing soaring costs and ongoing taxes and charges, and we need to make sure we start working better when it comes to business, particularly when it comes to regional and local businesses. The Local Jobs First commissioner is responsible for compliance within the program requirements, and this includes new powers and functions, including additional investigation and reporting powers to conduct site inspections with notice and an explicit role to provide advice and support contracting parties in the resolution of noncompliance issues. The bill creates functions of the commission to also report to the minister any time on any matter in relation to the act itself.

In the few minutes I have got left I just want to say that I do support the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Kew that addresses the potential financial impact on Victorian businesses – particularly, as I have said, small operators in rural and regional areas – and that provides a forecast of the budget impact of the measures contained in the bill. These are not big asks, they are commonsense requests, and I am really hoping that the other side of the house listens to this, because the impacts on small businesses in Victoria are already being felt. We need to make sure that we know what this cost looks like. The building industry are seeing increasing costs, labour shortages – as I said, they have been tough times. We are seeing housing development and we are seeing local businesses working so, so hard to meet demand. But it is challenging, and there has probably never been a more challenging time in Victoria when it comes to owning and managing a business.

Just finally – I have got a minute left – I want to talk a little about tradie that I had a bit to do with when I was doing some of my training. He was dyslexic and he felt he did not have a future. Times were really tough for him. The expectation from others, particularly within his family, was that being a tradie was not a good career. It was a fantastic career, and it was a career that he thrived in. To this day I often think about him, because he went on to be a part-owner of a business. He went on to mentor. That is a big thing when it comes to local businesses and particularly regional small businesses – you are a mentor. The difference I saw in that young fellow by being mentored by a tradie, by a business owner and then going on to have that opportunity – I think that is what we should be aspiring to in this place. We should make sure that people can thrive and survive but also that they can have a successful financial business and that people can have fantastic careers.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (18:58): I rise to speak on the Local Jobs First Amendment Bill 2025 and to have a few minutes to speak about jobs, jobs, jobs. Certainly we are a government that are about job creation and supporting jobs in this state, because we know that it is more than just a pay cheque; it is that foundation for a great life lived with dignity, security and stability. It is a chance to build something. You build something not just for yourself but also for your family and your community. A lot of the discussions and debates that we have had today have been around what a job means for someone. In my personal experience, my husband is actually a plumber and has worked on many construction sites and hospitals within the CBD of Melbourne – some big, big projects. When we drive around the state he always says to the kids, ‘Look at that. I built that’ and ‘Look at that. I helped build that’ and ‘That hospital, I put the medical gas line in there.’ He is so proud to tell the kids what he has helped build in this state. He is now an apprentice-teacher – he has apprentices at a TAFE – and he gives that same pride to his students. They will be able to say what they are doing matters. There is a pipeline of important work for them to do, and they will be able to drive around this state as well and point to things and say, ‘I built that. I helped with that,’ and it is an absolutely proud moment to say that and to have a career that is meaningful and contributes to this state. That is what this bill means in real-life terms. It means having a roof over your head and having a pay cheque come in but also actually having the dignity of work.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### **V/Line services**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:00): (1211) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide a travel solution for regional schools like Brauer College to be able to get to Melbourne on the train, as they have been doing for many years. The Allan Labor government have again let down the people of south-west coast, failing to ensure a fit-for-purpose transport link to the capital city. It is deeply concerning that

educators and students of Brauer College cannot participate in a scheduled and long-established school excursion due to the state government's incompetence.

For years Brauer College has run a year 9 camp to Melbourne. This camp has always relied on the V/Line train service, which previously allowed the entire group – around 90 students – to travel together affordably and efficiently. But this year they cannot. The introduction of new, smaller capacity V/Line trains has made it impossible for the school to book the group on a single service. Despite early planning and multiple attempts to secure seats, V/Line refused to even consider the booking until 100 days before departure, and even then the answer was still no. It is a disgrace that a school group cannot travel together on a regional train for an excursion into the city.

