



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Thursday 9 February 2023**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Matthew Bach

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nicholas	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>1</sup>	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, David <sup>2</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP

<sup>1</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>2</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;  
 Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;  
 LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;  
 Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Thursday 9 February 2023**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Emerald Tourist Railway Board (Puffing Billy Railway) – Report, 2021–22.

Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Council – Primary Returns, 16 January 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority – Report, 2021–22.

Racing Integrity Commissioner – Report, 2021–22.

Victorian Racing Integrity Board – Report, 2021–22.

*Business of the house***Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

**Adjournment**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (09:39): I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 21 February 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Membership*

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That Mr Davis, Mr Limbrick, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt be members of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements***Bushfires commemoration**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (09:40): I rise this week to pay tribute to and to recognise and to share our ongoing grief with the victims and survivors of the Black Saturday bushfires in 2009. 173 lives were lost in the course of those catastrophic fires, and the impacts of those bushfires continue to be felt throughout the state, around Australia and indeed internationally, thanks to and as a consequence of the efforts of selfless volunteers and first responders who came to the aid of people in their hour of greatest need.

Bushfires are an increasingly significant risk to life and property across the state, and indeed this anniversary has reminded us of the ongoing risk and the need to assist communities in preparation for the inevitable increase in fires as a consequence of climate change and hotter and drier conditions.

Next week indeed we see a further anniversary, the anniversary of Ash Wednesday. None of us who were in Victoria at that time, on Black Saturday or indeed during the Black Summer bushfires, will ever forget the smell of smoke, the flecks of ash on the wind and the fear that comes with them. To everyone who is grappling with the ongoing fear, anxiety, loss, grief and trauma of these bushfires: we see you, we acknowledge you and we continue our work to protect and recognise you.

#### **Bushfires commemoration**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:42): I join with Ms Shing in noting the anniversary of the 2009 fires and the terrible impact. Many of us who were active in public life at the time remember the terrible impact and remember the terrible sense as you went into those towns and saw the damage that had been done, the lives that had been impacted so dramatically, and still there is significant resonance from those times. I also join Ms Shing in noting that next week is Ash Wednesday, an anniversary in that sense, and we should also note the terrible results there.

#### **Türkiye and Syria earthquakes**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:42): But in fact the main reason I want to stand today, on top of those, is to just mark the terrible natural disaster unfolding in Syria and in Türkiye. The images on our televisions are those that nobody can fail to be moved by – that baby being brought forward from the rubble. There are just such terrible outcomes that are occurring now, and I certainly appeal to the authorities to do everything they can and for us as community members to work with those voluntary organisations that will assist. I think the hearts of everyone in this chamber go out to everyone that is impacted – so many hundreds of people and so many lives are lost.

#### **Mentone Nylex clock**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:43): I rise to inform the house of the recently completed restoration of the Mentone Nylex clock in my electorate. Last month I had the pleasure of joining with the local community as the Nylex clock was relit. The refurbished clock was switched on for the first time in 16 years. While perhaps not as famous or conspicuous as the clock in Richmond, for many locals it brings up powerful emotions and memories of the heyday of the factory. The Nylex clock in Mentone is a symbol of the manufacturing roots of Melbourne. I am delighted to see this local icon restored, which was achieved with funding from Kingston City Council and Bunnings Mentone. In celebrating the completed works, I would like to particularly congratulate the efforts of Dorothy Booth of the Mordialloc and District Historical Society. She has been a driving force in preserving this piece of local history for the community. Finally, I would like to thank Cr Steve Staikos and mayor Cr Hadi Saab for their advocacy for and support of the restoration. As one of my first community events since being elected, I was glad to see this significant local icon restored to its full glory.

#### **Men's mental health**

**Tom McIntOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:44): Mental health is an important issue in our community, and today I rise to highlight the fantastic grassroots work of eastern Victorian locals working towards better men's mental health. Men's mental health is something I am passionate about, but it has long been a taboo topic, particularly amongst men living regionally and working in male-dominated jobs.

I want to highlight the work of two groups of men who are doing great work in their own different ways. On the Mornington Peninsula young guns Nathan, Ben and Mason founded Speak & Share through one guiding philosophy: a problem shared is a problem halved. Speak & Share is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to begin the truly hard conversations associated with mental health and to combat the stigma that surrounds it. They do this by holding workshops at schools and sporting clubs designed to facilitate the tough conversations to encourage people to open up and to change the mindset that vulnerability is weakness. They also regularly hold community events such as fun runs with the aim of increasing connection within the community. Speak & Share's very hip gear is a common sight on the peninsula, particularly amongst our younger residents, and it is encouraging to

see so many people recognising the importance of mental health and the value in open and honest conversations.

There is also great work happening in the construction industry on worksites right across Eastern Victoria. Men working in construction are at a higher risk of suicide, and it is inspiring to see local blokes taking action in their own way. Recently I joined Caleb and Jeremy from Sayf on a construction site, which happened to be part of the fantastic Gippsland line upgrade, raising awareness of their simple act that lets family know how you are feeling on a daily basis. All these groups are working hard, keeping us heading in the direction of a stronger Victoria by connecting men to each other and services.

### **Springvale temple fire**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:46): It was heartbreaking to see the destruction of the beautiful and iconic Bright Moon Buddhist Society temple in Springvale South by fire early this week. I express my condolences to all those affected by this tragedy. I cannot begin to fathom the immense grief the Buddhist community in my electorate are experiencing as they grapple with the loss of this spiritual site and the uncertainty it has created about their loved ones' ashes. I am only relieved that no-one was injured, and I would like to thank the local emergency services for the diligent work in keeping our communities safe.

Built with hard work and community activism, this temple is a shining beacon of harmony and spirituality in our community. The Buddhist community make an immeasurable contribution to our state. Their traditions, festivals and festivities are vibrant and spirited, and it is through communities like theirs that we can unite and continue to build a more cohesive and diverse Victoria. Although they are going through a very difficult time right now, this fire will not lessen their resolve. Rather, it will unite the wider community in shared grief and a determination to build back stronger. I am confident that the community, with their passion, drive and determination, will see this temple resurrected and once again become the significant place for worship for Buddhists in Melbourne's south-east.

I know the Premier has made a commitment to stand with the temple in their recovery journey, and I also stand with the Bright Moon society community in any way possible to ensure that the recovery is swift and as uncomplicated as possible. I am with you side by side on this journey of grief and renewal, and I know that my good friend in the other place Meng Heang Tak is also. Thank you to the temple president Mr Vinh Loi Ly, the committee and the volunteers for your amazing work to support and console the community during their time of need. Your efforts are greatly appreciated, and our thoughts and best wishes are with you all.

**Sitting suspended 9:48 am until 10:12 am.**

### *Announcements*

#### **Photography in chamber**

**The PRESIDENT** (10:12): Can I just remind members – and you would have noticed it on Tuesday anyway – we have a professional photographer taking photos on the lower level of the inaugural speeches. Also, as I emailed, family and friends in the gallery are welcome to take photos, but respect the other members and also respect any other guests in doing that.

*Address to Parliament***Governor's speech***Address-in-reply***Debate resumed on motion of Michael Galea:**

That this house agrees to the following address to the Governor in reply to the Governor's opening speech:

## GOVERNOR

We, the Legislative Council of Victoria assembled in Parliament, express our loyalty to Australia and the people of Victoria, and thank you for the speech which you have made to the Parliament.

We declare that we will faithfully carry out the important duties entrusted to us by the people of Victoria, to advance the best interests of all sections of the community.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:12): I would like to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to their future leaders and the generations yet to come on this continent. There is no social or environmental justice without First Nations justice.

I walk into this building with a constant urge to pinch myself – that this is a place that the people of North-Eastern Metro have put me to represent them. I never set out to be a member of Parliament. This time two years ago I was an artist and composer, pretty much straight out of university. But then my cohort walked into an industry that closed overnight. The impacts of COVID on the arts and cultural sector cannot be overstated. We all lost work, and almost none of us were eligible for JobKeeper. Our federal government sent us the message that our jobs did not matter. I will not tell you how many hours I spent combing through the meagre state and local funding, competing with other artists for any government support, but what I will say is many of us were pushed directly into rental and housing stress. Many of my colleagues were forced to leave the industry and have not since returned. As a result, we are losing a generation of our storytellers sharing what it means to live in communities like those of Victoria.

I know what it means to have a government tell you you do not matter. That is why I ran – to make sure this does not happen again. There are so many communities marginalised by the decisions our governments make. As a queer person, I have seen my LGBTIQ+ community be used as a perennial political football. We are championed for cynical political gain when it is electorally advantageous, but we are cast aside when it is politically expedient. Only six years ago our human rights were the subject of public, often vitriolic debate in the marriage equality plebiscite. I know what it is like to have my rights and my way of life on public trial. To this community I promise that I will work hard every day to make this Parliament more inclusive and compassionate. This institution needs more queer voices. It needs more trans and gender-diverse voices. It needs more voices from people still sunburnt from Sunday's Pride March.

But maybe what compels me most to be a voice in this Parliament is seeing how young people are getting left behind. It is getting harder and harder for young people to get a rental or access affordable housing. We are dealing with more frequent natural disasters and damaging weather events, and most frustratingly, we are being shut out from decision-making on these issues that will impact us most of all. We are living through a climate crisis, a housing affordability crisis and an inequality crisis, but how many people from my generation are in this room? As the youngest MP in the new Parliament, it is important to me that we see these issues addressed and that young people have a seat at the table, speaking up for ourselves and generations yet to come, and represent our broader community. Our Parliament should reflect the Victorian population.

I never set out to be a member of Parliament, but these experiences drove me to get out in my community, push for change and give my generation a seat at the table. I would like to see in coming years more diverse voices enter this place and for more young people to have their voices heard. We

are going to be living with the decisions made in this chamber in the long term. It is important that our interests and experiences are taken into account to ensure the world of the future is one we want to live in. That is what I and my Greens colleagues are here fighting for.

Only the Greens are speaking to me and my values, representing me without compromise on the issues that affect me and my community. We are a grassroots political operation. We do not take donations from vested corporate interests, and consequently we really rely on the hard work of our team of volunteers. Throughout the campaign they were getting out there, speaking to community members and sharing what a progressive vision for North-Eastern Metro and Victoria could look like with more Greens in Parliament. I would like to thank Deepak, Alex, Emily, Reuben, Joanne, Kellie, Steph, Julie, Chris, Brendan, Nadia, Sophia, Liz, Asher and Sarah for backing me as candidates in running this race. A shout-out to the big crew of supporters who stood for hours in the elements, including names like Liezl, Cass, Rosemary, Maurice, Dana, Mallika, Kate and many, many more in support of me running. When we went into this campaign we knew that we were up against a system that was hell-bent on locking us out. Between the money from corporate interests and dodgy group voting tickets, we knew that we would have to work like stink to get into this place – but we did it. I am so grateful to my community for trusting me, and I look forward to serving them and getting tangible outcomes for them.

The people of North-Eastern Metro have put me in this place. I am proud to call myself one of them, having grown up in Eltham and lived in the region my whole life. We are hardworking, community-minded people who want to be a part of the solution to the struggles facing our state. We are politically engaged. We listen to local radio. We watch the news. We take personal action to reduce our own emissions. Growing up, reducing our waste and recycling was always a part of daily life. We all collectively lost our minds when we could not find a home for our soft plastics. My mum still has a giant bag of old wrappers waiting for its time to shine in the middle of the lounge room. Let it go, Michelle!

The suburbs of North-Eastern Metro are vibrant and green, with large pockets of protected green space and nature which support and sustain us. Many will have distinct memories of this during the lockdown era, when we spent time walking our streets and parklands, finding peace and taking care of ourselves and each other. It is because of this abundance that we can appreciate why we must take care of the land that we are on, and we know it in turn is taking care of us. We must show it respect and live in harmony with it for our own sake and that of future generations. For North-Eastern Metro that means protecting local biodiversity, looking after our creeks and waterways and creating nature corridors for our wildlife to coexist with us for years to come.

That also means having an honest, open conversation about housing, ensuring that demand for social, public and affordable housing is met. We cannot allow the current state of affairs to continue, with unaffordable and inadequate housing as purely an investment asset rather than treating our homes as a human right which is integral to our own health, safety and wellbeing. And we also cannot forsake our local green spaces and protected environments in the name of property developer profits. We need a commonsense approach. I am not the first person to call for this, and I would like to pay my respect to the community leaders and activists in my electorate who have been tirelessly pursuing these issues for years, be it in landcare groups, community actions, campaigns to VCAT, waterway clean-ups and revegetation. I hear you. I will fight for you. I even know I have no say in the matter, because either way I know you will be pulling me up at the local supermarket, holding me to account in the middle of aisle six next to the toilet paper – Quilton three-ply, recycled.

I find it well put by Greta Thunberg:

We live in a strange world where children must sacrifice their education in order to protest against the destruction of their future, where the people who have contributed the least to this crisis are the ones who are going to be affected the most.

I believe that too often in the state of Victoria, under successive governments and political cycles, it is the voices of the community, particularly the young and the diverse members of our community, that are not the priority of the political class. I think if the interests of our truly broad community and the planet itself were central to our decision-making and discussion in this state, then we would see a ban on new fossil fuel projects.

I want us to stop pouring fuel on the fire while we are trying to put it out. I want to see affordable housing made available to all, as housing is a human right. I believe in our capacity to live in harmony with our surroundings and live with the land that was here long before us. I will fight to see better investment in public education, of which I myself have benefitted directly, which gives all our young people a strong start in life irrespective of household income. I further note that in the historic composition of this new chamber I want us to acknowledge the reality that members of our community do take drugs, and I will push for a health-first harm minimisation approach to this reality rather than a punitive mindset which criminalises people.

And when community members express their views on the imbalances and injustices occurring in our state through organised protest and political activism, I want to see a future where residents are able to do so without fear of intimidation and being criminalised in the name of corporate interests. Corporate Australia should not get off scot-free when by the same test we send citizens to prison. Branding compassionate campaigning from community with criminality goes against the interests of our young people, who strike for climate and a planet worth living on. They are fighting for their lives. They are fighting for our lives. We are in the midst of a climate and extinction crisis and this government is passing anti-protest laws. How are you not the villains of that story?

I have been sent here with a mandate to deliver for my community and keep up the fight on their behalf. It has certainly been a shock to the system. This place can often feel alien to me, with marble busts peering down hallways and the towering presence of former parliamentarians and premiers on each wall. The very building seems to impose stern questions on you as an outsider, a newcomer, particularly as a young person: ‘Who are you? What are you doing here? Do you think we can’t tell you had to google how to tie a necktie?’. While on one hand it can come off as the opposite of a welcoming vibe, I think it pushes me to work harder, to go against the grain and claim the place that young people, planet protectors and champions for social justice should have in this chamber. People are desperate to be heard.

Young people are at breaking point. We want to be listened to and for our perspective to be heard – for our perspective to have impact. Listening and showing compassion are traits that are not party specific. We all have potential to demonstrate that in this term. I would like to think that everyone in this place has come with a mindset to make a difference for their community and make Victoria the best version of itself that it can be. It is something I would like us to keep in mind for the rest of this term, even when debates become heated. It is certainly something that our community, especially our young people, expect of us.

While I can say that this time last year I certainly did not think being in this place was going to be part of my journey, I will work hard to honour the responsibility and faith my community is putting in me. It is a huge honour. While there is plenty of pain and plenty of anger out there in the community, my path to now has taught me: do not get mad. Get involved. Get elected. Do not be a bystander.

I will say this to the people in this chamber: do not forget it is an honour to be here. That honour comes with grave responsibility. The decisions we make here impact people’s lives. In some cases they cost people’s lives. If you cannot live up to that responsibility, then get out of the way. I can tell you there is a generation of young people watching, waiting, ready to take your place. We cannot let them down.

*Members applauded.*

**Nicholas McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:33): Thank you, President, and congratulations to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to pay my respects to all of our Indigenous people.

I did have a speech, I might say, to begin with, but I have dispensed with that. I will go on dot points and notes, and you will forgive me when I read because I am not a fan of reading too much. We will see by the end of this speech whether that is true.

It strikes me that I would like to pay particular respect to Sheena Watt. When we have in this chamber a descendant it is obvious to me that I should pay our respects to you, your parents, your grandmother. I watched your maiden speech. To me that is an obvious thing to do, and it is something that I think is both appropriate and necessary in some regards.

I am also respectful of Jacinta Price and Fred Chaney. I want to mention Fred Chaney. I think I first heard him speak in 1991 in Canberra. I was fortunate to be part of the Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Trust for Young Australians national capital seminar, which is one hell of a title for young people.

Fred spoke eloquently and passionately and I think shocked most people who were there, who, it is probably fair to say, at that young age of 17 or 18 were probably not Liberal. But he understood personally and intimately the problems faced by Indigenous people in this country and the impact of racism more broadly.

My interest in these matters is not new, it is fair to say. I suppose, like many of my generation, I was impacted. I remember going to La Trobe University, where I was studying, to see the Donald Woods Bantu Stephen Biko story. That struck a chord with me, and that was at a period of our history when apartheid was still part of the norm in at least one country, at least formally.

Madiba Mandela is also a person that I draw from, who I had the privilege to see in person and who I had the privilege to see in action in Africa. He did not hesitate even when he was confronted with black-on-black racism, and he did not hesitate to advance the interests of all people, particularly in Burundi, a country I am very well acquainted with and a country I have come to love and lived in for some time.

Malcolm X is someone I also draw inspiration from. These are probably not names you were expecting me to give today. The truth is black lives do matter. It is trite to say it, but we say it in this chamber and we say it outside but in the rest of the world it is still really not the reality. I lived in Africa for too long not to understand that when 200 or 300 Africans are massacred the rest of the world does not really pay attention. To the rest of the world black lives still do not matter as much as the emphasis we seem to give to when white people die. It is just a sad and stark reality of where we are at. But there is progress, and so I cling to that and I cling to those who wish to advance understanding and tolerance of such.

I am reminded, though, at the same time, that deaths in custody in this state, something raised by my colleagues just recently, are still unacceptably – well, there is no ‘acceptable’, but they are completely unacceptable. And that also goes for bail and in particular its impact on our Indigenous population. Despite efforts even in these recent days to tackle that issue, it is met, it is probably fair to say, with administrative disinterest and pedestrian urgency. It is really quite a condemnation of all of us as we sit here and simply put up with it. On any side of politics, we all have a voice. You do not need a licence to use it. You are all in your own parties, forged from within. That is why you are here. You are a long time dead, so get on with it.

I remember a story I was told when I lived in Congo, one of the first countries I worked in in Africa, and this goes to the heart of why racism does matter. If you think you are not part of it or you think that you do not contribute to it and you are standing still and doing nothing, then you do. It requires activism in the same way democracy requires activism. The story was that a young boy, probably in the order of 12 to 13, was on a plane flying from the capital of Congo, Brazzaville, to Pointe-Noire –

it is a former colony, like most African countries are – and they hit some significant turbulence. The two pilots were white. The boy was black. The mother was black. The boy turned to the mother and said, ‘Mum, it’s okay. The pilots are white.’ It is a very sad story, because what it says is that racism changes a child’s perception of who they are and what they are capable of, both positively and negatively. So anything we can do in this place to address that imbalance and go one better – recognising that from time to time, as they have done in South Africa, it takes more severe measures to achieve that balance in the short term until an equilibrium can be achieved in the long term.

Dr Heath, I think you are to blame for the fact that I now speak about Dr Martin Luther King – J-R, as they say in the States. He talked of these things. Many people, when they think of him, think about race, they think about colour – a white boy, a black boy – but he also talked about Jew and gentile, Protestant and Catholic. What he spoke about was freedom. What he spoke about was equality. What he spoke about was peace, tolerance and respect.

In recent days in this chamber, from my observation, I know that we do not all agree necessarily with the way this place runs or on what we say, but I offer this observation: when we stand outside because we do not like the Lord’s Prayer, we are not showing respect. And as people who would like to see that respect in other aspects of our lives, this is not the place for protest; this is a place of privilege. Come in here, show your respect and be part of the change you want to see, because unless we practise what we preach and unless we are respectful to all religions, then how can we possibly ask the rest of the community to follow us? We are not leaders. I am not a religious person, so I cannot be labelled as such. I simply have some basic respect. Whether I agree with it or disagree with it is beside the point. It is what it is, and if I do not like it, I will work to change it. If I do not have the numbers, then I lose. That is the way it should be. That is the way a democracy works. At heart I am a libertarian. I am a democrat – with a small d, I emphasise – and I am a proud member of the Liberal Party of Australia.

I am also very proud that as a youngster, like so many youngsters these days, I did understand the importance of the environment, passionately. I was, as a youngster – grades 5 and 6 – passionate about animal cruelty and the testing on animals for make-up, so it will not surprise many of you that that is the reason I never wear make-up. I cared about the ozone layer. I cared about recycling. I still care about recycling. I still cannot get over the fact we are quite happy, all of us, to send our garbage to Bangladesh, Thailand, China – the dumping grounds. I still cannot quite understand why an intelligent people cannot for themselves recycle their own garbage. I was passionate about the oceans, upset by the fact that we continue to use them as dumping grounds. I was aghast at big game hunting, aghast at the loss of the Amazon. These are things and issues I hope that we all can advance in our time here, for all our sakes.

I suppose there is one thing in particular I wish to use my time here for, and I do not expect nor hope that my time here is long. I am not a fan of it; I think you get in, you get what you want done and you get out. That is just me. But I do feel like there has been an assault on our democracy in this state for some time, and it is ironic that I stand in this chamber where the assault is probably at its peak. Many of you who are new to this chamber may not understand what I am referring to, but for too long this place has made so-called reforms in the name of democracy, ironically, and yet they have been anything but democratic.