To add insult to injury the school was told they could book a coach instead, at an exorbitant cost. The result? The group has been split. Half the students will travel on the early train, while the other half must wait, missing out on two pre-booked activities. It is hard enough to provide extra adults needed for excursions like this. The regional students should not be penalised because of poor planning and inadequate infrastructure. They deserve the same opportunity as their metropolitan peers, not barriers. The train simply lacks capacity.

Last year I called on the minister to ensure the new VLocity trains matched or exceeded the capacity of the existing, then current, N-class services. Of course this was ignored. The government was continually warned the capacity with the recent VLocity train upgrade would not meet the needs of the community. In fact in September last year Labor's Jacinta Ermacora told our community 'there will not be an overall reduction in capacity.' But there is.

How is this an upgrade? This is not progress. This is a step backwards for regional equity. The Minister for Public and Active Transport should urgently review the capacity and booking policies of the VLocity service. We must ensure that regional schools can continue to offer these vital experiences without being priced out or split up.

### Cultura

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (19:02): (1212) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth. The action that I seek from the minister is to meet with the Cultura multicultural youth council. This group is part of Cultura, a Geelong-based organisation that promotes cultural exchange and understanding. The multicultural youth council are working towards identifying community needs, developing project ideas and providing leadership training for young people.

The young people involved in this group are truly inspiring. At a recent Geelong consultation session for Victoria's multicultural review I was particularly impressed to see some of these council members standing up and speaking out so magnificently on behalf of their communities. I would like to touch on some of the points they shared with us that evening.

[NAMES AND QUOTES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Angel from the Indonesian community shared this:

From what I understand it is very easy for people of colour to feel like they should be invisible in a place where we do not have a voice. But that needs to stop for the sake of young people who might be going through the same thing that I myself and countless others did. I implore that there is a change to be made so that everyone who feels ostracised has a sense of strength to take up space and be proud of their roots.

Pia, who is part of the Macedonian and Indian community, shared this:

This racism still impacts me every day as I do not like dressing in traditional clothing, speaking any languages other than English because I have been made to feel so ashamed or embarrassed about my culture, and that sucks.

These comments highlight the importance of supporting our regional multicultural communities, and I am really proud that this Allan Labor government does just that. Meeting with the Cultura youth

council will be an excellent opportunity to hear more from this extraordinary group, and I look forward to the minister meeting with them.

### **Regional businesses**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (19:04): (1213) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs and Minister for Regional Development, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently convene a regional business roundtable in the Euroa electorate to listen directly to local manufacturers and small business operators to address the devastating impact the Victorian Labor government's regulatory burden is having on regional enterprise.

Right now, the numbers tell a damning story: Victoria recorded a staggering 48 per cent increase in business insolvency last financial year, with a total increase of nearly 100 per cent in the past two years. We have seen more than 4200 Victorian businesses close their doors in just the past year alone. This is the worst performance of any mainland state, and our regional communities are bearing the brunt. Separate data from the ABS confirms what we see on the ground in communities like Heathcote, Benalla, Seymour, Kilmore and Broadford. There are fewer businesses, fewer opportunities and more families under enormous financial pressure.

Over recent weeks I have sat down with manufacturers, farmers, retailers, pubs, service providers and wineries, businesses that have served our communities for decades. Their message is clear: the system is broken and there is absolutely no support. Skyrocketing energy bills, unaffordable insurance, out-of-control WorkCover premiums, layers and layers of red tape, inconsistent regulation and a punishing tax burden are making it harder and harder to keep the lights on, both literally and financially. These are not faceless corporations, they are family-run businesses who employ apprentices, sponsor the town's netball team and power our local economies – and they are being punished to the brink. The closure of ForestOne's sawmill and particle board operations in Benalla is something that will impact hundreds of local jobs and is not isolated. It is part of a broader pattern of neglect, worsened by Labor's reckless policies, which are driving up prices and driving out investment. These same burdens are seeing retailers, cafes, pubs and factories close right across our region, and we have seen banks close in Euroa, Stanhope and Seymour and services continue to disappear. In towns like Heathcote, Kilmore and Seymour I have spoken with business owners who are seriously weighing up whether to shut down or move interstate entirely; that is how bad it has become.