We have turned this chamber into a lesser chamber. Once upon a time we had the right to block supply in here. That right was taken away from us. We are not equal houses. Do not think you are for a second. That other chamber, that other place, has got the right to block supply. You had it once. You do not have it anymore. They took it away from you, and you took it away from yourselves. And then, as if not content with that, we took away the need to actually democratically elect replacements. These were the so-called reforms that occurred in the 1990s and into the 2000s. So when there is a vacancy here we will dispense with the public and the voting; we will just return you right where you were with your party. There is almost no greater insult. I have sat in this chamber in the last couple of days –

and I was here as a youngster in 1991, 1992 listening to lots of debates – and seen the fact that government backbenchers cannot ask questions.

That is the training ground. But we have replaced them with ministers statements, which seem broadly innocuous and non-offensive but somewhat of a waste of time. Maybe they are not. Maybe I am too quick to judge; time will tell. But I think we have lost something in that exchange. I think the backbenchers of the government have lost something significant in that exchange, and one day I hope we are there. I hope everyone gets to have a chance at that.

An attack on democracy is not a good thing for anyone at any time, and we are supposed to be the beacon; we are supposed to be the light that others follow. It would be remiss of me to be here today and not talk about what the previous Parliament did, the 59th Parliament – the pernicious rulings of the 59th Parliament, and I speak of the whole. I wrote about this at the time, but never again should we as elected representatives allow Parliament to impose upon its citizens such conditions, such limitations, such breaches of their own individual rights, their own political rights, their own religious rights. The kinds of unjustified, disgraceful actions that were at play in this state – incarcerating thousands of people in their housing commission towers, when just months before that we were all criticising China when they did the same thing. Remember when they were welding the doors of people's homes? Imposing a night curfew – for which there was and is still no medical evidence it was required – was convenient, sure, but if convenience is the high jump bar, then our democracy is in serious trouble.

I will not accept that we did not know that it was coming. I will not accept that we could not have done better. I will not accept that this state should not have had a pandemic plan in place. I have lived in Asia. They have had bird flu, they have had avian flu, they have had zika. I mean, it was obvious. We had daily flights from Wuhan to Melbourne – almost daily – in March 2020, well after the outbreak. In fact I can tell you that because at the time I looked at flights myself. I travelled at that time. I can tell you the return flight fare from Wuhan to Melbourne was \$178. They did not stop; they kept coming. So it was no surprise that Victoria was the first state to have the first case of COVID – astonishing. Who would have thought? To limit the number of people who could go to funerals – think about it. I am not talking about Afghanistan. I have lived in Afghanistan; they have never limited the number of people that can go to funerals. To disallow someone to worship in their place of worship – this might in context have an explanation, but when you couple that with the fact that strangers by the hundreds could flock to Dan Murphy's and Coles, it somehow gets difficult to justify.

I am all for saving lives, but there is a balance. The only Premier in this country that I saw trying to achieve that balance to the best of her ability was the New South Wales Premier. It is a shame we did not do that here. If that was not bad enough, then to lock Victorians out of their own state – what a disgrace. History should judge us badly. History should judge the 59th Parliament appallingly. It is my hope that those people who were adversely affected, and the businesses, do seek and do receive compensation. Why shouldn't they? When you change the rules on people midstream, regardless of the reason, I would have thought it is inherent to have to pay up.

That is not the only attack. Donation laws – what an affront to democracy. The attempt by this Parliament to create a two-party, or probably a one-party, state. What a disgrace! If I want to receive a donation from a friend, colleague, whoever it is – because they love me, because they hate me – I should have that right. What I should be required to do is be transparent about it, and then we should have in place measures – as we do – so that if my behaviour is corrupt, I am put in prison and so is the person that gave me the money. This approach in government in this country where we take the stick to people rather than a carrot, where we penalise the few who break the rules rather than the majority who do not – it is the modern plague in this country. It is the way we govern. It is the default. I simply cannot abide by it. It is intentionally designed to strangle small parties and independent people, much less that person who just thinks they are going to put a name on the ballot and try and take it up to the major parties. They should be scrapped, absolutely scrapped. They should be replaced with the

strongest, toughest transparency laws in the country, if not the world, and then let us get on with it. Let us have some competition. Let the people decide. Let the people judge.

Because the irony is at the same time as we have introduced these donation laws, we have introduced public funding. It did not happen before, boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen – public funding. And the irony is we have had all this red shirt stuff and the rest of it, but every single dollar we all spend we get back because it is publicly funded. We are all using public money for political activity every single day, on or off the payroll. Doesn't it strike anyone as just lunacy? When are we going to wake up to ourselves and see it for what it is? It is an attempt to control people. It is an attempt to create a one-party state. Stop accepting it. Public funding of elections, my oh my – if only the Victorian people really knew.

Then we come to the gaming of the electoral system. I knocked on doors for a year in Jagajaga. I think I received in the order of 4000 votes more than Jenny Macklin, and still I lost – primary votes, not the votes that are recounted and are counted and counted. Despite our democratic system of one man or one woman, one vote – 4000 votes, it is a lot of doors to knock on. Four thousand votes more, and yet this system has been now for years systematically gamed. Look at the figures. I took a look at them last night. I was impressed. I mean with what we have been able to achieve. In 2018, 0.6 per cent, Rod Barton with 2508 votes and a quota of 70,000 can still win. That is better than the lotto, you have got to say. Forget getting a ticket, run for Parliament. A Liberal Democrat, 0.84 per cent, still got elected; Animal Justice Party, 2.7 per cent, still got elected. Reason Party, 1.37 per cent – guess what, still got elected. We are not doing too well this time. You knew I would come to this – Shooters and Fishers, 2.9 per cent; Liberal Democrat, 3.5 per cent; One Nation, 3.6 per cent; Animal Justice Party, 1.5 per cent. I listened to the debate the other day, and all I heard was the justification for keeping the status quo because it was their jobs. Create your own job. Do what the rest of the punters have to do: apply for one, flip a burger at McDonald's. I don't joke – I have done it. I would do it again. If this Parliament has any conscience at all, it will cease the group voting tickets. It will end it once and for all, and it will not replace it with bribes, it will not replace it with payoffs, it will simply do what is right.

That brings me to truth. As I have said before, transparency is the greatest driver of public behaviour; truth in advertising is where it is at. That should be one of the most urgent matters before this Parliament so at the next election it is not just truth in advertising for everyone except politicians and political parties, it includes politicians and political parties. What are we afraid of? Is it so hard to have to tell the truth? Or is it that we actually tell so many lies that it would be a little bit awkward? That last election, where we talked about privatisation and the evils of the Liberal Party, so-called – wow, where is history? It has affirmed my view that we have to teach better history at schools, because somehow the other side of politics forgot about their federal colleagues. They forgot about themselves. Do you remember Paul Keating, Bob Hawke, Qantas? That was the national airline – sold that off, privatised, gone. Commonwealth Bank – privatised, gone.

**A member** interjected.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** I am coming to the State Bank of Victoria. That was the state government. It was Joan Kirner who started privatisation of electricity. Let *Hansard* show, and let it be in bold and the biggest font you can have, Joan Kirner's Labor government started the privatisation of electricity assets when she sold 51 per cent of Loy Yang B in 1992. Wow. But she was not done. She had sold the state bank. We were on our knees. Those old enough might remember it. We were two weeks off defaulting our public pay cheques. Do we remember that as well? We were two weeks off defaulting on our public pay cheques.

**A member** interjected.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Oh, superannuation – who said that? Was that you, David? Superannuation, that is right – unfunded liabilities in superannuation, which means they actually did not have the money to pay for their superannuation. That is to say nothing of the Melbourne Port – a

50-year lease – the land titles office, VicRoads, Snowy Hydro: this government. I do not mind being held to account, I just mind hypocrisy. If you going to throw a stone, know the others that have been thrown before, because that is a joke.

In any democracy what is also critical is an independent umpire. I have been in politics a while, I think it is fair to say – not the longest, a while. I do not ever recall in the better part of 30 years hearing from the most senior echelons of the Victorian Electoral Commission during an election campaign, but we did this time. It was a disgrace. It caused me to question, for the first time in this country, my confidence in their independence, and I was not alone. And then I heard their representatives go on radio in the middle of a campaign, having briefed the media the day before and given comments in the media as well, so if I had any unease or misgivings about the independence or just the job the VEC does, then that was alarming. And let me be clear, I am not talking about the rank-and-file workers of the VEC. That is not who I am talking about for a second; they did a sensational job. I am talking about a VEC which spoke with what I think sounded like a partisan voice. I am talking about a VEC which I think failed to provide balance. Not Afghanistan, not Burundi, not Liberia – I have been in those countries and they did it, they provided balance – but Victoria last year. They opened the polling booths late, delayed, all over the place. And what is worse – and we are included in the act; it talks about and actually stipulates what we all must do around polling booths – they actually had no regard, that is the senior echelons, for the duty of care they had to the volunteers of all parties. How many of us stood in a road? How many of us stood in a car park trying to hand things out while they applied draconian rules without any common sense?

It was unfair to all of our volunteers. It put them in dangerous positions, and no-one in the VEC cared for their duty of care because it came from the top. It was unacceptable. It was 2022, not 1822. Responsibility starts at the top. This Parliament should receive a resignation. There is no doubt about it, absolutely no doubt about it.

We can also extend our transparency to senior statutory appointments – judges. This place has no say in that. If I hear one more time that judges are independent – they are not independent, they are appointed by ministers. There is no transparency around that process. The Chief Commissioner of Police – there is no transparency around that and no involvement of Parliament. We do not get to choose, we do not get to have a say. The FOI commissioner, the head of the EPA – why are those positions not filled by bipartisan, equal members of the Parliament, in committee if you want? Whatever you want. Not behind closed doors. It speaks to transparency. It speaks to our confidence in the system we have.

When we are speaking of truth, we must also speak of other public policies. The injecting room is one that I have spoken about many times. Again, let me be clear, what we ought to do here is to have an outcome for drug users which meets their every need. We are seeking to assist them and support them and save them – save their lives and save them from harm. In fact I brought the act with me today. I have had it for some time, and I know it reasonably well. Section 55A, 'Object', is unusual in some regards in politics, particularly in this Parliament, in that it stipulates in paragraphs (a) through to (f) what it is supposed to do, the clear objectives. On every single count it has failed. If you care to read the interim report, it has failed. They are not my words. Do not take my word for it, read the report.

The first objective is to reduce the number of avoidable deaths and the harm caused by overdoses of drugs of dependence. The experts reported that 16 deaths occurred within 1 kilometre of the Richmond injecting room during the first five quarters of its operation. That figure is one more death than the preceding five quarters. During the first 12 months of the trial there were 1232 overdoses inside the injecting room and in the following eight months there were 1968. That is a 59 per cent increase. During the first 18 months 271 of the 2657 overdoses were characterised as extremely serious, requiring the opioid-reversing agent, while some 30 overdoses resulted in the attendance of ambulance paramedics. Sadly, the number of deaths outside increased by one more in the 15 months after the facility opened compared to the 15 months before.

The report concludes that, sadly, overall there were no obvious trends observed, with the numbers of deaths recorded since the medically supervised injecting room opened largely similar to those recorded before the medically supervised injecting room opened, and yet we are consistently told in public that it is saving lives. It is my sincere hope that it does save lives, but the evidence we have at hand is that it is not. When the new report – the delayed report, the report that was not produced before the election – is finally produced, I will be reading it with a fine-tooth comb because on every one of these counts we are doing drug users no favour. In fact, on the evidence of that report, we are harming them immeasurably.

That brings me to cannabis. The CDC are well known to all of us, I am sure – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In their words:

- One study estimated that approximately 3 in 10 people who use marijuana have marijuana use disorder.
- Another study estimated that people who use cannabis have about a 10% likelihood of becoming addicted.

What are the long-term effects of marijuana on the brain? The CDC said:

Marijuana affects brain development. Developing brains, such as those in babies, children, and teenagers, are especially susceptible to the harmful effects of marijuana and ... (THC). Although scientists are still learning about the effects of marijuana on developing brains, studies suggest that marijuana use by mothers during pregnancy could be linked to problems with attention, memory, problem-solving skills, and behavior in their children.

Using marijuana before age 18 may affect how the brain builds connections for functions like attention, memory, and learning.

There is mental ill health: people who use marijuana are more likely to develop temporary psychosis and long-lasting mental disorders, including schizophrenia. The association between marijuana and schizophrenia is stronger in people who start using marijuana at an early age and use marijuana more frequently. The list goes on. It is my sincere hope that as we come to debate these issues, we debate them with the facts and the science – that is all I ask – and that our approach is that we do no harm. That will be my approach.

So what of Victoria? What next? Victoria is a great state, but it has been some time since we have had a great vision. Even our Big Build is building us now billions of dollars of duplicated train lines all across the state – not triplicated, they are duplicated – which means at some point in the not-too-distant future we will have to go back and triplicate them, because without triplication you cannot have express services. And so again we make all the same mistakes we made in the 1980s and before that in the 60s and the 50s and the 40s.

Instead of planning a second international airport, we are still playing around with trying to get a train connection to the first one. Dump the first one; just go for the second one. Be done with it. It is a waste of money, a waste of time. We have all played around with it for way too long in politics.

Our federation is broken. COVID showed that. It is not surprising. The states created the federation. They create, by act, local government. While many of my colleagues will not share this view, I am a republican and I hope there is the day, in time, when we can finally have an Australian head of state. It is long overdue. 1986 was the last legal tie that we cut with Britain and the Privy Council. It has been an evolution. That evolution should continue in the interests of all of our people and the interests of our nation's own independence, because we would also be foolish to assume that we are forever of this geographic footprint. The history of the world shows and tells us these borders will not be forever, ladies and gentlemen – not in my lifetime, but if *Hansard* still exists at that time. The history of the world says at some point your boundaries change. Things change. I have lived in countries where things change overnight pretty quickly. When change comes, change is quick.

It also strikes me there is ample opportunity to embrace others. We used to be big thinkers. In the past we have even entertained in this country the possibility of housing another nation's people in the

Kimberley, another nation's people in Tasmania, to give them another nation. It is an irony, isn't it, because while we still struggled to reconcile with the people who were first here we were contemplating giving part of that land to an entirely different nation. It was an insult, but it also demonstrated that we have the capacity to think, to act, to do good. Let us start at home. Let us then see what we have to offer.

Two further points. This has been vexing because, like many fair, reasonable people who in the last 24 months have made financial decisions about their incomes, their households, based on the advice of the Governor of the Reserve Bank, I think he should do the right thing and resign, today. Enough people have called for it. You cannot give that advice. You cannot tell people that there will not be interest rate rises until 2024 and then nine consecutive times hike up the price of money. What a disgrace. He should do the right thing and resign. Every member of this chamber should likewise call for him to do that, because of the toll and cost to everyday Victorians who now have to manage the consequences of taking that advice – advice not just given once but given repeatedly, broadly, and not the kind of advice that people usually ignore.

Lastly, I speak of the media. It has become somewhat of a sport in this country to criticise the media when it suits and to criticise particular media outlets, either labelling them conservative or left wing or whatever it is. Kevin Rudd likes to do it. Steve Bracks more recently did it on election night. In my experience it does not matter who is on the front page; it does not necessarily dictate the outcome. We have all seen it – stick around long enough. But if you keep going for journalists – because journalists are the heart of any flagship or of any outlet – then you will start to erode yet another pillar of our democracy. That is unacceptable. They have a job to do. They are not here to be sycophants. They are not here to publicise what it is you do. They are here to scrutinise and keep us accountable, and so every time you criticise them simply because you do not like what they say or what they publish, you take another part of that pillar away. It is the bedrock of a civil society. Hunting season on the media is over. I will stick up for them even when they criticise me; that is their job. Thank you very much.

*Members applauded.*

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:23): President, congratulations on your appointment. I begin today by paying my respects to the traditional owners in the electorate I represent, being the Boon Wurrung people and the Wurundjeri people, who are also the traditional owners of the land that we are meeting on today, and all other First Peoples. I acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, that important work goes on in this state to progress towards a treaty and that this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

I grew up in Southern Metro. My first job was at the Macca's in Elsternwick on Nepean Highway. My schooling was also in the inner south, and I have very happy memories of being a drama nerd that found a place of friendship and acceptance there. It was a lovely place to grow up. I have fond memories of long afternoons at the local park with my little brother and sister and going on adventures and bike rides along the foreshore or down neighbourhood laneways.

Later, during my uni years, I was fortunate to spend time living in other forward-thinking cities like Vancouver and Tokyo that boast a day-to-day connection with the incredible local environment and a public transport system that is the envy of the world respectively. When I got home from these journeys the way that I grounded myself again was by taking a long bike ride through that sweet-smelling scrub on the foreshore, which I later learned was rehabilitated and nurtured by the local council and our community, past the icons of Luna Park and the Espy and looking towards our beautiful city by the bay, or Nerm. Now that gorgeous ride, which is as safe and pleasant as it is because it is mostly on separated cycle infrastructure, is my commute to the electorate office. This is my home, and I am very proud to represent our ambitious, intelligent and connected community in this Parliament.

Going back a little further to what shaped my childhood experiences, my mum grew up on a farm that produced wheat and wool, and when I was growing up we visited often with my grandparents, who still lived off rainwater that they collected in their tanks. This gave me an appreciation for how precious the life-giving properties of our planet are and how we can live happily with plenty if we are judicious and thoughtful in using what is given us by nature. As well as making sure we kids had access to nature, Mum always supported me in pursuing my varied interests and hobbies, from choir through to the *X-Files* – whatever weird thing I was into – as well as encouraging me in my schooling. Dad through his work as a lawyer inspired in me the ambition to practise law, instilling in me the importance of a good education and a sense of duty to try and do something useful with your work. He also helped me develop an early appreciation of what has turned out to be a prescient love for *Yes Minister*, and I feel that by maintaining some humour regarding the workings of this Parliament that will serve us all very well in this chamber throughout the term. I feel so blessed to have been afforded that appreciation of the city and the country and to have grown up in a house where creativity and learning were always encouraged.

When I was growing up I had a feeling that we were a nation that was proudly open. We were embracing and celebrating the diversity of our community. Multiculturalism was officially celebrated throughout the late 1980s and early 90s. We were fixing the hole in the ozone layer and we were globally cooperating, and Australia seemed like a good global citizen. We sang *Heal the World* in our school assemblies, and *Captain Planet* was on after school. I had faith that even though there were baddies out there – and in the cartoon they were the embodiment of evils like extractivism and pollution – there were good guys fighting back against these problems. I felt like the grown-ups had things under control. As I have lived through a series of unfortunate events – to name a few, September 11, the global financial crisis, one catastrophic bushfire season after another from Black Saturday through to the Black Summer – that faith in the grown-ups has been eroded. Specifically, I no longer felt like our governments were acting – or acting strongly enough – in the interests of local people and our environment. I am not alone in this loss of confidence. In 2021 Caroline Hickman’s groundbreaking climate anxiety study found that three-quarters of young people feel that, given the climate crisis, the future is frightening. They think that governments’ responses are not good enough and they feel more betrayed by them than reassured. Given the scale and the urgency of the climate crisis and the dire threat it presents for the good life for us now and for generations to come, I applaud and I am strengthened by the courage of youth climate activists, in particular the school strikers for climate. The clear-eyed focus of young people on the solutions – getting off fossil fuels and a just and rapid transition to clean energy – and their passion for action get me out of bed in the morning. While I am in this place I will strive to stand up for people and the environment now and for generations to come.

I so far have personally pulled through those unfortunate events okay, in no small part thanks to the excellent education opportunities and the stable housing situation I was fortunate to grow up with. But I know others have not had the same luck and privilege as me. Throughout my career I have witnessed how misfortune can befall any of us and how social and structural determinants of health can influence these outcomes. When providing pro bono legal assistance to people without housing I saw firsthand that anyone can become homeless, and it is a situation that has only become more perilous as we have seen reduced investment in public housing by successive governments and inadequate rights for those who rent their homes. Working as a law reform advocate, I have seen how anyone can fall prey to insidious marketing or addictive products of harmful industries, such as gambling. And as a local councillor I saw our community’s passion for climate action and I also saw their frustration at how slow our governments – still under the thrall of the fossil fuel industry – are to act. I also saw, as we all did during the pandemic, that governments do have the power to act decisively and swiftly to address these issues, as during the pandemic when people were housed in hotel accommodation. The solutions really are right there in front of us.

So I come here sceptical of the value of hope. Hope is what sustains us when things seem grim – and there are some grim prospects ahead of us if we fail to act on the climate and inequality crises – but

hope can really wear thin. Through my own experience of climate grief and anxiety, my dull dismay at visiting Franz Josef Glacier and seeing from the historical markers its clear retreat, diving with my sister on the Great Barrier Reef, moving with rainbow fish amongst the coral but seeing on the sea floor below brittle bleached coral, and that deep realisation that I am likely part of the last generation to witness these places in anything like their former glory, I share the fury and the disdain of young climate activists when we are told to keep hoping for a better future and I understand why we have moved to demanding action.

Though we might notice some of the most obvious impacts of the climate crisis when we visit these exceptional natural wonders, we no longer have to look very far to see the dangerous impacts of climate change. Our homes are under threat from flooding. Extreme heat and bushfires are bringing a watchful and a wearying note to our summers, which used to be really carefree. And it is making our cities swelter.

When I cannot summon hope and despair threatens to engulf me, like many in these last few years especially, I have turned to the arts to remind me of the good in people and our creative potential. Music, theatre, writing, comedy – all creative forms help us to experience and articulate painful emotions, they help us make sense of this world and they help us, crucially, to imagine different futures. It was reading up on sci-fi that I came across the term ‘hopepunk’, which helped me face another year of turning up to fight the good fight after another summer of extreme weather destruction and disastrous government inaction. Hopepunk was one of the *Collins English Dictionary*’s new and notable terms for 2019, and for me it conjures this image of a famous panel from the comic *Tank Girl*. Tank Girl sits on a rock, pulling on her boots against an orange sky with a cuppa at her side. ‘I can’t let things be this way,’ she says. ‘We can be wonderful. We can be magnificent. We can turn this shit around.’ I have to believe it, and I think we all should, because the truth is we are past hope. Blind hope at this point is downright dangerous. Hopepunk, though, offers us a way of describing collective effort and resilience in the face of bleak times and dark forces, and at this point we need effort and we need action.

So I have come through that cynicism, and instead of getting jaded, I have stayed green. And I know that I am in very good company in pulling on my boots, because all across our region people and community are already turning their hope into action. In local government I was lucky to see up close the energetic efforts of community members to care for their local environment. Greening their streets by promoting exciting ideas like an active transport and rewilding initiative, the Greenline corridor. They are picking up rubbish from the shores of our bay Nerm, the beautiful Birrarung, or Yarra River, and on their neighbourhood streets. Our communities are moving to action. They need government to step up too.

I deeply believe that we need to restore care for people and environment to the heart of our decision-making. Governments have immense power to respond to these modern crises and, crucially, to action systemic responses to what are systemic issues. That is what I have come here to do. It is what I will strive to do in this chamber, and I am immensely grateful for the privilege. My gratitude is owed in general to the people of Southern Metro, who have elected me, but also of course more specifically to a number of special people, because as anyone seated in this chamber knows, no-one gets here alone. So thank you specifically to the following people. To Sue Pennicuik: your work on so many issues but in particular for animals and justice sparked my attention as a young lawyer and it drew me to the Greens. I hope I can be a glimmer of the star you were as our former MP for Southern Metro. To Greg Barber, the man with a plan: thank you for your belief in me, which allowed me to picture myself standing up in this chamber in the first place. Thank you to my fellow Greens MPs, who have already been so welcoming and supportive as we learn to navigate this place, and to our brilliant and hardworking staff. Thank you to our amazing Greens volunteers across the Southern Metro Region, who put in hours out speaking with the community about how we can take more effective action on climate, housing and integrity in this term of Parliament. You stood on polling locations in every kind of weather for hours on end, and you were just generally inspiring and amazing. And thank you in

particular to the wonderful candidates who stood in lower house districts across our region. You did our movement very proud. Of course to my family – Mum, Dad, Suzanne and Richard: thank you for putting up with me, for turning up for me and for your love and support that I can always count on. And to Alistair: I can depend on you like time and the tides, and I love you. Thank you for coming on this latest adventure with me.

The issues our communities in Southern Metro face are local manifestations of the same great tides and trends we are all rising to meet across the planet at this juncture in history: inequality, arising in particular from increasingly unaffordable housing, and ineffective and punitive justice responses that disproportionately impact vulnerable or already stressed members of our communities. I had abundant opportunity growing up in the inner south, and I want every person in this state to have access to the same support and resources that I did or better.

Our biodiversity is under threat, and we need to urgently protect what is left of our wild places by expanding protections; by ending gas drilling, especially in sensitive locations like the Twelve Apostles region; and by stopping logging of our precious native forests. We can also do more to green and rewild our urban spaces, harnessing the creativity and drive of our local communities as we do so. And as I mentioned, our communities are leading the charge on this. They are turning nature strips and verges back into wildlife corridors and biolinks filled with a diversity of indigenous plants. They are minimising waste to landfill and recapturing food waste as local compost, and they are beautifying, reclaiming and restoring public spaces, like replanted sections of our foreshore, the Elster Creek nature reserve and the Caulfield Racecourse Reserve, to name a few personal favourites. So please in this chamber let us live up to our communities' expectations but also their ambitions.

We are so lucky to be in a place where enormous opportunity exists to make this necessary transition one that benefits us socially, economically and environmentally. The steps being taken in this state to support renewables are very welcome and encouraging first steps, and finally we are seeing action at the federal level too. But let us make sure we take commensurate action to end the primary driver of the climate crisis, the coal and gas industries, so that we can look our kids in the eye – or for a growing number of us, let us face it, have the confidence restored to bring children into this world – and we can say we met our responsibility to future generations. Our community members are planting thousands of trees and plants to absorb carbon and to shore up the foreshore against inundation and the riverbanks against erosion. A good government would stop the fossil fuel industry from cancelling out our mitigation efforts by ending coal and gas and ensuring a swift and just transition to clean energy.

Volunteers are out picking up plastic every weekend, and when I am out paddling on the Birrarung, every trip still ends with the kayak full of filthy plastic bottles – come on, container deposit scheme. A good government would keep up the momentum and find that next wave of plastic pollution bans to implement to tackle that next set of items dirtying our streets, rivers and bay. And locals could keep hitting the meal relief kitchen every meal – breakfast, lunch and dinner – to prep food for people experiencing homelessness. A good government would ensure that there is enough government-owned and adequately maintained public housing stock to address homelessness and housing insecurity in our state and make sure that everyone has a stable and secure place to call home.

I am actually very excited because we can do all of these things. We have huge scope in this chamber and in this building to act decisively to support the public interest, to improve people's day-to-day lives and to secure a better future for our community. From ending polluting fossil fuels to creating more comfortable and healthier public homes in this state that are all electric and efficient, the opportunities for getting it done are abundant. Let us take them together. Thank you.

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 11:42 am until 12:03 pm.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Maribyrnong River flood review**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): (25) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Nick Wimbush has been embroiled in a conflict-of-interest controversy, being appointed to Melbourne Water to conduct a review of the Maribyrnong River flood and then forced to resign in disgrace because of a clear conflict of interest given his involvement in planning panels with responsibility for the now recently flooded aged care properties. I ask: given Mr Wimbush's position at the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, what conflict-of-interest requirements are in place to ensure Mr Wimbush is not conflicted in his VEAC role?

**Ingrid Stitt**: President, I just might seek a little bit of guidance. Obviously the matters that Mr Davis raises in respect to Melbourne Water and that independent inquiry are not, under the general order, the responsibility of the Minister for Environment. They sit with Minister Shing in her capacity as Minister for Water. Noting that that was the preamble to Mr Davis's question, I might ask for a bit of guidance from you.

**David DAVIS**: Further to the point of order, President, the minister is responsible for the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, and I have asked directly a question about the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, which is squarely within her area of ministerial responsibility. The question arises because of other matters that have happened, but he holds a position in an authority under her responsibility.

**The PRESIDENT**: I think, Mr Davis, I will call the minister, but she will answer as she sees fit.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:05): Thank you, President. Mr Davis is quite good at trying to muddy the waters – excuse the pun – because of course the implication is that this particular individual has a conflict or a perceived conflict on the board that I have responsibility for under the general order, and that is not something that I would think was appropriate for Mr Davis to draw that conclusion on. What I will say is that all of the appointments in my portfolio of the environment are done in accordance with all of the requirements, both in terms of the management of any conflict or perceived conflict by those individual bodies, and the appointments are done in accordance with the code of conduct and cabinet procedures.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): In light of the minister's answer, I therefore ask: will the minister demand a report from the chair of VEAC Mellissa Wood to outline conflict-of-interest policy and specifically whether Mr Wimbush is now or may have been conflicted in his role at VEAC?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:07): I know that on all of the boards that operate in this important portfolio area, and the particular board that Mr Davis raises, the chairs and the members of those boards understand very well what their obligations are to manage such matters.

**Security cameras**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:07): (26) My question is for the Attorney-General. There has been wide reporting this morning regarding an audit of security cameras initiated by federal Shadow Minister for Cyber Security Senator James Paterson. Since 2019 there have been growing concerns regarding the integrity of Chinese company Hikvision and their security cameras. In 2020 our AUKUS partners restricted the sale of Hikvision and Dahua cameras. These two companies are closely linked to the Chinese Communist Party, and there are significant security risks that information could be transmitted to the CCP. Some institutions such as the NDIA and the Australian War Memorial have already made the decision to replace these cameras, and I note this morning it was reported that over 900 cameras were identified at a federal level and that the government is moving to remove those. My question for the Attorney-General is: will she commit to

asking OVIC to conduct a security audit at a state government level on where these cameras might be placed in the public sector in Victoria?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:08): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. Many of the matters that you have raised would fall into the portfolio responsibility of Minister Pearson, as government services is responsible for many of the IT security- and cybersecurity-type initiatives that the government is responsible for, and there is a unit within DPC that report to him in relation to that. Actually, it has probably moved in the MOG change for government services. But I do have a scheduled meeting coming up with the commissioner for OVIC, and I am more than happy to have a conversation with him about the issues that you have raised and to come back to you.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:09): I thank the Attorney for committing to have that conversation. If an audit is conducted, will the government commit to releasing how many of these cameras have actually been installed in public institutions and to getting rid of them?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:09): There is a bit too much speculation in relation to the commitment that you are seeking from me. But I understand the intention of your question, and I am more than happy to have conversations about that.

#### **Ministers statements: flood and storm recovery initiatives**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:09): Today I would like to draw attention to the incredible resilience of our regional communities and especially our farmers and growers who underpin our agricultural industry. They are a community and sector who face continual challenges, as the forces of nature impact all that they do. This has never been more evident than during the devastating floods of October last year and of course during the significant hailstorms that have impacted the Goulburn Valley fruitgrowers. This government understands the profound impact that floods and storm events have on communities and that recovery is a long process and so much more than a clean-up.

I am proud that this government has responded swiftly, with strong flood recovery programs which provided not only financial support but also important counselling services. Our initial flood relief grant program was more than \$19 million and was followed by an Australian and Victorian governments \$877 million recovery support package, which was announced in November last year. And I am now pleased to advise that primary producers who have suffered a significant loss of income as a direct result of the 2022 floods will be eligible for primary producer flood recovery concession loans of up to \$100,000.

We understand that the road to recovery takes more than a grant program, and I am proud of the role of Agriculture Victoria and the role that it has played in supporting our farming communities to navigate through these challenging times. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible work of emergency services and the many, many organisations that have been dedicated to supporting the wellbeing of our farming families and communities right across Victoria.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, yesterday in response to my first question to Minister Shing you required her to provide a written response within 24 hours as I understood it, if my recollection is correct. I just note that we are now 24 hours later and that written response has not been provided, so as a point of order I seek your assistance.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that is not a point of order at this point. I would ask you to ask a question, and I am sure the minister will act on your concern. A question?

**David Davis:** On the point of order, President, the minister may want to explain why she has not answered it.

**The PRESIDENT:** A question, please.

**Maribyrnong River flood review**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): (27) My question is to the Minister for Water. Minister, Melbourne Water is an agency which is allocated as a responsibility of yours in the administrative orders. Melbourne Water has a model policy template for major agencies on conflict of interest on its website. It says at key principle 2c, ‘real, potential or perceived: a conflict of interest exists whether it is real, potential or perceived’. I therefore ask: does the minister accept that Mr Wimbush had a conflict of interest in his role as chair of the Maribyrnong River flood review under Melbourne Water’s own policy?

**The PRESIDENT:** Before the minister answers, I am a bit concerned that you might be asking the minister for an opinion. I will just have a little chat with the boffins.

Mr Davis, I believe you are asking the minister for an opinion, but I am more than happy to ask you to attempt to rephrase the question.

**David DAVIS:** I will do that. Minister, isn’t it a fact that Mr Wimbush had a conflict of interest in his role as chair of the Maribyrnong River flood review under Melbourne Water’s own conflict-of-interest policy?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:14): Thank you for the question, Mr Davis. Yet again you have gone back to preambles to your questions which put assertions and invite conclusions that are not reasonably open for you on any reasonable ground to accept. It is really important, Mr Davis, that when we talk about these issues you understand, as I would hope in the general carriage of your own role you do understand, the distinction between an actual conflict of interest and a perceived conflict of interest. This, Mr Davis, is something which media outlets understand. The reportage of Mr Wimbush’s resignation has not been couched as an actual conflict of interest. It has been referred to as a perceived conflict of interest.

Mr Wimbush made a judgement, which was confirmed by Melbourne Water, to tender his resignation from the review and from chairing that review in order not to cloud a process which is intended to provide a means by which the residents affected by the floods in Maribyrnong in October last year can better understand the impacts of the flood wall amongst other things and to understand where and how we might as an area be in a position to build back better and also to understand the matters at play when we are talking about a one-in-50-year and one-in-100-year flooding event.

Mr Davis, you have also sought to infer that Melbourne Water as an authority which falls within my scope under the general order is somehow not undertaking its functions independently. Mr Davis, I take objection to that, and by way of analogy I would suggest that anyone who wants to say, for example, that Melbourne Water and its independent review are not taking place with that arms-length component that they require is also by inference suggesting that the courts, as funded by government, are not independent, that tribunals are not independent, that independent statutory oversight bodies are not independent – and the list goes on.

So, Mr Davis, you actually have to be clear about the purpose for which you are asking this question. This is a question again which goes to the heart of your inability to understand the nature of an independent review and providing remedies and solutions to those people affected by the floods in October last year.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:17): The minister clearly will not engage with the fact that there is actually on the website a clear description of what a conflict of interest is in her department and that Mr Wimbush was clearly in conflict with that. I therefore ask a further question: was Melbourne Water aware of Mr Wimbush’s conflict of interest at the time of his appointment? If so, what action did it take, and if not, when did Melbourne Water become aware of Mr Wimbush’s conflicted position?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:18): Yet again, Mr Davis, you are seeking to have a debate about a matter that is not in fact in play. This is about the nature of actual versus perceived conflicts of interest, and it is about the fact that yet again you do not appreciate the fact that this is an independent review. In addition to that, you are seeking information from me about matters which relate to an independent review being conducted by Melbourne Water. This seems to me to be an attempt at a gotcha. On the one hand, if I have that information, then the review cannot be independent, and on the other hand, if Melbourne Water has that information, it must be some kind of cover-up. Mr Davis, these are questions for Melbourne Water, and if we are to have any confidence in the nature of an independent review –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the member is seeking to assert that she does not answer questions for Melbourne Water. She is responsible under the administrative orders, and she needs to answer those questions.

**The PRESIDENT:** No, you are just debating. That is not a point of order, that is just debating.

**Harriet SHING:** Thanks, President. Mr Davis, I would really like to see the independent review be able to take its course. I would hope that you would be able to do so too in the interests of providing affected residents and communities with answers to the questions that they are currently seeking.

#### Drug harm reduction

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:19): (28) My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Mental Health in the other place. Minister, yesterday morning the Victorian health department released a warning about orange ‘Nike tick’ pills being sold as MDMA and their links to several recent hospitalisations across Victoria. These pills were found to contain pentylone, a chemical that has similar effects to MDMA but lasts much less time so people consume more, thereby increasing their risk of overdose. The health department’s tweet and similar drug alerts the department has been releasing since 2020 show that the Andrews government understands that testing drugs circulating in the community saves lives and is good policy. They just refuse to make pill testing their official policy. We applaud the government’s change of stance. Now will the government start taking drug harm reduction seriously and begin a proper pill-testing trial in Victoria?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:20): I thank the member. I am going to start with that, as I do not want to stuff up your name just yet – so the lovely new member. Congratulations on your inaugural today, and thank you for your first question and your advocacy in relation to pill testing. I will have a conversation with the Minister for Mental Health, who has responsibility for drug and alcohol programs, and I am sure we will get you a response within the standing orders.

**The PRESIDENT:** I reckon I am getting it right: Mr Puglielli with a supplementary question.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:21): Thank you for the correct pronunciation, Chair. I thank the minister for referring the question for answer. Victoria’s current approach to drug law remains punitive, out of date and ramshackle, and that is putting people at avoidable risk. Not only do we have no system of pill testing, but there is no requirement for police to notify the health department if they encounter a dangerous substance in the community. Police have the ability to provide drug intelligence to the department before people are hospitalised and potentially save lives in the process, so I ask: will the government at least require the police to inform the department of dangerous substances in the community so health warnings can be issued to save lives?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:22): Thank you, Mr Puglielli, for your supplementary. Everything has an ocker twang with me. I cannot help it; I am sorry. I will get there.

I fear that your question is actually probably for the Minister for Police, because you are asking for a requirement for police to report to the Department of Health, but I do recognise the nexus. I feel that we are going to have a lot of conversations about drug reform this term, and there are a lot of interesting things going on across government. One of my responsibilities is VIFM, and they do a lot of work on testing of new and emerging drugs and concerns and making sure that police and health authorities have got the latest information about these emerging trends – particularly the ones that you referred to in relation to the more dangerous ones – and trying to get warnings out for the community who might be consuming things about avoiding particular types. There is a lot of work going on, and I think we can have a conversation about this. Your specific question I will refer to Minister Williams and see how we can get you a bit of a response on that, but I am sure we can have further conversations about what the government is doing in relation to harm minimisation in relation to illegal drugs.

### Ministers statements: prison programs

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:23): I rise to update the house on the good work happening across our corrections system to keep Victorians safe and help people to turn their lives around. Since being appointed as the Minister for Corrections, I have had the privilege to meet many of the great people that work at our corrections facilities. Just last month I was at the Loddon Middleton and Tarrengower prisons.

At Loddon I was pleased to see the VET centre of excellence delivered in partnership between Corrections Victoria, Kangan Institute and industry. In this program, people in custody participate in a 12-week program to gain nationally recognised training in civil construction skills. They are also connected with major employers, which makes it that bit easier for people to find employment once they are released, because we know that having a job is so important to helping someone turn their life around.

At Tarrengower women’s prison I was grateful to meet with the dedicated staff as well as a number of partner agencies who run programs for women in custody. The Greyhound Adoption Program is a particular highlight. In this program women in custody train rescued greyhounds and prepare them for adoption. This program not only helps rescued dogs find their forever families but gives women in custody the chance to learn valuable life skills and gain a TAFE qualification too. There are also education and employment programs providing women in custody with real-life skills in hospitality, agriculture and even warehousing.

These industry programs are providing practical training and job readiness to set people up for success when they are released. I would like to thank the staff at Loddon Middleton and Tarrengower prisons and right across our corrections system for the work they do every day in keeping Victorians safe.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call Dr Bach, can I acknowledge former member Sue Pennicuik, who is in the chamber today for question time. I know there have been other former members here for inaugural speeches, but the practice is that we do not acknowledge them for inaugural speeches. But Ms Pennicuik is here for question time, so I think she deserves to be acknowledged.

### Foster carers

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:25): (29) My question is for the minister for child protection. Minister, you and your numerous predecessors have tried now every trick in the book to keep the contents of the KPMG report on the carer allowance secret. Personally, I enjoyed the new one you came up with yesterday: that it is cabinet in confidence. That is very odd, because I have in fact now been provided with a copy of this report. As you surely know – hopefully know – it finds current support is woefully inadequate and recommends an increase of 67 per cent. Minister, please, the government has had over a year. Carers are facing a crippling cost-of-living crisis. Is this recommendation supported by government or not?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:26): Thank you, Dr Bach, for your question, and thank you for your question earlier in the week. The KPMG report, as you have simply just informed the house, was prepared for ministers previous to me in their consideration for cabinet. It was indeed a cabinet-in-confidence document, and it is very interesting that you have now a copy of that.

But what is most interesting and should be of great interest to this house is actually the work that carers do and the work that our government is doing to support them. The critical contribution that carers make in supporting some of our most vulnerable children is one that we all know is invaluable in the care system, and there is a carer allowance that is allocated which contributes towards the care of children. It is also an allowance that is scalable and that can be adjusted where there are complex needs for children with complex issues. Higher levels of carer allowance are also determined on a case-by-case basis, and that is something that this government can and already does do.

But I did not get the opportunity the other day, because I think your supplementary question was perhaps a little too narrow, to say that I think it is important that this house understands that some of the other supports that this government does provide to carers is a relevant part of this conversation.

**Matthew Bach:** On a point of order, President, the minister has now been going on for a long time, and it is always interesting to note her stated care for our foster carers. However, this question, as my previous questions have been, is in fact a very narrow one. I think it is in our standing orders at section 8.07 that it is necessary for ministers to be relevant to the question. I know the minister is new to this house, but she should be made to come back and actually answer this very narrow question.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Dr Bach. The minister still has nearly 2 minutes of her allotted time.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Thank you, President, and thank you, Dr Bach. I would have thought that, given your interest in carers, government support for carers is key to your question, and that is exactly what I am attempting to inform you of. Our government has provided almost \$13 million for the continuation of the care hub trial, which provides wraparound supports to those who are providing care for some of the most vulnerable children in our community. This government provides early intervention supports, which we talked about at length yesterday, I think it was, when I was talking in my ministers statement about family services. I am not sure that those on the other side are perhaps familiar with family services; it is not something for which they do have a portfolio. But family services and the supports that family services provide are crucial for carers in the delivery of the care that they provide to some of our most vulnerable children. We also have the help desk, which I think you will find carers are most supportive of in terms of the support that they can get from the help desk in relation to care and extra supports, particularly when they are in need of therapeutic supports for the children that are in their care. There is also the continuing of the CaringLife app. So there are many ways in which this government continues to support carers. We will continue to support carers, and we thank you for your interest.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:29): I do thank the minister for her response. Minister, again, as I am sure you have been briefed about, Victorian foster carers are now leaving in their droves, and as they leave the system they routinely report that the government's appalling stinginess is a chief reason for their departure. The current level of support, you would have to admit, Minister, you would have to be aware, is not even enough for carers to cover the basic bare essentials like food and school supplies or dentist bills. Vulnerable children are then the ones to suffer. I will ask this question in the hope of getting an answer finally: do foster carers deserve support to cover these bare essentials?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:30): Thank you, Dr Bach. I think you like to ask the questions. We are just getting to know each other, but I think you like to ask the questions but

perhaps not listen to the answers, because your question is, ‘Do I think that carers deserve valuable support?’ The answer is yes, and the answer is we are providing that support.