Unreliable electricity has quickly become one of the biggest risks facing regional businesses, particularly due to Labor's poorly managed energy transition. The government's failure to provide adequate backup power, maintain our infrastructure and ensure our energy security is leaving many, many country towns exposed to regular blackouts, costly disruptions and rising power bills; while forcing a transition away from gas, the government has forgotten to ensure our regions have reliable energy.

My message to the minister is: regional businesses are out of time. They need a government that listens and leads and does not hide behind bureaucracy and press releases. I call on the minister to visit our region, host a business round table and support our regional communities.

### **Wyndham law courts**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:07): (1214) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action that I seek is for the Attorney-General to provide me with an update on what the operationalisation of the Wyndham Law Courts, the first stage of the project which opened this year, will look like. The Wyndham law courts are the largest court complex outside the CBD, and this project will deliver hundreds of new jobs and activity in the East Werribee precinct, a growth area that I know will just get busier in the years ahead. It is imperative that we build up the job opportunities for the people in our area, and I see the law courts as a real anchor of job creation; I know that projects like this scale up their activity. I was recently onsite with staff from Court Services Victoria. They could not be prouder of the building that they have already started occupying and that many more will

occupy in the future. I thank all the workers who have been putting together this fantastic build and fit-out. I am very excited to see it open later this year, and I look forward to the Attorney-General's response.

### Crime

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (19:08): (1215) Crime in Victoria has soared to a record high. The most recent data published by the Crime Statistics Agency is deeply troubling: a criminal offence is committed every 50.3 seconds, a car is stolen every 17 minutes and youth are overrepresented in violent attacks. Crime is increasingly impacting my local community, with criminal incidents up 22.1 per cent in the Yarra Ranges. Over the past 12 months, 8236 criminal offences were reported in the Yarra Ranges, with Lilydale, Mooroolbark, Chirnside Park, Coldstream and Montrose suffering significant increases. A deep dive into the data reveals that in the Yarra Ranges aggravated robbery is up 82 per cent, motor vehicle theft is up 79 per cent, residential non-aggravated burglary is up 43 per cent and residential aggravated burglary is up a staggering 177 per cent. The action I seek is from the Minister for Police to advise what additional resources the government will provide to Yarra Ranges police, particularly the Lilydale and Mount Evelyn police stations, to help our hardworking local police tackle this rise in crime across the Yarra Ranges.

One of the highest priorities of any government should be community safety, yet the Allan Labor government has been reluctant to ensure laws are strong enough to deter crime or to respect and resource our police properly to tackle crime, the crime crisis and keep residents and small businesses in my community safe. Our community has seen the Lilydale football grandstand set on fire; several bus shelters smashed; the Seville tobacco shop firebombed, causing serious damage to adjoining businesses; armed robberies at the Wandin pharmacy and at supermarkets in Mooroolbark and Montrose; and a sharp rise in theft from people's homes, cars and farms. The situation is alarming and comes as the Allan Labor government cut nearly \$50 million from the Victoria Police budget despite a shortfall of over 1100 police officers across Victoria occurring on this Labor government's watch. Our local Yarra Ranges police do tremendous work in difficult conditions but are let down by this Labor government's mismanagement and financial incompetence, leaving frontline officers overstretched and underequipped. Only the Victorian Liberals will put community safety first. Community safety has to be the number one priority. It is a significant concern for residents and small businesses in my community. We must arrest this rise in crime and put community safety first.

### Planning

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (19:11): (1216) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and I ask the minister to meet with me to discuss how the Victorian government's planning and regulatory frameworks can better support community protections and compliance during the construction phase of major developments. Across the Northcote electorate we are seeing a surge in major residential and mixed-use developments. These projects will play a vital role in addressing our housing needs and revitalising underused land, particularly around our key transport corridors. We welcome this investment in our inner north communities. But as these large-scale builds move from concept to construction they often bring significant disruption: noise, dust, blocked roads, strained parking and substantive impacts on local businesses and residents over long periods of time. While most developers engage with communities in good faith to work through these pressure points, there are still too many instances where basic obligations are not met and enforcement options are limited.