**Matthew Bach:** On a point of order, President, the question that the minister said I put to her is not in fact the question that I put to her. I do listen to her responses. I said, ‘Do foster carers deserve support to cover these bare essentials?’

**The PRESIDENT:** Sorry, Dr Bach. It is not a point of order. In that instance the minister clearly answered your question.

### Firearms regulation

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:31): (30) My question today is for the minister representing the Minister for Police in the other place. The tragic murder of two police officers in Queensland recently exposed a deep flaw in data sharing between New South Wales police and Queensland police in that the offenders were well known to New South Wales police but the data never made it to Queensland police, ending in the tragedy. There is already a technical solution to data sharing between firearms registries – at great expense, I might add – that enables law-abiding shooters to be able to legally and safely sell and transport firearms around Australia. It also allows intelligence about criminals and firearms to be shared. National cabinet has now announced it is investigating whether a central firearms database is going to be created, presumably to be held in Canberra. Given that it is supported by the Nationals and their coalition partners, I suppose it is destined to happen. My question is: what instrument of power is the Victorian government going to use to surrender some of its right as a state to the Commonwealth government to make this happen?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:32): I thank Mr Bourman for his question and interest in this matter. In line with the practices of this place, I will take that question on notice and seek a response from the relevant minister, Minister Carbines, as set out in our standing orders.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:32): I thank the minister for his answer. I have been critical of LRD previously and its need for more resources and to take a more balanced approach on some issues, but I also acknowledge that it is the clear leader amongst the registries nationwide and we really do have something to lose. What specifically is the minister going to do to ensure we do not end up being dragged down to the level of the other registries and that the customers of Victoria Police LRD receive at least the same standard of service as they get currently?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:33): I thank the member for their question and interest with their supplementary question. I will ensure that the supplementary question is also passed on to the minister in the other place and you get a written response in accordance with our standing orders.

### Ministers statements: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:33): In the short time that I have been Minister for Child Protection and Family Services there has been much discussion in this place regarding Indigenous children and young people in care. These matters are far too important to be reduced to political squabbling, and today I rise to update the house regarding Indigenous children and young people in care.

First I acknowledge that we discuss this issue on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present. I also acknowledge that for tens of thousands of years before us Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people cared for their families, including their children and young people, on these lands, as did all Aboriginal people throughout their respective lands.

Sadly, today Aboriginal children and young people are significantly over-represented in our child protection system. Aboriginal children are more likely to be placed in child protection and too many Aboriginal babies are being removed from their mothers. These statistics are tragic. There is no hiding them and no disguising them, and we all need to do more. The Premier and I have said we will do more. This government has committed through the *Roadmap for Reform* and more recently the *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir* to prioritise efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care. We have invested over \$160 million in this strategy and its nation-leading initiatives, and we are starting to see positive results.

Victoria has the highest rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care who are placed with Aboriginal relatives, non-Aboriginal relatives or with an Aboriginal carer – above 70 per cent. However, we can and we must do more. We know that greater self-determination will lead to better outcomes, and this government has committed to reintroducing a bill to enshrine important changes to the Children, Youth and Families Act to reduce over-representation. Changes include a statement of recognition and binding recognition principles in the Children, Youth and Families Act and expanding the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program. I look forward to these changes receiving support from every member of this house, because Aboriginal children's wellbeing is well above politics.

#### Parole eligibility

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:35): (31) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, this is a sensitive matter in my electorate and indeed all of Victoria, as the Black Saturday fires have scarred the lives of many, many people and trauma still exists within the communities that I and others represent. It has been revealed that the arsonist who was convicted of starting the fires in Gippsland is due to have their parole considered. What steps will the government take, including any new necessary amendments to the operations of the adult parole board, to ensure that someone who could pose a significant risk to my community will not be released on parole?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:36): I thank the member for their question and their interest in this matter, a matter in which there is great public interest, I note, especially because of the connection with their electorate. It is important from the outset that I do state that the events of February 2009 have left their mark on all Victorians, but none more so than the families of the victims who lost their lives. My thoughts are with those families today on the anniversary of those terrible fires. Knowing that someone lit some of those fires deliberately still shocks me, and I can only imagine the additional distress this adds to those grieving families.

Parole applications, as the member has outlined, can be incredibly difficult for victims and their families. I would encourage anyone affected to reach out to the Victims of Crime Helpline for the support they need. The victims register also provides support during this process, including helping registered victims to make submissions to the adult parole board.

This government is committed to keeping the Victorian community safe. That is why Victoria has the toughest parole system in the nation. Community safety is the adult parole board's paramount consideration when considering whether to grant parole. This decision-making is enshrined in legislation. There is a longstanding process where each prisoner is eligible to make an application for parole, and this will be considered by the independent adult parole board in accordance with the Corrections Act. I appreciate the question; however, I will not be speculating on individual parole applications in this place.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:38): I thank the minister for his response on this very important issue in our region. If released on parole, what assurances will the government give the people of the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland to ensure that the person in question is monitored and does not pose a significant risk to the community?

**The PRESIDENT:** The supplementary, Ms Bath, is hypothetical. I am happy for you to rephrase it if you like.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you, President. Minister, will you review your policies about the protection of vulnerable communities and people within those communities and the perception that they have around persons who have been released on parole to ensure that there is good communication within those communities and that they are indeed safe and not at risk?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:39): I again thank the member for their question and their interest in this matter. As I outlined earlier, the adult parole board are an independent statutory body and decisions around parole are a matter for them – whether to grant, deny or defer parole in these instances. But my thoughts are with the families. As I said in my earlier answer, it can be a very distressing and stressful period. There are supports available through the victims register to assist victims and their families through that process.

As you would appreciate, I am not going to speculate on every individual parole application. But the adult parole board, as the member should be aware, has a range of options available to ensure the safety of the community, including imposing requirements for persons to be subject to electronic monitoring as a condition of their parole order, exclusion zones and a number of others. If you would like to know some of the other options available to the adult parole board, I do recommend going to their website, but my office is also happy to pass on information on what the options are. But they are all matters for the adult parole board.

#### Timber industry

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): (32) My question is to the Minister for Environment. VicForests are getting so desperate to log that they are currently logging in the Wombat State Forest, which the government has proposed to turn into a national park, and they have proposed logging in the Dandenong Ranges National Park and in the High Country. This is deeply concerning for the protection of our species and for biodiversity. I ask you, as the minister responsible for our state and national parks: how does the government justify the environmental destruction of logging in an area such as the Wombat State Forest, which clearly has sensitive biodiversity values as you are planning to make it into a national park?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:41): Can I thank Ms Copsey for her first question and congratulate her on her inaugural. Obviously she has a passion for the Victorian environment, as do I. The Andrews Labor government are absolutely committed to protecting our environment, and we have actually shown this through the very strong work we have done in protecting some of our most precious forests across Victoria. We have added almost 96,000 hectares of land to the protection list. The immediate protection areas include East Gippsland, Central Highlands, Mirboo North and the Strathbogie Ranges, and that is incredibly important. In fact the *Victorian Forestry Plan* will see an area of native forest protected in Victoria that will be larger than the landmass of Tasmania. It is incredibly important to me that national parks are protected, and I would take issue with the characterisation that these areas are being logged. They are being protected.

As we all know, emergencies like the bushfires in 2019 and 2020 had such a devastating impact on not only the Victorian community but our natural environment, and the 2022 floods and the 2021 storms resulted in lots of hazardous debris and fallen trees across the Victorian landscape and we have a responsibility to manage the bushfire risk associated with that debris. The issues that you are raising are matters that my department manage based on the science and based on the best advice from our Forest Fire Management Victoria personnel, and can I give them a little shout-out because they do incredible work right across the state. Obviously we take our advice from them in respect to how they remove that debris, but it is all about making sure that we manage bushfire risk appropriately.

We also recognise the really important role of traditional owners in this area and their expertise in caring for country. That is why they are an important stakeholder in this space, and I am very passionate to see them play a much bigger role in how we manage our forests into the future. We know that fallen trees also provide obviously valuable habitat for our wildlife, so wherever possible we will leave that debris and those fallen logs in situ to protect our precious biodiversity.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): I thank the minister for her answer and her passion for our special places. I would note, though, that when it comes to the Wombat State Forrest the situation is not exactly as the minister describes. And in addition to this, salvage logging has been shown to be incredibly damaging to forests, so my follow-up question is: given VicForests' stated intention to try and log in our national parks, what plans does the government have to ensure that there is in fact no logging in our national parks?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:44): I thank Ms Copsey for her supplementary question. I have already indicated that I do not accept the premise that this is logging. Of course our national parks are protected, and our government is very proud of the increased protection that we are providing and the increased hectares across the state that will be in those immediate protection areas. VicForests, under the general order, do not sit with me as the Minister for Environment; Minister Tierney has carriage of the work of VicForests. But for storm debris removal it is not unusual for DEECA, my department, to contract VicForests to do that debris removal work. I am very happy to provide information about that process to the member, but I reject the characterisation that we are logging in our precious national parks.

#### **Ministers statements: Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:45): I want to talk today about my excellent visit to the award-winning Royal Botanic Gardens in Cranbourne last week and how incredible the staff and the scientists are at that facility. They are leading world-leading research on the discovery, protection, cultivation and restoration of rare and threatened plant species, such as rare Victorian orchids. Along with the member for Cranbourne in the other place, it was a real pleasure to meet those horticulturalists who are doing such critical work.

The native botanical gardens offer a natural bushland experience and feature over 100,000 plants with over 450 indigenous plant species. It was actually really impressive to see the work of the orchid conservation lab and see the Raising Rarity project in action. This project, which has received \$1.3 million from the Andrews Labor government Nature Fund, has grown over 80 nationally threatened orchid species and conducted work to protect 24 other threatened flora species, ensuring that these precious native species can survive and thrive for generations to come. There is also a new visitor centre funded by a \$3.3 million investment by the government that will ensure that the Cranbourne botanical gardens remain Victoria's premier ecotourism nature attraction.

I want to thank the garden staff for their critically important work in conserving our environment and for allowing me to get a little bit down in the dirt and plant an *Acacia pendula* shrub. Obviously, the Cranbourne Royal Botanic Gardens is an absolute gem. They are doing incredible work, and I commend all of the staff of that facility.

#### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:48): Can I thank Minister Erdogan, who will get Mr Bourman written responses from the Minister for Police in line with the standing orders. Can I ask Minister Blandthorn to get Mr Bach a written response for his substantive question – the first question, not the supplementary. And can I thank the Leader of the Government, who will get Mr Puglielli responses from the Minister for Mental Health.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, in relation to the initial issue that Mr Davis raised regarding Minister Shing and failure to provide a written response, I am just wondering if the minister could provide a written response to Mr Davis's questions and just –

**David Davis:** She has.

**Georgie Crozier:** Oh, she has? Thank you.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will call the minister if she wishes to give a response.

**Harriet Shing:** On the point of order, President, for the sake of clarity and to address the issue that was raised by Mr Davis at the outset, the answer to the question was in fact lodged in the course of question time. So thank you for raising that, Mr Davis, and the answer as put, for avoidance of any doubt, was 15 December.

**David Davis:** On a separate point of order, President, relating to the same matter and the same answer – I now have the answer; I thank the minister for the answer – both the substantive and the supplementary question were put to the minister for re-answering by you yesterday. The first question was on what date were you aware –

**The PRESIDENT:** No, Mr Davis. You can email me if you believe a written response has not been adequate and we can go through a process from there. Please do that and we will go from there. That is the process.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:50): (18) My question is for the Minister for Education. Late last year I had the pleasure of visiting Castlemaine Primary School, a wonderful school in my electorate with an enrolment of 170 students. During a tour of the school I was able to inspect the school's playground and equipment, which I found to be in appalling condition. Installed in approximately 2005 the play equipment is beyond its life span, with the slide and fireman's pole having been removed due to safety concerns. Some of the playground supports are either rotting or splitting at the base. There is no soft-fall area, and many of the footholds on the rock wall have either been removed or are so loose they spin around. Even the school's netball court is unsafe, with a large crack in the surface a hazard for students. The playground needs to be replaced, and every grant application submitted by the school over the last few years has been unsuccessful. Will the minister provide a funding grant to replace the playground and play equipment at Castlemaine Primary School?

#### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:51): (19) My constituency question is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, and it relates to children in out-of-home care and their mental health. I raised a discussion around this last night in my adjournment debate. Heather Baird is the founder of a charity based in Sale, A Better Life for Foster Kids. She has been advocating for children in out-of-home care for many, many years. Indeed she was one herself once. She has a vast knowledge in this area. I have just heard the minister in her statement today talk about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kinship and out-of-home care. She said that she would be keen to do more and learn more. Having said that, my request is that she meet with Heather – Heather would be pleased to come to Melbourne – and discuss a raft of issues around out-of-home care, including mental health concerns that she has and the services that need to be provided at the point of entry rather than some time off in the never-never.

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (20) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. It was estimated that 10 million animals were killed on Australian roads last year. The residents and wildlife volunteers of the Macedon Ranges have been reporting increases in native animal road strike, like the female koala that was recently found by a caring member of the public confused and unable to move on the Calder Freeway near Woodend. Noah & Lil, a volunteer-run wildlife rescue, attended to this injured and vulnerable koala just before midnight; however, with a fractured leg she was sadly unable to be saved and was euthanised. There is something that the government can do to help reduce increases in wildlife road strike, so I ask: will the minister install additional signage in wildlife hotspots throughout the Macedon Ranges to help save koalas and other native animals?

**Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:53): (21) My question is for the Minister for Health and concerns the announced closure on 31 March of Epworth HealthCare's Geelong maternity services. Around 100 women due to give birth at Epworth Geelong will be forced to shift hospitals, but the permanent consequences are worse. At 600 births per year and growing, the hospital represents more than 25 per cent of the area's capacity. The decision to close an excellent, popular, modern, well-serviced, not-for-profit service, built with state and federal assistance, in one of the fastest growing regions in Australia is madness. Minister, what representations did you receive in support of the hospital and local birthing mothers, families and medical and nursing professionals from your Labor colleagues in the Geelong, Bellarine, South Barwon and Western Victoria upper house electorates, of which five out of six are women?

**Western Metropolitan Region**

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:54): (22) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last Thursday a young man by the name of Angus Collins was tragically killed at the corner of Footscray Road and Dock Link Road. This young cyclist's death highlights the failure of the department to provide a safe route for cyclists in this area. This has been a problem for years. It has been further aggravated recently, and all complaints and requests from the local community have been ignored. I seek a response from the minister as to what the department will do about this.

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (23) I want to raise another matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure today, and it concerns the crossings, again, at Mont Albert and Surrey Hills. The government of course lied to the people of Victoria before the 2018 election, promising that there would be two stations with the crossings, and now there is to be only one station. Local businesses have suffered tremendously through this process, but in the last few days there has been another botched approach by the Level Crossing Removal Project. They were handing out vouchers for a local business for local coffees, but they had not cleared this with the business in question – that is the Steam business, a local business. It seems just absurd, and I ask the minister: will she investigate this cock-up, I am going to call it, by the LXR P and yet again their inability to undertake basic processes? The sufferers are local communities and local businesses.

**Sitting suspended 12:56 pm until 2:03 pm.**

*Address to Parliament***Governor's speech***Address-in-reply***Debate resumed.**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:03): I wish to acknowledge the land of the Kulin nations, where I was born, and pay my respects to all First Nations people, the traditional elders past and present and their families. I acknowledge and affirm the value and importance of all Indigenous people, including Ms Watt. In doing so, I welcome and thank my good friend Jadah, who flew in from Western Australia in the early hours of the morning, and my Aboriginal friends, family, elders and community in and around Central Arnhem Land representing country and districts from places like Beswick and Manyallaluk. I pay my respects to the elders, and I particularly wish to acknowledge those who are watching online, Loretta, Anderson, Ray, Rachel B and Rachael, for their friendship and acceptance into family and community. Thank you for your patience walking alongside me, teaching me culture, community and language. You have given me a profound respect for your deep faith and your connection to the land and each other.

No-one gets into Parliament in isolation, so I want to welcome and thank all my family, friends, fellow party members and MPs and constituents who are here and listening online and those who wanted to be present today but could not be. Your love, thoughts and support are overwhelming and very much appreciated.

I am humbled to rise in this chamber for the very first time representing the people as the newly elected Liberal Party member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan region. Walking down these historic timber halls of the Victorian state Parliament and entering this grand chamber reminds me of the gravity and the honour I have to serve the people of the south-east and of Victoria. Above all else, I am here to champion my community, a diverse community that is geographically, culturally, economically and socially unique. From the beaches of Frankston and Kingston to the fast-growing suburbs of Casey, the green hills of Upper Beaconsfield and Cardinia, the industrial parks of Greater Dandenong and the established suburbs of Knox, the south-east truly captures the very best elements of our state. Like our geography, our people are incredibly diverse and represent different nations, cultures and beliefs. Some are First Nations people. Some are descendants of European settlers. Most come from a variety of international heritages, cultures and religions, but we all enjoy the Australian country and lifestyle and are grateful for it.

Like many of my constituents, I am the proud daughter of migrants. My father came with his parents and siblings from Sri Lanka. They left behind their home, relatives, friends, studies and most of their possessions and arrived in Melbourne by ship with the hope of a better life. My mother was 12 when she left New Zealand with her family; her father was offered a contract in Melbourne as a Holden mechanic. Soon after marrying in Frankston, my parents bought their first home in Noble Park, where I have my earliest memories. It was from this home that my father planned his campaign as an endorsed Liberal Party candidate for Sir Robert Menzies's team. My mum said I campaigned for the Liberals from my pram as a baby. I also campaigned for my late uncle Dr Tom Blazé, who was also a proud Liberal, a long-term councillor and three-time mayor of the City of Knox.

Although I have taught in many schools, my first teaching job was in Endeavour Hills, and I have volunteered and worked with disadvantaged students in Dandenong and Doveton as a youth worker. I married into a Dutch migrant family with long-term roots in Cranbourne stretching back many decades. My husband Mark is from a very large family of 10 children. With a lot of his family in the area, we bought our first home in Cranbourne and later moved to Berwick, where my children spent the remainder of their childhood. The south-east is genuinely in my DNA, and it is a privilege to represent the community I live in.

I am a Liberal anchored in our core values of liberty, freedom of association and worship, free enterprise and the right to self-determination for individuals and families. I believe in the value of the family, and I believe in a hand up over a handout, free enterprise over socialism, integrity over corruption and tolerance over discrimination. These are my values, these are the values of my community and these are Liberal Party values. Our party is strong when it brings together the classical liberalism of Menzies and the cultural conservatism of Howard. Our philosophy in action makes governments smaller and citizens bigger by lifting burdensome regulations and taxes and allowing citizens to make their own choices in life. We are not the party of big banks or big unions or targeting lobby groups and big bureaucracies which have influenced the left of politics today.

When I was in school we studied *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. He made the following observation: all are equal, but some are more equal than others. Does giving all Victorians a fair go mean some people should receive better treatment and more favours than others? Are we living in an all-inclusive and tolerant society if we demean the rights and freedoms of those we disagree with? If only the voices of the loudest and most organised groups can be heard, who is governing for the quiet Australians who represent a significant contingency and whose votes have helped elect people in this room, whether directly or through preferences?

My parents fostered an environment where faith, family, culture and community were a priority. They taught me the value of human life by opening their home to people who were displaced, depressed, abused, homeless and discriminated against. Through their compassion and generosity they modelled the greatest calling of all: to love people and to love God. From their example I say that no Victorian should be persecuted for their deeply held beliefs, especially if it promotes peace, love, tolerance and reconciliation. To those who feel that faith is unwelcome in the boardroom or the Parliament, I say: your voice is welcome!

Menzies believed that the true essence of Australia 'is to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised, and who, whatever their individual religious conviction or dogma, see in their children their greatest' achievement. As a mother of four children; I know this to be true. I had a lot of trouble having children and holding my pregnancies, but through all the pain and heartache of motherhood it has been the most rewarding and challenging career of my life. And I want to thank Jesse, Joshua and Amy, who are here today, and Annie, who is watching online. I chose to leave my career to be with you at home. I was there to watch you take your first steps and to hear you say your first words, and I read your first books to you. You and your generation and the value of everyone's family are the main reasons I am in this place.

I come equipped with a fresh perspective and decades of experience. I have been a volunteer in Africa; I was in South Africa helping with the racial bridge-building during a time when the apartheid system was being dismantled. I also went on to serve in education systems, in feeding programs and in medical programs in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. I have worked with disadvantaged youth and the homeless in Melbourne and regional Victoria and in education at all levels, primary, tertiary, vocational training and particularly in the secondary system. I have also worked in a variety of areas of social work, mostly with teenagers and young adults, two areas of policy to which I now turn.

Having taught thousands of young people over many years, I am fully convinced that education is one of the most powerful tools we have to transform people's lives. And I want to say in terms of education that I believe parents should have a say in the types of things that are being taught to their children.

My own life has been shaped by a desire to learn and led me to attain two masters degrees while working in a variety of careers and being a busy mum. I strongly support the development of more select entry schools and specialised schools for gifted and talented students, having seen their benefits in the classroom and in my own family. Both my mum and two of my uncles went to select entry schools, and so did one of my sons – and my dad, in Sri Lanka, as well. Being given the opportunity to attend a select entry school broadens the horizons. It helped my son find companions that have

celebrated his intellect, and today he is making significant policy contributions in the field of economics.

In the recent education report it was noted that in the aftermath of successive lockdowns students are suffering from anxiety, depression, diminished social skills and other mental health issues. I encourage both levels of government to revisit their support for school chaplaincy programs to provide appropriate, affordable and additional support for students.

I grew up with lots of strong women in my life, and I have always been a strong proponent of women in leadership. My mother worked her way from humble beginnings and through societal expectations. She fought to be educated and have a career. This was at a time when most mothers were at home. She faced wage inequality and was overlooked for promotion because she was a woman, but she never stopped the fight to achieve. With the encouragement of my dad she persisted and always believed in herself. She attended Mac.Robertson Girls High and went to teachers college, even though her mother thought that girls just needed to get married. She received an education scholarship and became a speech pathologist in Melbourne. She has also worked as a vice-principal in one of the largest primary schools in the south-east and was a school principal. Mum showed me the power of tenacity, persistence and courage.

My dad studied medicine, law, journalism and theology. He has often been my confidant and closest friend and has championed and encouraged me through the myriad of seasons in my life. My parents made sacrifices to send me to a good school and taught me that I could do whatever I put my mind to, and I am thankful. After the challenges and health challenges that they have had, I am so pleased and so proud that they are here to witness this moment and the benefits of their hard work.

I also want to thank my very patient husband, Mark, of 27 years. He has been unwavering in his persistence and enthusiasm. He has stood with me and supported me through the responsibilities of political life. And to my colleagues David, Georgie, Wendy, Bev, Renee, Joe, Trung, Evan, Moira, Nick, Melina and Gaelle – I think I have missed somebody; sorry, Peter Walsh – it is an honour to work alongside such a strong and fresh team.

Like many, I have been a candidate before, and I wish to acknowledge and thank the many members and volunteers – particularly Cameron Eastman and Josiah Mathew – and many lower house candidates and their teams who have rallied with me to fight for Victorian families, for the South-Eastern Region and for Liberal Party values. There are so many people I could name. I wish I had time. I want to thank you all. This is your moment as much as it is mine.

To John Pesutto, I want to thank you for your confidence in me and your support. It is an honour to serve in shadow cabinet under your leadership. I know your empathy, listening ear and commitment to collaboration have made you and are making you an excellent leader, and you will be an outstanding future Premier for our state.

With the responsibility bestowed on me as Shadow Minister for Emergency Services and Shadow Minister for WorkCover and the TAC, you will find me to be compassionate and empathetic to the needs of the people, yet also hardworking and tenacious, demanding integrity, safety and good governance, because the people of Victoria deserve it.

Friends, there is a time and a season for everything. It is time for the nameless, voiceless people of the south-east and in Victoria to be heard. It is time for people's beliefs and freedoms – the beliefs and freedoms of many Victorians – to be respected. It is time for this house to work together for the greater good of the people of Victoria. And I am here for such a time as this.

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 2:26 pm until 2:37 pm.**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:37): Thank you, President, and congratulations on your election.

Around six years ago I was working as a GP in a service for people experiencing homelessness. I was seeing a woman whose story was all too familiar by then – a survivor of violence, discrimination, abuse and poverty. During the consultation she said to me, ‘They expect you to pull yourself up out of all this, but it’s like the ladder they give you has rungs that spin and are covered in grease.’ While what she was saying was something I had understood inherently – that the system does a tremendous job of entrenching inequality – it was not always easy to describe. She had provided an image that powerfully captured this concept, an image I could not unsee, and every time I recall that moment I feel her eyes on me asking, ‘What are you doing about it?’

It is an extraordinary privilege to stand in this place as the first regional Greens MP in Victoria. I acknowledge that we are on the stolen land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay respect to their elders past, present and future. Sovereignty has never been ceded, and there is much truth to be told and to be heard as First Nations people fight for justice and treaty, a fight that I commit to supporting in whatever way I can. I also respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the country on which my electorate of Western Victoria is located: the Bindjali, Wergaia, Jadawadjali, Bungandij, Gunditjmarra, Djab Wurrung, Wadawurrung, Dhauwurd Wurrung, Djargurd Wurrung, Gadubanud, Dja Dja Wurrung and Gulidjan peoples.

Western Victoria is also home to many First Nations people from throughout Australia, either by choice or because of forcible displacement from their ancestral soils and communities by governments. Our region has seen massacres, genocide and generations stolen – attempts to systematically dismantle a people. But while the wounds of colonialism run deep on country, language, history and culture, many of which will never heal, Western Victoria’s magnificent land, waterways and skies reflect First Peoples’ endurance and survival in our region. The land – the ancient You Yangs, Grampians and Otway Ranges to the grasslands of the west, habitats of the striped legless lizard, koala, growling grass frog and Otway snail. Our life-giving waterways include the Loddon, Moorabool and Barwon rivers, wetlands like Lake Albacutya and Western District Lakes and our bays and oceans such as Corio Bay and the mighty southern sea country, home to the Burrunan dolphin, kunuwarra, platypus, humpback and southern right whales. The wide open-sky country from Portland to Melton is home to the stars, to Bunjil, to the hooded plover, to the golden sun moth, to the grey-headed flying fox and to thousands of migratory shorebirds. I thank those First Nations people in the region who have shared their knowledge and stories with me, and I will continue to listen and learn.

Western Victoria – Djilang, or Geelong, on Wadawurrung country – is also my home, but it has not always been. The eldest of four kids, I was born in Sydney. My mother was an Irish immigrant, one of seven children, while my father and his brother were Australian born with UK ancestors who were among the early colonisers. We moved around quite a bit as my parents followed work opportunities from Sydney to Wollongong to Canberra. Dad worked in retail, beginning at a service desk and working his way up to a career in management. He also has a strong interest in natural history and our environment and brought us up to share this.

Mum left school at 15 and worked all sorts of jobs, including a long stint doing night shifts at a media monitoring company. She would come home, run us all around and then start again, and until I became a parent myself, I do not think I appreciated just how hard that was. She cannot have slept for years. And just as I was finishing my schooling, she decided to become a primary school teacher and began on her later life career, fulfilling her passion for education. Mum has a strong sense of social justice and, no matter what difficulties our family faced, never let us forget our relative privilege.

Our household was always busy, and we all had to chip in to make it work. My amazing three siblings and I are all very different in our personalities and interests, but we have always been close. In the lottery of life I won big with my family. While we had our fair share of challenges, ultimately our ladders were climbable.

School was transformative for me, largely due to teachers who were somehow just what I needed at the points they arrived: Kim Wilson, Kathy Griffiths, Michael McPhillips, Marion Le, Graham Toms, Val Evans and many others. It is perhaps only in the longer term that we can see just how defining teachers' roles in our lives can be, and for each of them I can look back and see the moments when they shifted my trajectory.

At school I was what is commonly known as a nerd, and I found myself involved in various youth activities, one of which led to a morning tea at Parliament House for me and several other students with a federal MP, who shall remain nameless. I was in high school. It was the late 1990s, and they were heady times in Australian politics. I was excited about meeting a real-life politician. During our morning tea I asked the MP a question: if you could change anything about Australia, what would it be? Their response: 'Nothing.' It was profoundly disappointing. I had assumed the only reason anyone would do that job was because they were passionate about making a difference to something. This MP had spent the session trotting out the usual lines about how young people are our hope for the future – something that has always made me cringe. Not only does it deny young people their agency as present drivers of change, but more so it is a cop-out on behalf of those who are in leadership positions with the power to change things now. Always deferring to the potential of future generations is why we see growing inequality, a housing crisis, decimation of our natural environment and an increasingly unstable climate. What would you change? 'Nothing.'

Not content with doing nothing, I ended up deciding to study medicine, perhaps somewhat naively believing it was the best way that I could make a difference. So with too little money but plenty of excitement, especially about getting out of Canberra, I moved to Melbourne. My uni years were often pretty tough, moving from one dodgy rental to another and juggling work and study, but once again, with some luck and a system that was on my side, my ladders could be scaled.

It was not long before I started to get frustrated with things in medicine. It was becoming clear that a lot of what affected people's health could not be fixed by a doctor. Access to care was being determined by postcode and income, not need, and many of the things making people sick had nothing to do with health care at all; it was our social and physical environment – people disconnected from nature, from each other. I was restless and eager to find a way to change things, and after graduating I fell into the junior doctor arm of the Australian Medical Association. It was not quite what I was looking for; however, it was the catalyst for an unexpected life-changing meeting. A Geelong-based colleague and I were competing with one another to see who could stage better industrial action fighting for improved conditions for junior medical staff in public hospitals, and while I argue my walkout was better, he won the long game. I fell for his charms and ended up moving to Geelong.

Accustomed to an itinerant life, I had no sense of one place being home, but something about Geelong changed that. Even before I lived there it would hit me – every time I would go past the You Yangs, past the sinister beauty of the refinery lights, past Corio Bay, it just felt like home, and it still does. I have since married my strike-action crush, had two children and live there with our cat, which stays confined to our property 24 hours a day, and four chickens. We feel strongly connected to our community and the very special region we are lucky enough to grow as a family in.

It was in Geelong that I became more politically active. Once again I had struck good fortune, receiving a scholarship in 2011 to the London School of Economics to do a masters in health policy, planning and financing, motivated by a desire to improve access to health care. Out-of-pocket costs were rising, as they have continued to do since. While we like to pride ourselves on having a universal healthcare system, this has been eroded through increasing creeping costs for scans, tests, specialists, GPs, dental care, allied health, psychology, aids and equipment, and medication. We associate bankruptcy as a consequence of health costs with other countries, like the USA, but it is happening here. A growing number of Australians experience what is known as catastrophic health expenditure, where they spent more than 10 per cent of household income on health care, including over a third of the lowest income households. We know that at least one in four people with a chronic health condition forgo necessary care due to cost. A vicious cycle of poverty is the result for many people. Poor health

impacts their ability to work and participate in society. Low-income households are less likely to receive the care they need, and they are more likely to be further impoverished if they do – ladders with rungs that spin and are covered with grease.

On my return to Geelong, while working in general practice I noticed that there was one MP who was talking about this and all of the things I had been frustrated about throughout my medical career: Richard Di Natale. He was a federal senator in there working to change things. I reached out to Richard's office to see how I could support what he was doing, and I was welcomed in by Richard and his team. It opened up my world to a whole movement of people who care deeply about humanity and the environment. Around the same time, I began working in a service for people experiencing homelessness, and it was a tipping point. Every policy failure, every form of discrimination and all the ways our system entrenches inequality were being lived by the people I saw: intergenerational trauma; poverty; the wounds of colonialism; childhood neglect and abuse; violence; racism; transphobia; sexism; homophobia; isolation; asylum seekers hiding from authorities; people who had workplace accidents; gambling addiction; drug addiction; people caught up in the criminal justice system too young, stuck revolving between the streets and prison; burnt and infected feet from walking on hot ground without shoes; injuries from violent assaults and sexual assaults; simple chest infections becoming life threatening on a winter's night on the street; pregnant people avoiding care for fear of their babies being taken away; people dying – dying – because of their lack of safe and secure housing. And what I was seeing was only the tip of the iceberg. Every day in other practices I saw plenty of people barely hanging on, coming to see me for a mental healthcare plan to help with their anxiety about not being able to afford their next rent payment, living in their cars; families in inappropriate, overcrowded transitional housing for years; women stuck in violent households because they could not afford to leave. On any given night over 25,000 people are homeless in Victoria and over 100,000 are waiting for public housing, and those numbers are growing. Countless more are on the verge of losing their housing. How is this acceptable? In a country as rich as ours, how are we okay with this? I would go home at night, the image of the slippery ladder in my mind's eye. 'What are you doing about it?' There was almost nothing I could do as an individual GP in a clinic. It required system change, political change.

Inspired by Richard and many others, including Steph Hodgins-May, Lloyd Davies and Greg Barber, I decided to run for council in 2017. It was an incredible privilege to serve as a City of Greater Geelong councillor, working with my community for five years with the common goal of building a healthier, more connected and more sustainable Geelong. I would like to thank my councillor colleagues, including Pete Murrphy, and the thousands of council staff for their service of the Greater Geelong community and for their support and friendship. I retain a deep respect and appreciation for the value of local government in our democracy and the need for other levels of government to work with our councils.

Throughout my time as a councillor I was often asked about my experiences of being a young woman in politics, the inference being it must be hard. While it has had its challenges, I have always felt part of a tapestry of women woven together, making each other stronger, many of them pioneers who fought the battles to make it easier for me – the incredible women in my family, my mum, my sister, my many aunties, my grandmothers, my mother-in-law, my brother's partners; the women who have been my teachers and mentors, like Elizabeth Bennett and Ruth McGowan; my medical colleagues; my amazing friends; those MPs who were never too busy to answer a call, the wonderful federal Senator Janet Rice; Ellen Sandell in the other place and Samantha Ratnam, who I am honoured to join in this place; the Pathways to Politics for Women network; councillor colleagues around the state and Women in Local Democracy in Geelong – the women who reached out with words of encouragement, offers of help or just a knowing look. Thank you, you helped me through even the hardest of times.

In late 2019, pregnant with my second child, I had my first experience of true climate anxiety. Climate change was a major motivator for me to get involved in politics. There is no greater threat to our health and wellbeing. Almost 27 years ago, a few years before I had my morning tea with the unnamed MP,

Bob Brown in his first speech to federal Parliament spoke of the urgent threat of climate change, a speech that shamefully could be given today with few amendments.

I have lived through the subsequent decades of debate, of denial, of inaction. I have seen corruption of politics by vested interests and the fossil fuel lobby, the ever more dire predictions and closing windows of time for action while the insidious creep of climate change peppered by increasingly frequent extreme weather events and disasters, displacement of people, ecological disruption and growing instability around the world were a constant reminder of our failure to act, but until then I had not felt so despairing about it.

Having experienced recurrent pregnancy losses, I had always avoided letting myself imagine my future children, but they were now finding their way uninvited into my consciousness. The icy panic would come to me during restless nights when I would hear my grown-up kids asking ‘What did you do about it, Mum? You knew, what did you do?’ I know I am not alone in this experience. These and many darker questions about our future and our role in it haunt a growing number of us.

At that time there was steadily growing community pressure for governments to act on climate change. School students were striking regularly, demonstrating their agency and asking us, the adults with the power to make decisions, asking us, the leaders, to act: ‘This is an emergency. This is our future. What are you doing about it?’ The community of greater Geelong was also calling on us as councillors to recognise and act on the climate emergency. On 20 September 2019 I joined my community in marching for climate, and aside from the Cats winning an AFL Grand Final I have never seen so many people in our streets. Students, workers, health professionals, parents, grandparents, concerned citizens – people who had never been to a protest but were compelled to join this one.

The horrific Black Summer bushfires followed. My parents live on the south coast of New South Wales, and all my family were visiting them over the holiday period. Being eight months pregnant, luckily we had chosen to stay in Geelong, but I remember the constant worry, listening for updates, continually refreshing the Rural Fire Service website and checking in on family members who were marooned and evacuated several times. Then there was the smoke, which we were not spared. There was not only the physical discomfort associated with inhaling the filthy air but the worry about what effect this might have on my unborn child and on my young energetic toddler, who I had to keep cooped up inside to protect from it. Three billion animals, over 46 million acres and 34 human lives lost; homes and livelihoods destroyed; people displaced, climate refugees in their own country; the unmeasured long-term health impacts of smoke and stress – few in Australia were untouched by that summer of fires. No-one could escape the emergency anymore.

Despite the sense of despair and overwhelm, I came out of that period feeling more motivated than ever. As Bob Brown once said, ‘Don’t get depressed, get active.’ What choice was there, really? The greater Geelong community did not give up. They kept making their voices heard, and while it took time to get there I was proud to be part of one of a growing number of councils setting ambitious targets on climate change.

But over the next few years I felt increasingly like we were hitting a brick wall, and I could see a familiar pattern across western Victoria. Our region was being left behind by state and federal governments.

People in our rural and regional areas bear the greatest burden of the impacts of climate change, as we have seen in the recent catastrophic floods which affected communities and industries across my electorate. Despite knowing what we know, despite everything these communities have gone through and will go through, governments are negligently pursuing fossil fuel projects – gas drilling near the beautiful Twelve Apostles, potentially a floating gas terminal in Corio Bay. It shows extraordinary contempt for people and the environment now and in the future.

Our regional and rural communities also have less access to basic services like health care and experience significantly poorer health outcomes. Public transport is at best poor and in many cases

non-existent, entrenching car dependence and isolating people who cannot drive, limiting their access to work, education and services. Our rural and regional communities are also facing a housing affordability crisis, driving people into poverty, forcing people to leave their communities, impacting small businesses and services who cannot attract workers and pushing more people into homelessness. And our regional and rural communities can see what is happening to our precious natural environment – our rivers, groundwater, forests, grasslands and our native wildlife – through neglect and a failure of planning and policy to prioritise and value our environment, instead treating it as an afterthought. Councils cannot go it alone – not on climate change, not on the environment, not on addressing systemic inequality. We need other levels of government to do their bit, and time is not on our side.

I decided to take my fight to the state level, supported by people across the region who care deeply about social and ecological justice. There are too many people to name all individually, but I owe them my deepest gratitude for their hard work and their passion. Particularly I want to thank the 11 wonderful lower house candidates – Praise Morris, Sam McColl, Earl James, Ellen Burns, Ricky Lane, Thomas Campbell, Hilary McAllister, Genevieve Dawson-Scott, Rachel Semmens, Aleisha Smith and Courtney Gardner; all of their campaign teams; key organisers, including Judy Cameron; and the countless volunteers and supporters who gave their time and energy. I would also like to thank my recent workplace, Kensington Hill Medical Centre, and my patients, as well as past workplaces, Deakin University medical school, the Australian Journal of General Practice, Point Lonsdale Medical Group and The Living Room. Not only did they tolerate my constant side projects in politics but they actively supported me.

My extraordinary husband, who is the most talented, generous and all-round best human I know, and my amazing kids, I love you more than words allow. Thank you for everything you do and you give up to be part of this. My parents and my ever-selfless in-laws, we could not do what we do without you. And to all the community groups and the organisations in the Western Victoria Region who fight for our land, waterways and skies and for an end to systemic inequality, thank you for being a constant source of inspiration and hope.

I am all too aware of the responsibility that I now have. Every one of us here has been granted an enormous privilege: the power to make real change now, not to defer tough decisions to future generations. If my school-aged self asked me now, ‘If you could change anything, what would it be?’ I would tell her, ‘Dismantle systemic inequality; no more ladders with slippery rungs. Provide everyone with safe and secure housing. Ensure that need, not wealth or geography, determines access to essential services like health care. Allow people to live free from discrimination, violence and abuse. Show solidarity with First Nations peoples’ fight for truth, justice and treaty, and recognise that they have cared for this country for tens of thousands of years. Protect our land, waterways and skies, and treat them as living entities whose health is inextricable from that of our own. Fight to protect our democracy, including our right to protest. Act as though climate change is the greatest threat to human health and wellbeing that we face, because it is’, so when my grown-up kids ask me, ‘Mum, what did you do?’ I can look at them and say, ‘I did everything that I could.’

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 3:00 pm until 3:06 pm.**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (15:07): I again congratulate you on your election, President.

I am first and foremost a representative of the people of my electorate – Western Victoria Region. From the Grampians to the You Yangs, from the central highlands to the coast, I love Western Victoria. It is where I was born, where I was educated and where I have worked my entire adult life.

They say you never stop being a teacher – a profession I am so proud to have practised – so I would like to reflect on a few lessons that I have learned over my time to get to this place today. The first

lesson: never forget where you come from. My ancestors came to Australia of their own free will, mostly from the Scottish cities of Wigtown and Perth. Most of the McCracken men for about seven generations were named John. It is safe to say they were not blessed with creativity, but they were consistent and economical. And that is where my middle name comes from. But like many families in Western Victoria, I do not fully know the situation that got us to this point in time, but we are here.

I was born in Ballarat and raised in Beaufort, and I am proud to be a country kid at heart. Growing up we had quite a list of pets, and I could never understand why our family friends thought that they were a little bit odd. Let me give you a little sample. We had Kevin the sheep. He was named after the title character of *Home Alone*. We had a puppy who was a Great Dane bull-mastiff-ridgeback cross. We had Karen – before it became cool – the cat, who is actually still alive today, aged 18. And we had a whole heap of chooks named after characters from *Keeping Up Appearances*, as you do. All very normal I assure you. I used to love yabbing in our dam. The only problem was the occasional tiger or brown snake, and they were not on the list of pets, I tell you. I played tennis and squash, I rode my bike, because that is how you got around, and I also worked in my parents' pub. We had the freedom to play outside and get muddy, dirty and wet, and I do not think it did me any harm.

The second lesson: never forget older people. This relates to a very special person in my life, my grandmother Elaine McCracken. I love my nan; she is 101 years old. Nan served as a councillor for the town of Stawell and the Northern Grampians shire. My grandfather Arthur McCracken served as mayor four times over his many years of service. Pop passed away in 1986, before I was born, so Nan decided to run for his seat, and got elected.

In her earlier life Nan suffered through the Great Depression, World War II and losing two children, and she worked as a seamstress, more out of necessity than choice. She missed out on educational opportunities, but she made the best of what she had. She is dignified, diligent and understated. She taught me her ultrasecret weapon for getting what you want out of people, which is going to help me a lot in these times: food. I do not know how many times she would say to me, 'Joseph, if you ever want to break into a conversation, go with a plate of food.' And just as a sidenote, she is about the only person in my life that I let call me Joseph. Nan was not a feminist. She was stoic, a good manager and had a nurturing heart. Nan, thank you for your kindness, care and love. I will always be in debt to you.