One recent example is a major construction on High Street in Preston, which has caused significant angst in my community. Disappointingly, nearby businesses and residents have reported a range of issues to my office, including unannounced road closures on High Street – a vital north-south corridor – trades vehicles occupying street parking for extended periods despite time limits designed to support retail turnover, lost revenue from reduced customer access and, most frustratingly, a sense of intransigence when concerns are raised. These concerns have rightly been escalated to Darebin City Council as the responsible authority for planning permanent local law enforcement. In this case I have



also reached out directly to the developer to seek clearer channels of communication with the surrounding community. Despite these efforts, what has become evident is a structural gap.

Councils are largely responsible for developer compliance during construction yet are often unable to hold developers to account when issues persist. While the particular project I outlined predates the Victorian government's activity centres program, the future does hold a bigger role for state government planning mechanisms as we look to support growth along our transport networks close to jobs, schools and services. Given this, it is timely to consider whether we need stronger safeguards during the construction phase of major developments, not just at the approval stage, because currently there is no consistent framework to manage disruptive developer behaviour, especially where the cumulative impact is high but individual offences are minor.

Ideas raised with me include requiring major developments to appoint a dedicated community liaison officer or creating clearer obligations for developers to work with communities through prolonged disruptions. I would welcome the minister's advice on whether these mechanisms or others could be integrated into Victoria's planning or building systems. Our community supports well-planned and well-built urban renewal, but we expect it to be delivered in a way that respects the people and businesses that make our suburbs such a great place to invest. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss these important matters further with the minister.

#### **Middle East conflict**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (19:14): (1217) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier. The action I seek is to admit the absolute horror of mass starvation that we are seeing in Gaza, for the Premier to commit this Victorian Labor government to divest the state of Victoria from all defence companies involved in Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Every night I put my-three year-old to sleep in his bed – my three-year-old with his chubby cheeks and his mop of long curly hair and his chunky thighs that are only now just starting to turn from those rolls of a toddler into the slender legs of a boy. I look at his sleeping face, but all I can think about are the children of Gaza. All I can think about are the images that we have seen of the mum holding her own toddler, who should have chubby thighs but whose backbone and ribs you can see sticking out, whose legs are twigs, his emaciated face pressed against her neck – a child who is probably now dead because he did not have enough to eat, even when trucks full of food were just a few hundred kilometres away, but Israel would not let them in so that he could live.

I wanted to say something about it in this chamber today because as a mum and as a human I have a platform, and how could I not use that platform to say something about this preventable, deliberate starvation that is being perpetrated against the children and the people of Palestine? Time and time again we are told that this is not the right place, that this is not the right way to protest. We are told it is not okay to hold up signs peacefully in Parliament asking our government to do more, to apply pressure to Israel. We are told that we should not be protesting in the streets or outside weapons manufacturers or outside organisations with ties to the Israeli government. But if these are not the right ways to protest against the deliberate starvation of children, what is?

We are told the Victorian government is not dropping the bombs so we should keep this Parliament out of it. But last December Labor Premier Jacinta Allan released a \$240 million plan designed to support defence industries in Victoria, and that means giving money to the same weapons manufacturers that are providing parts for planes and parts for weapons for Israel to use against the children of Gaza. Victoria wants these companies here for the jobs, but jobs at what cost? Israel could not slaughter children without the weapons and the parts that our state and federal government are supporting these companies to create. In March this year Jacinta Allan met with executives from all the top weapons companies, including a private meeting with Lockheed Martin's president of missiles and fire control.

Premier, Victoria might not be dropping the bombs on Gaza, but we could be doing something more to stop the people who are. International pressure works. My son, when he grows up, will look at me and ask what I did to prevent starvation in Gaza. We should be doing more.

**John Englart**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (19:17): (1218) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is to name the Upfield bike path after local advocate for climate and social justice John Englart, who sadly passed away recently. With his two chihuahuas for climate action, Juliet and Jones, riding in the front crate of his bike at every community event, John was always a very visible and well-loved member of the community and an icon of Fawkner.