My third lesson: family is everywhere. The concept of family for me has changed over the years. It used to mean 'mum, dad and kids', but when my parents divorced my view changed completely and I found it very challenging. I often bore the brunt of anger, frustration and fear, and it certainly left its scars on me. But it has also taught me a lot of lessons: resilience, empathy. It has taught me a lot about people, and it has helped me to see different perspectives. I have learned to let go. I have learned to forgive others and to forgive myself. I have come to realise that these experiences have shaped me into who I am today, and as much as I did not enjoy it at the time, I would not change a thing.

Family is really the people around you that you care about and love – so many of whom are here today – even though you are not related by blood. I still believe that family is the cornerstone of our communities, but it is a reflection of society that as families change, so do our communities and so must our attitude and thinking toward supporting families. We cannot force families to be what we think they should be. Families are what they are – big, small, blended or diverse. But the family unit is still vitally important, and it is the fabric that binds our society together.

Lesson four: education can free the individual. After finishing my own education at St Patrick's College in Ballarat, I graduated from the University of Ballarat with a bachelor of commerce and a bachelor of management. I worked as an accountant, but it all got a little bit too exciting for me, so I decided to swap the calculator for the whiteboard markers and become a teacher. It was honestly one of the best decisions of my life. I loved every single moment of being a teacher. I cared for my students greatly. I felt so honoured and privileged to be shaping futures. I loved having a laugh, sharing a joke. For me, banter was everything, and I gave as good as I got – another good training ground too, mind you.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my teaching was in the role of head of humanities. I was responsible for creating curriculum in civics, history, economics and geography, and I led the creation of programs which were factual, evidence-based and, most importantly, non-biased. Curriculum should focus on giving students life experiences in preparation for a future in the real world, not training activists.

One of the biggest insights I have gained in my time in schools is that sometimes the best teachers are not necessarily the ones with a teaching certificate. I have watched my friends who are here today, Sandy Leak and Andrena MacFarlane, work effectively to support students. To all non-teaching staff in schools, your job is just as important as the teachers', and I want to acknowledge and thank you for the often under-appreciated work that you do.

A good classroom to me is one full of laughter, learning and fun, and I wanted my students to be happy. I have enormous respect for young people. One young person in particular really stands out, and she cannot be here today because she is travelling around Australia. She is an incredible young woman who I taught in my global politics class. She migrated to Australia from the Middle East, and as I got to know her, I grew quite close to her as she confided in me her personal story.

Slavery, fear, sleep deprivation, torture, persecution – I cannot even begin to tell you the horror that this young girl experienced, and I could not help but get involved. After some very difficult discussions and a lot of red tape with some government departments, we managed to emancipate this young lady from her circumstances. I remember after her final exam, when she was leaving school for the last time in order to go to crisis housing, she turned to me and she gave me a hug and said, 'Joe, you have literally changed my life.' I was lost for words, and I am never lost for words. The truth of the matter is that this young person changed my life as well. We remain friends to this very day. It taught me that a good education with good teachers can free anyone and the world of opportunity is unlocked.

Local government, lesson five: get back to basics. 'Getting back to basics' was my slogan when I ran for Colac Otway Shire Council both in 2016, when I was elected third, and in 2020 when I was elected first with two full quotas. I did not manage to replicate that success at the last state election, but I am going to try next time, okay. I was elected mayor at the end of 2017, the youngest by a margin, and then I served as deputy mayor for two years. I had always strived to see public money spent efficiently and fairly and I hated seeing waste. I campaigned hard to focus on core council services: good roads, fair and reasonable rates, footpaths, public gardens and parks, drains that clear the water easily – the essentials that often get overlooked. Local government should not be involved in the business of other levels of government such as climate change, nuclear disarmament or foreign affairs. Sometimes I felt like I was on the set of the ABC's *Utopia*. I will not mention two-way radios or the many, many revisions of the governance rules or that boom gate at Skenes Creek or those mayoral chains, which still haunt me, although I do have to mention a wonderful project that I managed to get off the ground in Petjuli Street and Jacaranda Crescent. It was a great park, and I campaigned very hard for it.

I will always remember the wise advice of Helen Paatch OAM, who said to me, 'People might tell you that they voted for you, but the only ones you can believe are the ones that said they didn't vote for you.' The problem is I do not know which way Helen voted. I just hope she voted for me.

I would like to thank my friends from Colac Otway shire for their friendship over the last six years, particularly Kate Hanson for her honesty and friendship, Jason Schram, Chris Potter, Jamie Bell and Stephen Hart. To Tosh-Jake Finnigan, my friend and replacement on Colac Otway, I know you suffered greatly for shining a light on corruption and I hope you find justice. To Anne Howard, a very capable CEO, I wish you and your team all the best.

Lesson six: loyalty matters. I joined the Liberal Party when I was 19 years old, back in the dying days of the Howard government. One of my earliest political memories was in 1996. We were all crowded around the telly in the lounge room as John Howard swept to office, ushering in a golden era of Australian politics. The Liberal Party should not be afraid to stand for its values, as John Howard and

Peter Costello did. We must never forget that we are a centre-right political movement. We are the custodians of both the libertarian and conservative philosophies. Both have prospered in our party in the past and they can again.

I will always be a proud member of the Liberal Party. We are the enablers. We encourage people to stand on their own two feet. We facilitate the great Australian entrepreneurial spirit, not by handouts but by government getting out of the way. If you work hard, you should be rewarded, not taxed into oblivion. We want to see progress while preserving the traditions and settings that attract people from all over the world to call our country home. People lie at the core of our values and principles, and we must never forget that. We are a party of and for the people, and I will always be a loyal Liberal.

Lesson seven: know one's self. This is perhaps the hardest lesson for me to speak about because it is something deeply personal to me. Most people would not know this about me, and it may come as a shock to some. I actually do have a partner in my life, but my partner is a he, not a she. Jack, I want to thank you for all your support and care over the last period of time. It has been so appreciated. I do not know what I would have done without you. It has taken me a long time to come to terms with this. I have experienced doubt, shame, anxiety and many other things. I have never really talked about it much or made an issue of it, because I never wanted to be defined by it. I hate identity politics, and I will fight against it whenever I can. I have always struggled with the concept of defining a person by one aspect of who they are. A person is made up of a large set of diverse characteristics – age, gender, sexuality, race, religion, occupation. Why do we need to take one of those characteristics, amplify it and define a person in that way? The simple answer is: we do not, we should not. I think LGBT activists in Victoria need to carefully consider their public perception. Many, including me, have difficulty being associated with the movement. Most people in the LGBT community just want to get on with living their lives. Gay people do not need to be treated any differently to anyone else – no separate doctors, no separate radio stations, no festivals and no separate flags. And I question the need for a separate flag to identify the LGBT community, the rainbow flag. Flags represent nations and countries, and the only flags I will be saluting are the Australian flag and the Victorian flag. They are the only flags that do not discriminate on the people they represent.

But I do see this as actually a positive conversation to have. It is an opportunity to consider how we achieve real equality. It is going to require some serious thought, some open minds and, for some, educating themselves – but it can happen. It is not homophobic, bigoted or ignorant to question ill-informed notions of equality. Equality is something I care about, but I mean real equality, not the virtue signalling of the last 20 years that has failed.

My last lesson: be humble and thankful. It might be a problem in this place. To my parents – Terry, my father, and Heather, my stepmum – thank you for all your love, support and care. To Bev McArthur: Bev, I am so thankful that I have had you as a mentor, like you have mentored many other young people in the Liberal Party. You are a wealth of knowledge and experience and you are incredibly smart, and it is a complete honour to serve with you. Some may not know this about Bev, but Bev actually runs the McArthur school of politics, also known as 'camp McArthur'. Courses are available in philosophy, policy, speechwriting, media, elocution and the course I most recently graduated from, fashion.

**A member:** You haven't passed it.

**Joe McCracken:** I haven't passed it yet. I can attest the instruction is very direct, but it is of the highest calibre. Bev, thank you for your amazing friendship. You are a great person.

To Richard Riordan and his lovely wife Catherine and family, thank you for your friendship and welcoming me into your home and your lives. I am truly thankful for you taking me under your wing in Colac. To my friends and colleagues at Trinity College Colac: firstly, Melinda Roberts and Sharon McCrae – my two meter maids – you girls have still got it, I think. Thank you for your incredible friendship as well. To my gang, Andrena MacFarlane, Lynne Wheal, Leesa Sharkey, Caroline Grist,

Dianne Towers – cuz – Anne Hughes, Sandy Leak: you have made my teaching career so much fun, and it has been so worthwhile.

To my friends in the Liberal Party who helped me get here today – Matthew Verschuur, my trusted friend: thank you for everything. Thank you for your good humour, your impersonations and your support over many years. To my friends in Polwarth and the south-west, Bronwyn and Leigh McKenzie, Ian Pugh, Ian ‘Snag’ Smith – aka ‘the dancing king’ – Kathryn Cecil, Lyn Conlon, Veronica Levay, Peter and Mary Hay, Deb Lorraine, Ellie Read and Matt Baker, thank you so very much.

To my Ballarat friends: Helen and Robert Bath, Vivienne Edlund, Geoff and Di Notman, Leonie Smith, Roger and Caroline Pescott, John and Michelle Dooley, Shandra Cohen, Samantha McIntosh and her husband Greg, and Paul Tatchell and his lovely wife Helen. I have got to say if anyone ever needs any life lessons, go and talk to Paul Tatchell; he is like Gandhi or the oracle. He is an amazing man, and I respect him so much.

To my friends and supporters in Geelong: Wilma Bolitho, Donnie and Andrew Grigau, James Bennet-Hullin, the Honourable Ian Smith, Alison McLeod, the Honourable Senator Sarah Henderson, David Orford and Jo Bryant and our two new superstars Charlie Johnson and Edwina Royce and your families: thank you.

I also need to mention Norma Wells, Margaret and Daryl Barling, Michael Kroger, my good friend and cousin Ross Kroger, Julian McGauran, Ralph Krein and Graham Watt – each in your own way have contributed enormously. To state president Greg Mirabella and his capable preference negotiator Mike Horner, whose work supported my election, thank you as well.

Now, I tricked you, because this is actually my last lesson now. My very last lesson: the present is a gift. You cannot change yesterday, and tomorrow is not written. You only have the present, and it is a gift given each day; that is why it is called the present. And I hope I can make the most of it in this place.

All the experiences of my life, good and bad, have resulted in me being here today at this point in time, and I am so proud to be here. As I look to the future and I think of all the work that needs to be done I think: today is just the beginning.

*Members applauded.*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (15:30): I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the address-in-reply to the Governor’s speech. Whilst this is not my inaugural speech in Parliament, and nor indeed is it my first contribution in this chamber, it is the first opportunity I have had to explain to this place where I come from, why I am here and what I stand for, so with the indulgence of the chamber, this speech is perhaps a hybrid model.

First, can I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past and present.

In the first instance, I have not come from very far, just across Queen’s Hall.

**A member** interjected.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: It is a different world. As I was standing for re-election to the Parliament, albeit for the Council rather than the Assembly, I did not deliver a valedictory speech as the outgoing member for Pascoe Vale. As such, I take this opportunity to thank the people from Glenroy, Hadfield, Oak Park, Pascoe Vale, Pascoe Vale South and Coburg who elected me to the 58th and 59th parliaments. It was an honour and a privilege to serve them for eight years. Working together we achieved great things: more than \$100 million in upgrading and modernising local schools and early years infrastructure, the removal of five dangerous and congested level crossings, the removal of the

dangerous roundabout and the installation of traffic lights at the busy Gaffney and Sussex streets intersection, a new home for the indefatigable SES in Hadfield, a new home for our dedicated paramedics in Oak Park and so much more.

But most definitely it is the sharing and the helping in the ups and downs of the lives of local people and local families that had the most profound impact on me. It has been a genuine privilege to be invited into homes, businesses, kinders, schools, sporting clubs, places of worship, festivals and at times protests. It has been a genuine privilege to sit with and stand beside my constituents. There are far too many people to name, and invariably I would leave someone out, but I will be forever grateful for the welcome, the trust and the support of the people of the Pascoe Vale district. I am also very grateful to my Pascoe Vale electorate officers. Without them and their dedication to our district, we would not have achieved such great outcomes.

I now bring my experience to this important house of review as a member for the Western Metropolitan Region, and I extend my gratitude to the people of the region for their support. It is a region that extends from the north-west suburbs of Airport West and Gladstone Park to the waterside suburbs of Williamstown and Altona, a region that extends up the Calder to Sunbury and down the Princes Highway to Werribee. The region is huge, the people are diverse and the needs and concerns are extensive. It is an honour and a privilege to be their voice in this Parliament and in this government.

There is an important distinction to be made about the way in which we are all elected to this Parliament. Unlike in the other place, none of us in this chamber are elected on our own. We are all elected in the name of our respective parties. I thank the people of the region who have again put their trust in our Labor government to keep them safe and to help them live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives, and I acknowledge the tireless efforts of our members and candidates across the west and of course the great Australian Labor movement in securing the support of the western suburbs.

Whilst I grew up in the Yarra Valley and moved to the north as a young adult, I have always been connected by family, by work and through volunteering to the west of Melbourne. My familial connection to the west is initially through my great-grandparents Bridget and William Black, who lived on the distinctive block with the giant palm tree on The Strand in Williamstown. My great-grandfather was an engineer who worked in the rail yards. A source of familial pride is that he designed the heaviest steam train in the Southern Hemisphere. Indeed it is still on display in the Williamstown railway museum. Heavy Harry, as the train is known, also features in artwork on the Level Crossing Removal Project – I had nothing to do with that. Bride and Bill had nine children, including my grandfather Adrian. My family were active in the local Catholic parish. My great-uncle Gavan set up a law practice in Ferguson Street, Williamstown, in 1968, and through my uncle and my cousins it has been serving the western suburbs communities ever since. It must be said, though, that my fondest childhood memories of Williamstown are of my brothers being chased by swans on the foreshore.

Prior to coming to this place I worked in industrial relations, both for a union – the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association – and for an employer, formerly the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne. As a union organiser I was assigned responsibility for workers in retailers across large parts of the outer western suburbs. Werribee Plaza became my second home. From Altona and Hoppers Crossing through to Point Cook and Werribee – actually all the way to Torquay – I had the privilege of working for SDA members, some of the lowest paid workers in our society. Yet as the COVID pandemic has taught so many, they are some of the most essential workers in our society. Our membership is also predominantly female. It is young and it is insecure. Working in retail, there is always someone else lining up for your job, and as I did say in my inaugural speech in the other place, while there are some who like to suggest that those who come to this place from a union background lack real-world experience, I can assure them that my members' workplace was my workplace throughout the western suburbs. From the store level to the boardroom and into the tribunals, some of my most formative experiences have come from working hand in hand with everyday workers from across the west, doing my best to represent their interests as they seek to get ahead in life.

As I have said many times in this Parliament, I thank the SDA for their continued faith in me to represent the interests not just of SDA members but of all working people and their families, and that is exactly what this government has done and will continue to do. We have made sure that Victorians have the next day off when a public holiday falls on a weekend. We have made Easter Sunday and Grand Final Friday public holidays, particularly valued by retail workers and indeed by me as both a Catholic and a Tigers fan. We introduced the portable long service benefits scheme, allowing Victorians working in community services, contract cleaning and security to accrue long service leave entitlements and transfer them from job to job. We became the first state in the country to pass laws making wage theft illegal, protecting the pay of workers across our state. We also made workplace manslaughter a criminal offence, because no Victorian should die at work. Our government has ensured and will continue to ensure we use all possible powers to ensure Victorian workers get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and that they come home to their family and friends at the end of that day.

As I said prior to my election, I also worked as a senior industrial relations officer of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne, as it was then known. One-third of Victorian students are educated in Catholic and independent schools. It is a legitimate and important choice for many families. I worked with schools across Melbourne, including Catholic regional colleges and parish primary schools across the western suburbs. Working with these rapidly expanding school communities to address workforce issues was always a positive experience despite the many challenges. One of those challenges was ensuring that resources and facilities kept pace with demand. I am proud that it is a Labor government that has recognised these challenges and supported Catholic and independent schools, in particular low-fee schools, by legislating for recurrent funding and providing capital infrastructure grants. Across the western suburbs, just in the previous term our government has invested in Catholic and independent school upgrades, including St Paul's in Sunshine West, Wyndham Christian College, Thomas Carr College, Salesian College in Sunbury, Good News Lutheran College and the proposed Catholic primary school in Tarneit North.

I am proud to be part of a government that supports all students and all families from the early years, through school and beyond, wherever they choose to attend. I am proud to be part of a government that is making kinder free and instituting pre-prep. I am proud to be part of a government that is delivering 100 new schools, ensuring that every one of our growing communities in the west has access to a great local school. Since we came to government eight years ago, every single government specialist school in Victoria has been funded for a major capital upgrade. It is part of our investment of \$12.8 billion in new schools and more than 1850 school upgrades. Not only is this investment delivering great local schools, it is creating around 17,500 jobs in construction and associated industries. And we are also delivering the biggest reform to VCE since its inception, with the creation of the new VCE vocational major replacing VCAL. We are continuing to support students and families post school, and we will continue to support the jobs of the future with free TAFE.

I have a familial history in the west and I have worked extensively in the west, but I have also served on the board of a community service organisation that has delivered important family services across the west for decades, the Caroline Chisholm Society. The Caroline Chisholm Society – located first in Moonee Ponds, then Caroline Springs and Essendon, and it also has a site in Shepparton – has provided important services for women and young families across the western suburbs. From material aid to counselling, parenting education and supports, the Caroline Chisholm Society has helped families across the western suburbs thrive. The volunteers who have dedicated themselves to this organisation, serving vulnerable families, remain for me a true inspiration, and the women and children who I have met through this organisation remain a source of motivation, particularly in my new portfolio responsibilities.

However, perhaps my most formative experiences leading me to this place and my greatest inspiration are the lessons I learned in my own family. Some of what I have to say I have said in this Parliament before, but for me it has even greater poignancy in the context of my new responsibilities as the

Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers and Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. My mum Anne grew up in West Heidelberg. When she and her siblings were quite young, their father – my grandfather Adrian – had a diving accident and became a quadriplegic. My nanna gave up paid work as a nurse to be a full-time carer. Reliant on social housing and charity, sometimes things were hard, including when my nanna lost her younger son, a toddler, in another accident. But times were always full of love and support, and that helped build my nanna, my mum and her sisters into strong and resilient women, each with a commitment to building stronger and more socially just communities.

My nanna passed away nearly 10 years ago – which I could not believe when I counted it out last night – and whilst I am sure she is in here in spirit, I know she would have loved to have seen me elected to this place in the first instance but more particularly to see me become the minister for these portfolios. Nanna had a strong working Christian faith that drove her to defend the vulnerable and downtrodden in our community. From her work as a carer at home to her time managing Prague House, a home for homeless men, to her volunteering later in life at Mary of the Cross and at the Housing for the Aged Action Group, Nanna worked tirelessly to promote the dignity of every life. I draw inspiration from the example set by my nanna, and as I have said before, I know that her hunger for justice lives on in my mum and in me.

My dad Ian grew up in Bendigo and remains at heart a country person. For many years the family had a successful business in farm and earthmoving machinery. Later in life Dad's father suffered a workplace accident and acquired a brain injury. Like Mum's family, Dad's family knew the effects of living with disability. They also knew what it was like to manage the consequences of a workplace injury in a time before WorkCover. Dad was the first person in his family to decide that he wanted to go to university, and his father copped some criticism for agreeing that it was a worthwhile pursuit. But like my parents have always done for me, his parents empowered him to seize opportunities. There can be no doubt that Dad's upbringing influenced his lifetime commitment to balancing the right to operate a business and generate wealth with a commitment to fair and reasonable conditions of employment, safe workplaces and real and meaningful opportunities for skill development. This is something that Dad was recognised for in being made a Member of the Order of Australia, and his work in this regard has had a profound impact on my own perspective.

From the very beginning my parents sought to instill in me and my two younger brothers John-Paul and Daniel a sense that the whole world is interconnected and that we all have an obligation to work for the common good – a sense of solidarity. For as long as I can recall dinner conversations involved important policy questions around what constitutes a living wage, junior rates of pay, support for the working poor, freedom of association, the value of unpaid work, a fairer distribution of wealth, work and family life balance, equal access and opportunity, and the rights of the child. We grew up understanding that everyone – young or old, however abled, whether they be a student, a worker, a refugee or a prisoner – is equal and entitled to a standard of living that is consistent with human dignity. We grew up understanding that, yes, some people actually do need more than other people do in order to get ahead in life. Some people do need greater opportunities. We grew up understanding that particularly the most vulnerable people need more support than others to achieve their full potential.

I am proud to be part of a government that has been working to deliver that support for the last eight years, and I am excited to be part of a government that has been given that privilege for four more years. I indeed feel so very privileged to receive the commissions for Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers and Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. I feel privileged to be a voice in our government for those who are most vulnerable.

The government has already invested a record \$2.8 billion in child and family services over the last three budgets, including \$271.6 million in the 2022–23 budget as part of the *Roadmap for Reform*. Since 2014 we have funded an additional 1180 child protection practitioners to ensure that we keep our children as safe as possible, and we have tripled the investment in family services from 10 years ago, as I said yesterday. We are seeing the results of this investment. The rate of children in out-of-

home care in Victoria is 6.4 per 1000, the lowest in Australia and well below the national average of 8.1 per 1000. We have completed the transition to the NDIS. There are around 150,000 active participants in the scheme. Half of these participants are receiving supports for the first time. We released *Inclusive Victoria*, the state disability plan, in 2022, informed by significant stakeholder consultations and developed in close collaboration with the disability advisory council. And we are ensuring that across Victoria accessible facilities are available to those who need them.

Since 2015 we have invested over \$10 million to construct 70 fully accessible toilets, with more in the construction pipeline, and we did not just stop the former government's sell-off of public sector residential aged care; we have invested more than \$618 million in upgrades to public aged care since coming to government. More than \$320 million of this investment was in rural and regional Victoria.

In the carers portfolio our last budget continued the carers employment initiative. We also continued to deliver innovative and flexible support to Victoria's unpaid carers through \$22 million in funding per year for the Support for Carers program. But we know there is more to do, and I embrace the challenge.

In speaking of my journey to this place and in considering the work ahead, I acknowledge the many people who support me, in particular my staff. I do not think any of us would be here doing the things we are doing without our staff, and I am so grateful to all of them. I am grateful to my friends and extended family. There are so many of them – big Irish Catholic family that we are – but they all know who they are. I particularly thank my mum, my dad, my brother John-Paul and his wife Natalie and their children Kiera and Michaela and my brother Daniel. The way in which Mum and Dad have lived both their personal and professional lives is a constant source of inspiration. I am forever grateful for their love, their care and their unwavering support. And my brothers John-Paul and Daniel – I am also grateful for their love and support, and that of my sister-in-law Nat and my nieces.

And of course last but by no means least, Adrian and Patricia: Adrian, I could not do any of this without you. Your belief in me, your wisdom, your counsel, your humour, your cooking – we are definitely a team, and I love you very much. And Patricia, my greatest privilege is the God-given honour of being your mum. I am so very proud of you – proud that you tell the other kids not to chase the birds or feed the ducks; proud that you lead welcome to country at kinder; proud that you already know the words to *Solidarity Forever*, including all the verses; proud that you are kind and clever and stubborn – and I know that you will do amazing things. As was said yesterday, this job often takes all of us away from our families. You are always, though, my number one priority. I was there for your first words. Other than 'mum', 'dad' and of course 'no', it was actually 'dog'. You pointed at the dog on my apron and said, 'Dog'. I love reading you books – the detective dog Nell, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, *The Gruffalo*, *Cinderella* and so many more; you most definitely love to read. I hope that you will always know that you are always with me, my constant inspiration and motivation to help make this place better, more just, more kind and more equal for you, for Kiera and Michaela and Indra and all of your friends. For all children, for all people, all of us in this place have that obligation.

*Members applauded.*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:48): I am pleased to be able to rise and respond to the Governor's speech. I have just been listening to a number of inaugural speeches and then the minister who has come across from the other chamber into this one, and I think all of these speeches have given us a fantastic insight into understanding a lot of the motivations for people to enter this place but also their backgrounds and some of the wonderful things that they have achieved – but also those around them that have supported them and supported us all as we all have made the journey into the Parliament. It really has given us some great insights into people. I have enjoyed listening to them very much, and as the term carries on we will see more of, I am sure, those personalities and motivations coming out in various ways throughout the Parliament.

But I want to make some response to the Governor's speech, which was delivered on behalf of the government. Whilst there are so many points in here that are very constructive and that we all agree we need to improve – and I will speak to some of those – there are issues in this that I think we all need to be aware of as well. We have got these challenges that are arising, as we keep hearing, from a national level, from an international level and indeed at a state level, about rising costs, our inflation rates and interest rates that are affecting us here in this country. Those cost-of-living pressures are affecting many, many Victorians, and we have got an ability here in Victoria to assist in delivering good government programs and provide those services to all Victorians.

What I am concerned about is that the increase in cost-of-living pressures that we find, our increasing debt that we find at a national and state level, will drive our quality of living down, and I think that is something we all need to be aware of. What we have seen in the past eight years is a government that has spent and wasted billions and billions of dollars. We went into COVID and we had billions of dollars wasted on infrastructure projects. If that money had not been wasted, it could have been put into our necessary services like health and mental health. The government will say, 'We've had a royal commission into mental health', but that interim report was delivered years ago and what are the actions? The government talks in this speech about investing in our health care around the infrastructure projects, but we know that they have failed to deliver on the ones that they promised five years ago. This government has a record of promising and talking up big but delivering very little. But when they do deliver there is a lot of waste and mismanagement, and that is going to have a cost for Victorians for years to come.

There are many people that are more qualified than I that talk about the intergenerational debt that will be handed down to our children and their children. I think that should be something that we should all be concerned about, but I fear that the government does not grasp the severity of that and what that will actually mean. Something that I truly believe is that if we need, for instance, a strong health system, it must be sustainable, it must have that investment, but what we have had is failing infrastructure for many, many years. The government will go back and talk about previous governments, and invariably they talk about the Kennett government, but look what the Kennett government had to do after the last time.

**Melina Bath:** It was a botch-up.

**Georgie CROZIER:** More than a botch-up, Ms Bath – the state was on its knees. And we were reminded about the sell-offs only this morning through one of those speeches – the privatisation of public services through the Labor government then. They talk about Kennett but what Kennett did was get Victoria back going. The fortunes of that good governance then provided, I think, quite good governments in the early 2000s – Labor-led governments that were the beneficiaries of that and at a federal level through the reforms that were done at that point through GST reforms and others.

I make these points because this speech is a very big spending agenda. Our debt and our borrowings are truly enormous and they are growing and we do not know the true extent of that. As I said, the government talks up big and talks about how in the next four years they will focus on energy, health, education, transport and jobs. We have got an energy crisis; we know that. Energy prices are going up, and that is a massive issue, a massive cost-of-living issue. It is impacting every single household. And it is the vulnerable that are really those ones that will suffer the most because of those rising prices. We have got a federal government saying we are going to give you \$275 to bring down your energy prices. This government is saying we are transitioning to renewable energy, but they are not doing it in a sensible, measured way because what it will do is drive up those prices. I am truly concerned about the impact that will have not only on the individual but on our way of life, and of course our jobs and industries will be impacted. Many of us on the side of the house understand those in, for instance, farming communities, the inputs, those that are in business, the inputs, and those energy inputs that they must cater for so that their business can succeed and thrive.

Health – as you have heard me say many times, there is no denying Victoria’s health crisis is still very, very prevalent. I am reminded time and time again about the issues that my office is contacted about, about people who cannot get the surgery that they need. We have got an elective surgery waitlist – that is not elective, it is vital surgery. It is surgery that people need. When they cannot get their surgery, it impacts on their health and wellbeing and their ability to carry out their job. It impacts on their mental health. Often they rely on very strong opioids and painkillers, and that also can drive and cause many, many issues. Of course, as you have heard me say over the last few days, the latest figures that the government needs to provide to Victorians for us to understand what the elective surgery waitlist is are not being released by the government. They just refuse to do it. They make up some pathetic excuse when the data is ready. This is the data from September to December. This is the data collected over that time. We know that the numbers are in the tens of thousands, but what I fear is the extent, and I fear that those on the hidden waitlist are also getting more and more, so the pressures are going right through the system.

The government says it is investing in the health workforce, but we know that there are issues across the system because of experienced nurses leaving. I had a text message last night at 11:15 pm from somebody who had an experience in one of our major hospitals after being diagnosed as having had a mini stroke. What he told me in the text message concerned me greatly. He was texting me at that hour of night to say, ‘You’ve got to understand what is going on. Here is my experience.’ That happens to me all the time – desperate Victorians talking about the care they are receiving or the lack of management and treatment that they are receiving because the system is so stretched. That inability to have necessary and urgent care can be the difference between life and death. It can be the difference between disability and recovery. These issues need to be spoken about, and I will not give up talking about the needs of Victorians, because there is no doubt the health services in this state, despite all the good efforts from those that work within them, have been failing and continue to fail. There are too many people on that hidden waitlist that are dying because they cannot get their surgery. There are too many people on the elective surgery waitlist who are dying because they cannot get their surgery, and there are too many people that are requiring emergency management and are dying because they cannot get the proper treatment.

So this health crisis continues. The energy crisis is there. We have education, where our standards are dropping. The government says it is concentrating on jobs. I spoke about rising interest rates and inflationary pressures that are going to put more pressure on what the government has borrowed. It is basic economics: the more you borrow and the more interest rates go up, the more interest you are going to have to pay. What does that mean? That means less money to go into services like health, like education, like transport. This is a terribly worrying time, I think, for Victorians, because I am not sure the government has a full grasp of what is going on.

The government can spruik all they like about free this and free that. Well, we found out today that the Parliamentary Budget Office post-election report has revealed that there is no new funding beyond next year to deliver free TAFE. This is what I mean – there is no money there to deliver these programs, even though the government has been spruiking that, ‘We’re going to provide free this and free that.’ It is somebody’s money. It is the taxpayers money. Of course we want to provide support to those that need it. Of course we want people to have an education and have access to kindergarten and to provide really fabulous education at that very important stage, or at the other end after leaving school, getting a tertiary qualification and being able to do the best that an individual can – find that opportunity and really be able to do it. But we are finding where the shortfalls are. I think the big talk by the government on their big agenda is going to let down a lot of Victorians as we find out just how stretched the budget is and just how difficult it is that so many of these services and so many agencies and others are running out of money.

There is quite a lot more I would like to say about the Governor’s speech in my reply. There are some good things in here in terms of investing in women’s health. I applaud the government on that, but I doubt whether they will deliver it based on their track record. But I do say it is not just about delivering

these initiatives; it is about delivering good health care and having access and equity of access to good health care right across the state. That is not the case when you have got hospitals shutting down, you have got doctors' contracts being cancelled and you are having amalgamation of health services – that is the decline of access to health care across regional and rural Victoria. I know that those colleagues that come from those areas know exactly what I am talking about because their constituents are telling them as well.

I would like to say more about this, but I will leave it at that and I will leave it to others to make their contributions. Again, can I congratulate all those new MPs on their first speeches. I have enjoyed listening to a lot of the speeches that have come before the house so far.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:02): I also rise to make a contribution in reply to the Governor's speech, which was delivered by Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau, Governor of Victoria, at the opening of the first session of the 60th Parliament on 20 December 2022. In so doing I feel that the pitch for my address-in-reply today is one of hope and optimism because this government has such a bold and progressive reform agenda. I am excited and optimistic about the future and what this government has to offer the people of Victoria. I will go on to speak about some of the things that obviously occurred and were touched on in Her Excellency's speech, but also on how they are providing opportunities and impacting the people of the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region each and every day, and some of the things that are meaningful to me as well.

I am honoured to be elected as a member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, and I want to thank the voters of my region for placing their trust in me. I will work every day to represent their interests. It is a privilege and an honour to be able to serve for yet another term and certainly as a member of the government to be returned. As I said, it is a privilege to serve.

The thing that I think most people do not realise about the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region is that it is a diverse region. There are many people of diverse backgrounds, faiths, multicultural backgrounds. Although there might be pockets where there may be wealth, there are certainly people who experience hardship. For example, many people who I meet in my region, many women who I meet in my region, talk to me and tell me about their experiences of family violence. They may live in a well-appointed home, and what goes on behind closed doors may not be visible to people or the general public. But as we know, family violence affects all postcodes and social classes regardless of wealth. Whether you have wealth or lack wealth, it is not a barrier to people experiencing family violence. Something that I have learned in being a representative for people in my region is that sometimes women live in circumstances that do not necessarily portray the real circumstances going on at home and they can often find that a barrier to accessing assistance.

So it is something that I am careful to make sure of: that every woman in my region, regardless of her background, circumstances and the like, is able to access the help that she needs when she needs it. It is challenging. It is a challenge that we continue to face as a government. This government has invested enormous amounts of money in making sure that we can fight the scourge of family violence but that we can also make sure that women can access the resources that they need. One of the highlights in my region, for example, was last year, when this government opened the Orange Door services in Croydon. The east and the outer east for women in my region – the outer east has one of the highest rates of family violence in Victoria, so it was a resource that was opened and well needed in that area, and I understand that it is performing a great function for women who need to access the services that they need. That was a very proud moment, to see the government placing resources directly in my region so that women can access them. And of course there are other services that are placed in my region as well – at Box Hill, for example.

In regard to Her Excellency's speech, just in regard to investments in the healthcare system – and I touched on this yesterday when I spoke – our investment in our healthcare system is unprecedented. We are investing in health care in a range of ways. Not only are we building new hospitals and upgrading hospitals, but of course we are also investing in our healthcare workforce. We are also

making sure that we can increase the capacity for elective surgeries as well. But, for example, in my own region an announcement of a \$1 billion upgrade to rebuild the Maroondah Hospital was a fantastic announcement and one that was very well received. Specifically not only are we going to rebuild that hospital from the ground up, but we are going to also expand the capacity of that hospital by 200 new beds. We will also make sure there are 14 extra treatment spaces – because of course as the population grows we need to make sure we have additional capacity in our hospitals to treat people where they live and when they need it – and of course a new emergency department and mental health spaces as well, mental health hubs. We know that one of the things when we talk about the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System is that we are going to implement all of those recommendations, and making sure that people can access mental health care in local communities is critically important as well.

Of course something that is very important to me is public education. We have heard a number of speeches today, and various members have spoken about their humble beginnings and their education experiences. Of course the Andrews Labor government has a strong track record and commitment in public education. We are building new schools in growing communities as well and we are also upgrading existing schools, and that is something that I am most proud of. For example, in my own region – and we have already talked about this; it was announced well before the election – we are upgrading Warrandyte secondary college with an amount of \$4.1 million to make sure that students who go to that school can have fit-for-purpose buildings to make sure that they can get access to the best education they can. Melba secondary college – another announcement, which was about delivering on stage 3 of that rebuild, and that is an amount of \$18 million to secure that rebuild.

A fantastic announcement which was delivered as well – and one that is very close to not only my heart but I know President Shaun Leane's heart as well – was the complete rebuild of Croydon Community School, a fantastic collaboration between not only the teachers, the professionals and the educators who work at the school but also the architects, who came up with purpose-built plans to make sure that that school and the students' needs at that school could be met by the design of that school as well. I think the principal called it the 'circling of the wagons', so that no matter where you are in the buildings, they look centrally into the playground areas. There are areas where there is water, natural stone, natural logs and the like, which give it a really nice bush feel. There are beautiful gardens as well, and they have the capacity to have chooks there as well and kitchen gardens, so the kids can really get access to the best facilities that they need and that are purpose-built for their needs. What I know is a school like Croydon Community School absolutely saves lives, because some of the children that attend this school have experienced incredible hardship and disadvantage.

I must say that when I attended the graduation of some of the students toward the end of last year some of the students performed for us at their graduation ceremony, and the calibre of the musicians that are coming out of that school was absolutely something to behold. It was such a privilege to listen to the music that they performed for us. I look at those kids and I think all of them have a really bright future, and it made me feel incredibly proud to share in that moment with them.

There is also the upgrading of Croydon Special Developmental School. And something again that I notice when I go and visit schools in my region is that of course we need to make sure that our students with a disability can learn in fit-for-purpose buildings, and many of the schools that were first built to educate special needs students are now old, outdated and not fit for purpose anymore. So this government really put heart into upgrading schools and public education, because what we know is kids today need resources to be able to learn.

Many, many years ago, often it was just thought that kids with special needs really did not need access to education; it was just sending them off for the day. But I am incredibly impressed by our teachers who every day go to our special development schools and special schools to educate children with special needs. Seeing those kids flourish and the looks on their faces when they are learning in those classrooms really is amazing. So I am incredibly proud of being able to do this, and I look forward to the upgrades to Croydon Special Developmental School. I know one of the upgrades is to the

hydrotherapy pool as well, because therapy is a really important part of providing good quality education at those special schools. So I look forward to that happening as well.

And of course with the free TAFE initiative we have placed new courses on the free TAFE list. I know that for many students free TAFE and TAFE generally really does change lives. I am somebody who was fortunate enough to attend TAFE when I left school. In fact I think I was still in year 10, and I touched on this in my inaugural speech. When I was in year 10 I went to learn to type at night at TAFE. I and a girlfriend jumped on the train after school, and we would go on the train line to Meadowbank TAFE college, as it was, and we would learn to type at night. I remember my mum saying to me, 'Always have a skill. Have something that you can fall back on, because you'll always be able to find work,' and that was good advice.

What we know about TAFE is that it provides access to high-quality vocational education and training. I am really proud to have an institution like Box Hill TAFE in my region, for example. I think it will turn 100, if not this year the year after, so it is an institution of incredible longevity. It has survived many attacks by conservative governments. And I might just mention – even though it is just outside my region it is still a part of Box Hill TAFE – the Lilydale campus. That was under threat of full closure by previous conservative governments, and when we were in opposition we mounted a very successful campaign to save the Lilydale campus. It is now a campus of Box Hill TAFE. I have visited the campus. They offer amazing programs for students in the automotive trade but also in electrical trades. As I have said previously, my daughter is looking forward to undertaking an electrical apprenticeship.

**A member:** Yay!

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes, there you go. And I trust and hope that she will be able to access that in my region as well, and I am incredibly proud of her as well for doing it.

Also North East Link is another project in my region which will have a significant impact for people who live in my local community. Since I moved into my community many years ago now, I have watched the traffic steadily grow, and the North East Link project will have such a significant impact on people's lives: removing 15,000 trucks off local roads, reducing travel times by 35 minutes, the 10,000 jobs we are going to create but also planting 30,000 trees on that construction alone. But 10,000 jobs for people not only in my region but further afield – apprentices, people with disabilities – is such a fantastic opportunity. This is where a government can demonstrate how we can use our social capital to do really good work for the communities which we serve. I am really proud of that project. I am excited by it. Every time I drive on the Greensborough Highway I come over the hill at Watsonia and I look down the hill to my left and I can see real progress being made. There are so many cranes on that horizon.

We went down there with the Deputy Premier, the Honourable Jacinta Allan, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the other day. People in my community are excited to see that happening, and it is moving at such a pace. So people now know that we get on with it. We say what we do and we deliver on what we say we are going to do, and people trust us because they can see the progress on that. So all of those things are happening right now in my region.

As I said, whether it is free TAFE or even free kinder – and I am running out of time, so I will not have time to talk about free kinder, but I know the impact that that will make for the youngest and littlest Victorians in my region. And I cannot wait to go out and visit kinders in my region and take out the free kinder kits – which I know kids will love, with so many items of great local content – and talk to the parents. There are also our prep bags for our schools. I get out the frisbee – it is like giving each kid a can of Coke when you fling it around the classroom, and then the teachers take hours to calm everyone down. But that is what school is about; it is about having fun, right? And if kids are having fun and they are happy, they will learn.

**Tom McIntosh:** Play-based learning.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Play-based learning, absolutely: ‘Let’s see how aerodynamic a frisbee is. How far will it go? How high will it go?’ – all of these things. You learn lots of things just by playing. So for our littlest Victorians, certainly whether you are a preppy or in kinder or right through to year 12 and the like, whether you want to study vocational education – and our senior secondary school reforms now mean that it will be easier for kids to get access to and go and study vocational education and training – or whether you want to do a school-based apprenticeship, all of those opportunities need to come back so we can get kids into work, into secure, well-paid jobs, jobs for the future. Kids are excited to be able to work on renewable energy projects as well.

There is so much to offer Victorians. I am incredibly proud to be a member of this government that has been returned for a third term. I look forward to continuing to work on everything that the government is saying we will be delivering throughout this term and beyond, and I look forward to serving. As I said earlier, it is a privilege to serve. I would also like to congratulate the members in the chamber who made their inaugural speeches today – there were some very interesting speeches made – and I look forward to working with members across the chamber.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:17): Deputy President, I am pleased to see you back in the chair, as well as the President, in this 60th Parliament. I rise to make my contribution on the response to the Governor’s speech last December, and in doing so I would also like to put on record my thanks for the service that the Honourable Linda Dessau, Her Excellency, provides this state. I have not met her on many occasions, and sometimes, as when we were sworn in last month, it is very perfunctory. But one experience was four years ago on the 10th anniversary of the Black Saturday fires in Central Gippsland when she came down and toured the region. I remember going to Kernot Hall and meeting with her and having a conversation, and I was very impressed by her grace and humbleness in response to the people and the lives that were so devastatingly affected by the multiple bushfires that created havoc in our region. So I thank her for the service and the elegance and dignity she provides in the role.

Indeed when I first came in and read the Governor’s speech a couple of times ago, I went, ‘Who wrote this?’ And then of course I realised it is the government’s agenda and indeed the Premier or one of his multiple media gurus had written this down for us to look at. Looking at it, it is a big shout-out to the Andrews government, and one would expect that. It casts the net to share with the public what they believe they are going to achieve, and I am interested – very interested – in the topics that are covered. Indeed under ‘Energy’ the first line is ‘Bringing back the SEC’. When that little bombshell happened sometime in early November prior to the election, I of course was in the Latrobe Valley and handing out how-to-vote cards in and around Gippsland, and it was viewed with great scepticism by many of the people I spoke with on pre-poll. For those hard and fast in the Labor camp, yes, of course it was all fabulous, but many in central Gippsland basically felt that it was going to be a joke.

It was an election commitment announced in the CBD or surrounds of Melbourne and then later on flogged at the Yallourn power station. The energy situation in Victoria is incredibly serious; there is no doubt about that. Since coming in and seeing the closure of Hazelwood and the effect that has had on the Latrobe Valley we have seen the Andrews government’s closure statement on the native timber industry and the strangulation of that and the effect that that is having on our regions. Not only the Latrobe Valley but the broader Gippsland region is really in dire straits, and there are ramifications of that in a wider context. We are going to move toward renewables, and that is the path that we are on, but there is a great danger of falling off the cliff too soon. We need dispatchable power. We need reliable power. Batteries are coming, but with the requirements of batteries there is a danger that they absolutely will not be able to fill that short gap when the sun is not shining and the wind is not blowing or it is blowing too hard.