I first met John over a coffee in Brunswick Street. We had a great and wideranging chat covering topics such as synthetic turf, native timber logging, local production of electric vehicles, aviation emissions, the need for Melbourne to Albury high-speed rail, gas reforms and of course active transport. The Upfield train line and the Upfield and Merri Creek bike paths go through Hume and Merri-bek and beyond to Wallan. From his actions and words, you could tell he cared deeply about humanity. We often spoke about the effects of climate change on the vulnerable, and he knew deeply that improvements in access to quality active and public transport, especially for those without cars, were imperative for the planet, for social justice and for opportunity for all. We both held the long-term dream of completing the ring road link of the Upfield bike path. For me, it was since my time on the on the Transporting Moreland forum in the early 2000s and working with a former member for Pascoe Vale Christine Campbell, who progressed it through to Box Forest Road. I shared John's immense frustrations, as does the member for Pascoe Vale, with the delays on the final stage of the project, and sadly, this was the topic of my last conversation with him. Unfortunately I will never get to ride that final link with him past the cemetery and the mob of kangaroos living there.

At his funeral yesterday several people suggested that we name this section of the path in his honour, and I think this would be a fitting tribute to a man who devoted his life to getting the best outcomes he could for both people and the planet. When the project is complete – the website now says it will be completed later this year – we are planning a memorial ride for him and would love the minister to join us if she is able.

I pass on my deepest condolences to his family, especially Tarryn, Erin, Jesi and Kate and the rest of the family, and I sincerely thank John for his generosity in sharing his immense knowledge with me and with so many of us. I have compiled all the research he has sent me over the years, and I will continue to use this to advocate for changes to policy in many areas, including waste, reducing energy and heatwave vulnerability and increasing tree canopy. I know he, and so many of us here, also felt deeply the plight of the innocent people of Gaza. May he and they rest in peace, and may we all continue to advocate for human dignity and social justice. Vale, John. Thank you for fighting the good fight your whole life long, and may your indomitable spirit live on in each of us.

**Benambra electorate crime**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (19:20): (1219) I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide me with a full ministerial briefing on what the police in Wodonga are doing to bring down crime in the city. The latest crime stats are an absolute horror show for Wodonga. For the 12 months to the end of March there were 3640 criminal incidents. That was 13.3 per cent more than the same time 12 months earlier, and it was 41 per cent more than a decade ago. More than half of these still remain unsolved, and the Crime Statistics Agency puts the unsolved crime rate at 44.5 per cent. But those stats are misleading, and the reason I say that is because family violence and shop theft make up a sizeable chunk of the total crimes, but both are usually solved on the spot, where the offender is either caught as part of the crime or is party to the domestic dispute. Take out the raw numbers for family violence and shoplifting, and the unsolved rate is more than 50 per cent. No matter how you spin it, there were 1610 crimes last year that went

unsolved. That is people who never found out who stole their car, the culprit who damaged their property or entered their house and stole jewellery or other goods while they were there. These stats compare year on year, so if we are going to put our rose-coloured glasses on, theft of motor vehicles is up marginally, 378 to 393. But that is not just 15 extra people who had their car broken into or their mobile phone or their loose change knocked off. That is 393 new victims. What I would dream for and I would love to see is zero crime, not the celebration of a trend that is going on at the present. To the year ending in March, we had 21 aggravated robberies in Wodonga, which is an increase of eight from the same time in 2024. But let us break that down even further. That is 21 homes where people were sleeping or present when an unknown person entered their home. That is 21 families, parents and children that no longer feel safe. This is simply not good enough.

I had a staff member out at my office recently who was a victim. His partner and their daughter returned home after a 15-minute trip to the shops to pick up some groceries, and they entered the home to find drawers open and a few other telltale signs. They were home about 5 minutes before the offender burst out of a bedroom, passed the daughter and hurdled the front fence. Police were there in about 15 minutes, and there was security CCTV footage of the person casing the property, entering, then fleeing, none of which was ever released. That was over a year ago.

The important thing is I recently went to a community event on crime, with police command in attendance, and the local superintendent recommended that if you are not happy, call your local state member of Parliament. *(Time expired)*

### Suburban Rail Loop

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (19:23): (1220) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action I seek from the minister is to update my community, the Mordialloc district, on the travel benefits of the Suburban Rail Loop that was recently announced.

This is a really critical part of thinking about the vision forward for the City of Kingston and the City of Greater Dandenong. It was a Labor government, the Andrews government, that committed to removing 50 level crossings in our community and put forward that vision. At the time, we were told it was not possible, and we are now on the edge of delivering 110 level crossing removals and having the Frankston train line level crossing free. We have already achieved that on the Dandenong line, and we have seen the substantial benefits. We saw the upgrade to the Mordialloc Freeway, which was talked about for decades and delivered by this Labor government, planning for the vision of how our communities get around on trains, on buses, on roads and as pedestrians. The Mordialloc Freeway, opened in 2021, has been an outstanding project.

We have the Parkdale level crossing removals that were delivered just recently, and there was a great celebration in May of 2025. We are on the edge of some enabling works that get ready for the Mordialloc level crossing removals, making Mordialloc level crossing free, a vision that we took to the people in 2022 and was resoundingly endorsed. We still have Aspendale level crossings to remove, and we are on the edge of the significant Metro rail tunnel opening later this year, which will transform the Frankston train line for generations to come, taking the Frankston train line back into the city loop, adding extra capacity and services into the future.

But if we really want to be innovative, we need to plan for the next generation.

The Andrews government at the time was chastised by the opposition for thinking that the Metro Tunnel would be a game changer – now everyone in this Parliament supports this project. The majority of Victorians support the Suburban Rail Loop. Those opposite have had six different policies around what they think about that project but never an alternative to what will be the travel savings and time savings and how we get people home safer and sooner. They oppose everything and deliver nothing, and we see this time and time again. They are opposed to the Suburban Rail Loop, which will deliver huge travel time savings for the Mordialloc district and the City of Kingston; they are completely opposed to this project and want to put more impact on travel safety and more risk of being on the

roads for longer travel commute times onto my community. That is the plan. The alternative is an Allan Labor government delivering the absolute intergenerational projects for the future, and this project is so critical to getting people to where they need to be. Just remember that: Metro Tunnel will be delivered this year – that is an amazing game-changing project for our city; the Frankston train line is level crossing free under a Labor government; the Mordialloc Freeway delivered substantial travel timesaving benefits; and it is only a Labor government that will deliver the Suburban Rail Loop and transform our city for the future.

### Responses

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:26): The question in relation to the member for Lara and the matter that the member for Lara raised for the attention of me as the Minister for Youth was the action to meet with the Cultura youth council together with the member for Lara, and I look forward to meeting with the youth council and discussing the great work that they do and of course speaking to them on matters that are important for young people, in particular in the electorate of Lara and of course in the region of Geelong. So I will be very happy to meet, together with the member for Lara, the youth council at a suitable time.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide information on public transport and booking policies for regional colleges in her electorate. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, and the action the member seeks is to convene a roundtable meeting with business and manufacturing industries in in her electorate. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Attorney-General, and the action the member seeks is for the Attorney-General to provide an update on the operation of Wyndham law courts. The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action the member seeks is an update from the minister on police resources for the Yarra Ranges. The member for Northcote raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and the action the member seeks is to meet and discuss with the minister how planning frameworks can best support new housing and development in the electorate of Northcote.

The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, and the action the member seeks is for the Premier to address the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and provide an update on Victoria's defence industry. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is to name the Upfield bike link to commemorate a valued member of Broadmeadows electorate, John Englart. The member for Benambra raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to provide a briefing on the resources of police in Wodonga. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action the member seeks is an update to the community on the travel benefits of the Suburban Rail Loop. I will refer all the matters raised to the relevant ministers.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

**House adjourned 7:29 pm.**