The government needs to be very mindful over the next four years about supporting the valley. We have had the Latrobe Valley Authority, and that is coming to wither on the vine. It had \$7.5 million in the last budget and half of that was on wages, with the little bit left on projects. What is going to happen? We see the Latrobe Valley is going to be home to the new hub of the SEC. We had the

GovHub, but during the course of COVID everyone went home, and many, many of those people have not come back – whether they actually worked in the valley at the same time is a contentious issue. We are seeing the loss of livelihoods and jobs in our central Gippsland area, and it is an absolute concern. You see other areas growing as ours is contracting. The government needs to be most sensitive to this so it is not just lip service.

The cost of living is going up. We know that. We know that the cost of electricity, the cost of gas, the cost of services is incredibly heartbreaking for many families. We know that education is an incredibly important aspect, and it is one that I feel that this house should inquire into and investigate, along with my good colleague Dr Bach, and look at some of the positives that are happening in our schools on a daily basis but look at where the stress points are, look at what is happening in terms of our teachers, our teacher training, our teacher retention – and regional Victoria, we often see, is disproportionately disadvantaged in terms of student outcomes. This has been the case for many a year, but it is time we reflected on that with new eyes, fresh eyes, and asked how government policy can support our regions and retain our teachers in regional areas.

I have time and again heard the concern that school councils have around electing or approving principals and the feeling that they are being separated and left out of those very important conversations, and they seem to often be held in the regional space rather than letting parents and the school community have proper input. And the curriculum – I believe it is important that we now have a look at the curriculum as a whole and with fresh eyes. If you go and talk to many teachers, as I still do, often there is a burden of requirement. And we have to also look at how our standard is going. If it is working, our standard should be going up. We should be matching it on the world stage, but we have seen in terms of the Programme for International Student Assessment report and assessments that Australia-wide we are slipping back. Just because it is Australia-wide we should not just put our cue on the rack and go, ‘Well, nothing we can do.’ It is really important to address those sorts of issues.

Recently we saw the Grattan Institute. We have heard the government talk about its build in terms infrastructure, and the Grattan Institute often are very considered with the reports that they put out. They are saying that flexible learning spaces are not serving children. Anybody who has taught in a classroom and had a large classroom area –

**Matthew Bach:** Put the walls back in.

**Melina BATH:** That is what they are saying. It can very much disadvantage certain students. They are saying that as part of this Big Build there should be a retrofit to shrink those classrooms back to a manageable size. I actually know this from a very personal context, because my youngest son had a learning difficulty and he absolutely could not cope in a large classroom setting. He has made good ends and is doing well in life, but he really struggled in those noisy and large classroom settings.

Post-COVID disadvantage and disengagement – we hear, very concerningly, on the ground parents talking about their children having lost contact over COVID and having been removed from the classroom and having had to be at home during those long, long months and the lack of engagement that they have now. And the concern we see now is about truancy – young people are just not engaging as they did. These are concerns that we need to address, and window-dressing in a speech from the government certainly is not sufficient. These are some of the things that I think we need to be looking at.

The Governor spoke about health, and there were a number of initiatives in there. IVF was one of them, and I remember during the course of the COVID pandemic, when the government actually shut down the private services for people going off and getting their IVF treatment, it was very traumatic. We saw recently the AMA and indeed the Victorian president of the AMA Dr McRae, and I am quoting from a recent report, say:

Victoria’s public hospitals are in crisis.

He said over several years we have not been making:

... increased investment in staffing and infrastructure. Factors including an ageing population, an increase in chronic and complex health conditions, and escalating presentations to emergency departments ... for mental health conditions ...

These are all very significant problems. What we are seeing in a local context, and again the AMA have spoken to this, is that rather than there being 80,000 – or 85,000, which is the government figure, and that is some months old now – on the elective surgery waitlist, they are talking about a figure that they have done independently of 135,000 Victorians on the elective surgery waitlist. And we know that these are not elective; these are must-have surgeries. These are surgeries for which the more the wait is prolonged, the more debility and pain there is, and the recovery rates certainly can be compromised. I spoke with a number of people in the last couple of years about that delayed service and delayed elective surgery, and in the end there was one of them in particular – it was elective; it was a hip replacement for a gentleman in South Gippsland – whose doctor said, ‘It’s no longer elective. You’ve lost that much weight; your stomach’s been ripped apart by analgesics and painkillers to keep you going, and it’s now life-threatening surgery.’ We do not want this to continue.

The concerning thing that we see in some of our regional hospitals – and our regional hospitals do an amazing role; every single person in there, all of those staff in the medical professions and all the behind-the-scenes staff that back them up, are working in very stressful and pressurised situations – is their elective surgery waitlists. I will quote two hospitals – their elective surgery waitlists have ballooned. In the 2020–21 financial year Latrobe Regional had just under 1000 people on that elective surgery waitlist. In the next and most recent report of 2021–22 we have got 1600 people waiting on elective surgery. We see an increase, but not quite to the same degree, in the West Gippsland health service. We know that when we had the election the Liberals and Nationals made a commitment, as they had the previous election, on the West Gippsland hospital and finally, finally the Andrews government were dragged kicking and screaming to announce that they would also commit to the West Gippsland hospital. It is much needed and the most significant priority for the seat of Narracan, the council of Baw Baw and all of those very good people that live there. We thank the Warragul hospital CEO and staff for all of the work that they have done over a period of time working in very cramped conditions in an exceedingly old hospital that is not fit for purpose.

Another thing I would like to cover off on is transport. There is a section here on transport, and what we know is that the lifeblood of our rural communities is our roads and rail. And what we also know living in regional Victoria is that our roads are crumbling. Potholes are the order of the day, and when they are fixed they just deteriorate at a great rate of knots and create frustration and indeed compromise driver safety. Twenty-five per cent of the population live outside the largest city, the metropolitan area as it is classified, but 25 per cent of the population receive – from the Parliamentary Budget Office, these figures – 13 per cent of the infrastructure build for transport, and people are feeling it.

Certainly we look at jobs, and I go back again to the Latrobe Valley. We see other regions growing by the thousands in terms of their job numbers. I love it when the Labor Party quotes regional unemployment as being at an all-time low et cetera – I think the previous federal government also had something to do with that. However, when you look at the regional areas and you look at Latrobe as a small region, a municipality, our unemployment figures are absolutely scary, and again this needs be addressed in a serious way.

I would like to thank the people of Eastern Victoria Region for re-electing me. I look forward to working hard every day to serve the population of Eastern Victorian Region.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:32): I rise to also make a contribution in reply to the Governor’s speech. This Labor government won the election in November by putting forward a positive plan for the future of all Victorians. We did this by addressing the major challenges facing Victoria in a practical and positive way and by demonstrating to the Victorian people that we have the strength and integrity to deliver on those plans. Those plans include a holistic view of the state, not

just metro Melbourne but the regions as well, in recognition of the connection between city and country and that the prosperity of one is tied to the other. The plan is for a growing state, a multicultural state, a state with a high quality of life and a state laying the groundwork for reconciliation with First People. We are building the infrastructure that we need in the future, whether that be world-class hospitals and schools, the Metro Tunnel, the Suburban Rail Loop, including airport rail, upgrading regional train lines and TAFEs or removing level crossings – all this while lowering emissions at an accelerating rate. These are the projects and investments that will make Melbourne a world-class city and Victoria a world-class state. To achieve this we need more skilled workers to fill more new jobs with good conditions in construction, energy, hospitals, schools and kindergartens. These jobs need to be secure, and people need to return home to their families safely at the end of the day. These jobs also need to pay well. They need to keep up with the rate of the cost of living.

I want to start by talking about the start that we are giving to our next generation of kids.

**A member** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Just in time. This is about how we look after and raise the next generation who will shape the future of Victoria. The way that we care for and educate our kids will shape the future of the Victorian economy. The people who work in this sector are truly life changing, and every day I am blown away by the care and dedication that our early education workers provide to our babies, toddlers and children, who at such a young age can be on occasion so demanding. Ninety per cent of a child's brain development occurs before they are five years old, and I am proud that the Best Start initiative kicked off this year with participating kindergartens offering families free kinder. This policy underpins everything we are doing by investing in our young minds at their most critical time for development, emotionally and academically, setting them up for the future. Most exciting to me is that this investment will help our kids identify and control their feelings, and if we can help our children continue to master their feelings and control their behaviour, we can make massive change as a society in big areas like violence, especially men's violence against women, and mental health.

Not only is this an investment in the future of human capital in our state and the productivity of our state but it is an investment in the productivity of our state right now by allowing parents to work more hours and keep the gains from that work in their pockets rather than spending them on more kinder fees. To support this investment we are building more childcare centres and upgrading hundreds of kindergartens right across the state – like the kinder I visited in Yarram last week where we are investing \$2 million to upgrade facilities to accommodate a growing population and the introduction of three-year-old kinder.

This also means local construction jobs and new jobs in early education, which is being supported by workforce initiatives including free TAFE. I studied at TAFE and I am passionate about supporting other Victorians to do so and making sure they do it in a quality TAFE system. Free TAFE will expand so that all Victorians can study for in-demand jobs like health care, mental health, construction, early childhood and hospitality. The government will change the once-in-a-lifetime limits so Victorians can take multiple free TAFE courses, and we will build and upgrade TAFE campuses around the state so that Victorians can continue to study in quality facilities, like the brand new \$25 million TAFE in Sale that has been finished and was opened last year. I have toured the excellent facilities in the heart of town and seen how they are offering skills in demand to the local community, like aged care, construction and, again, early childhood education.

Free TAFE is helping Victorians train for their future. This will continue to grow an agile and skilled workforce to provide the goods and services we need, including our clean energy future, with investment in a range of initiatives focused on renewable energy jobs. Making the transition to a low-emission economy is one of our greatest, if not our greatest, challenges. Our renewable electricity target is 95 per cent by 2035. Our emission reduction target is 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero emissions by 2045. There is no doubt these targets are ambitious, and to provide comfort and certainty to Victorians about power supply, power prices and jobs in the energy industry we are bringing back

the State Electricity Commission. The new SEC will invest directly in electricity generation with a commitment to at least 4.5 gigawatts – that is equivalent to the capacity of Loy Yang A – by 2035. Investing directly in generation will ensure that profits will be returned to helping keep bills down for Victorians.

As an electrician I am proud that we will also ensure that there are tens of thousands of good jobs in the energy sector for the next generation, including thousands of apprentices and trainees. In recognition of the workforce skills, the community's contribution to powering Victoria and the region's future opportunities, the SEC will set up office in Eastern Victoria, in Morwell. Thousands of renewable energy jobs will be in regional Victoria, including in Eastern Victoria, where Bass Strait off the coast of Gippsland is the first declared offshore wind zone in Australia. In December I joined state and federal energy ministers to make that announcement on Ninety Mile Beach, marking the first practical step in bringing these well-paid, skilled regional jobs into reality. We have wasted no time in starting this massive and important work, with the Victorian government announcing the panel of experts that will help guide the SEC and its investments just this week.

Further driving the regional economy, and in response to increasing financial pressures on Victorians, the government will cap regional public transport fares, making it easier for families and commuters in regional Victoria to get around by train and bus. New trains to support increased demand will be made right here in Victoria, and they will be run on upgraded lines connecting upgraded stations – including the Gippsland line – which are close to new health services. I have visited new stations under construction and have watched the new Pakenham station and elevated line take shape, transforming the space underneath and slashing time spent waiting in traffic. I have watched hundreds of diverse construction workers in hi-vis with well-paid jobs eat at local cafes. They are absolutely full. Travel on new Victorian-made trains will be affordable and equitable between city and country, and they will help people get to new health services.

In Eastern Victoria, as I am sure Minister Shing will attest, a new West Gippsland hospital will be built, an upgraded Wonthaggi Hospital will be built, we are finishing massive upgrades at Latrobe Regional Hospital in Traralgon and a new aged care building will be built in Maffra. I toured the existing Maffra aged care last year and this was clearly a welcome announcement as the existing facilities are dated.

Public health staff have been doing an incredible job through challenging times to continue to provide world-class care for our community, including our older people. Our health workforce has put in a mammoth effort over the past two years, from the nurses, the midwives and the patient service attendants to the allied health professionals, the doctors, the ambos and the ward clerks. I would like to join all Victorians in thanking them.

Right across the country the pandemic has placed unprecedented and sustained pressure on our hospitals and ambulance services. To help manage these significant challenges we have continued to invest and back in our health workforce with a range of workforce retention and attraction measures, which I will come back to. But they also need to work in the best possible environments, so to reiterate my previous comments, the Wonthaggi Hospital redevelopment will be an investment of \$250 million to \$290 million for the second stage of a major redevelopment. It will deliver extra beds, a new birthing complex and a new outpatient clinic. The new West Gippsland hospital will put patients first – the government will invest \$610 million to \$675 million to build a brand new hospital for locals in West Gippsland, located in Drouin East. This is a commitment to invest in the growing regional areas that are vital to our state's continued success.

All Victorians, including regional Victorians, will also benefit from state-of-the-art, large-scale hospital projects, including delivering the biggest hospital infrastructure project in Australia's history, the new Royal Melbourne and Royal Women's hospitals alongside Metro Tunnel's new Arden station, to give patients across Victoria access to the very best of care. From 2025 both the Parkville and Arden medical precincts will have brand new train stations and be linked, making it a 2-minute trip between

hospital campuses and connecting them to the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton and the rest of Victoria through the regional rail network.

This investment in both metro and regional health services also drives home the commitment of the government to an equitable and healthy Victoria. This includes Victorian women, with a signature policy of this government to invest in women's health. Women are 50 per cent of the population and have different health needs, which are going to be missed too often in traditional health services – and we are well aware that this is not a niche policy. The government will create 20 new women's health clinics, including a dedicated, Aboriginal-led women's health clinic. These will be supported by an inquiry into women's pain management, chaired by a panel of experts who will hear directly from women about their experiences accessing treatment. The government will establish a women's health clinic to visit remote parts of the state and will recruit more women's health specialists. Support groups and mental health programs for women tackling challenging health issues like endometriosis will be established.

The new trains I mentioned earlier, on the new tracks with new stations, will also support regional Victoria to host the Commonwealth Games in March 2026. This will also be in eastern Victoria. The games will bring together athletes, communities, cultures and businesses in an exciting program of events supporting thousands of Victorians, with the majority in regional Victoria. We will invest in new and upgraded infrastructure that will provide both first-class games experiences and improved facilities for Victorians in the future. Victorians love sport, especially regional Victorians, and the experience of having world-class athletes competing in home towns across the state will inspire and motivate local kids and energise local sports clubs and leagues, all at the same time. More social and affordable housing will be created as part of the athletes villages, supporting more Victorians to have a place called home.

But it is not just the big-ticket items; there are also initiatives to make life easier for Victorian families facing challenges. Families supporting kids with disabilities have been facing challenges, and we have heard that and have responded to that. For these families the government will deliver a package to transform specialist schools through upgrades and more support for students in the classroom. The government will also extend outside hours care to every specialist school in the state and will create onsite space for allied health appointments. NDIS navigators will be introduced into all specialist schools to help families navigate the system, and there will also be more speech pathologists and OTs in regional areas, TAFE transition officers, aqua therapy pools, a Premier's advisory committee and more therapy animals in our specialist schools – because kids love them and they work.

We will also encourage and support those who look after us when we are sick and get more nurses into the public health system. Thousands of students will have the cost of their nursing or midwifery studies paid for, while scholarships will be available for thousands more who complete postgraduate studies in areas of need, including intensive care, cancer care, paediatrics and nurse practitioner specialties. The government will also provide a \$5000 sign-on bonus for nurses who graduate in the next three years, rewarding those who choose to take up careers in Victoria's public health system. We will introduce stronger nurse-to-patient ratios and more nurses and midwives in the public system to help ease the load on our busy healthcare workers.

We will establish the paramedic practitioner role with an agreed model of care that can strengthen our ambulance service while easing pressure on our busy hospitals at the same time. We will add another 40 MICA paramedics to our ranks and we will incentivise more doctors to become GPs, offering financial incentives for doctors who enrol in the GP training program. The program will be available for two years and we will continue to work with the Albanese Labor government to increase the number of general practitioner and rural generalist GP training places so that even more medical students and junior doctors can join this critically important profession.

It is an ambitious and thorough agenda that this government has committed to, covering health, equality, jobs, climate and the environment, education, the cost of living and other challenges and

opportunities facing our community. In all that I have said I am giving only a mere overview of all the work of this government, and I could go on for much, much longer, but everything I have touched on and more is why I am proud of this government, our achievements, our commitments and all we will do for Victorians. I am sure that for all of those Victorians that voted for us in November we will deliver on all the commitments we have made and more, because we bring the team, the people, the life experience and the values that can deliver all that, and that is why I am proud to be here in this government delivering all this and more for the people of Victoria.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:47): It is good to rise to join this important debate, and it is lovely to follow Mr McIntosh. I do want to agree with many of the things he said, initially in particular in the area of early childhood. In the area of early childhood there is so much agreement, pleasingly, between those of us on this side of the house and those opposite, and it is excellent that the minister – a fine minister in my view, Minister Stitt – who is in the house presently, has led a reform process to introduce an expansion of the availability of kinder places not only for three-year-olds but also for four-year-olds. And as Minister Stitt knows, my daughter Phoebe is currently in four-year-old kinder at the local sessional kinder with amazing teachers – and our early childhood educators are fabulous and the various other support and allied staff are fabulous.

Of course, as has been aired previously, and I will not recapitulate these arguments now, we have some small concerns around issues concerning some kindergartens that do charge slightly higher fees, but nonetheless I concur wholeheartedly with the comments of Mr McIntosh regarding the huge importance of early childhood education. All of us in this place still want to see participation rates increase further.

It has been interesting for me to note some of the contributions of various academics, child psychologists and other experts to the federal Labor government's inquiry into school refusal. One of the key themes when you look at those submissions is that all of us as a community can work together to lift the standing of not only the teaching profession but also our schools and our kindergartens. Because while the vast majority of Victorian parents have a really thorough understanding about the huge benefits of education – and Mr McIntosh discussed them eloquently in my view, as did Ms Bath, the former schoolteacher. Most people on this side of the house are former schoolteachers.

**Moira Deeming:** Almost. Even me.

**Matthew BACH:** That is right. Mrs Deeming is currently in the house. She is a former schoolteacher as well. But nonetheless, we must all work together because a minority – but still a minority that is too large – out in the community do not quite have the fulsome understanding that we would like them to have about how amazing kindergarten is and how transformational kindergarten is, but also our schools. And I worry about an emerging tabloid narrative, in particular about our state schools. Again, Mr McIntosh and Ms Bath spoke about schooling and the importance of schooling, and this was a key feature of the government's agenda as outlined in the Governor's speech.

Of course we see instances of violence in our schools, and we are deeply concerned about them. Of course we see examples of bullying and increasingly online bullying in our schools, and we are very concerned about them. But as a former schoolteacher, I would want to fundamentally disagree with the tabloid narrative that our schools and in particular our state schools are purely hotbeds of violence and bullying and that there are so many teachers in our schools who just are not up to it. In my experience the vast majority of schools are fabulous, supportive places and the vast majority of teachers across the faith-based sector, the independent sector and absolutely our state sector – our fabulous state sector – are wonderful.

The government has outlined its agenda for schools, and I think a kind way of describing that agenda would be 'anaemic'. It is great to embark upon further capital works, and I suppose that is the government's brand: 'We build stuff. We waste a huge amount of money in the process, but we build stuff.' I understand that. And there are so many schools in my electorate, especially in Liberal seats,

who have never been provided the funding that they need. I catch Mrs Deeming's eye over there. There are so many schools in the west of Melbourne, an area she represents, that have been neglected for so long – call me cynical – because they have been in historically safe Labor seats. Well, that is changing, and a very good thing too. I know Mrs Deeming is going to continue to advocate in a very robust way to seek to get those schools in her electorate that have been overlooked for so long the capital funding they need.

But capital funding is not everything. We also need reform, and there is nothing in the government's agenda about reform. I want to see significant changes to our curriculum. We have heard today from other members of this place, including Mr McCracken, who made a quite extraordinary initial speech in this place – another former schoolteacher on our side of the house – about the need for significant curriculum reform. This is something, to be fair, the federal Labor minister, Minister Clare, says he is interested to look at. So let us keep an open mind. Let us see what happens, because I want to see a curriculum that is marked by rigour. Even before the pandemic, PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, demonstrated that Victorian children received their worst ever results in numeracy, literacy and scientific literacy. These are the core skills that will enable young people to spread their wings and fly in the world of work in the 21st century, and yet increasingly we are in fact going backwards in the state of Victoria, which Mr Andrews says is the Education State.

We need to have a difficult conversation about teacher quality, and I say this as somebody who has lost a little bit of skin over the last couple weeks for my outspoken support of our teachers. I came out recently to talk about school refusal, to say that we cannot blame our teachers – our amazing teachers – for the fact that we are seeing increasing rates of absenteeism. Just yesterday Jason Clare got to his feet in the federal Parliament and said, word for word, 'If you're not at school you're not learning.' Now, I do not fully agree with Minister Clare, because I think for children experiencing school refusal there are ways to utilise emerging technologies. But his basic premise is correct: that for the increasing number of kids who are experiencing very significant anxiety disorders – who perhaps may have comorbidities, including being on the autism spectrum – it is so hard to get back to school, but the best evidence demonstrates that we achieve the optimal results for young people both in terms of their learning and their wellbeing when in a supportive way we can work together to get them back to school as often as possible. So I was heartened by Minister Clare's comments in Canberra.

I am not aware that the government here in Victoria has any similar agenda. Minister Clare said yesterday that he has put the absence crisis we are facing in our schools on the agenda for the next meeting of the state and territory education ministers, so I will be asking Ms Hutchins if she can pop out of the freezer for a moment and confirm for me that she indeed engaged in that discussion and that she agrees with Minister Clare – who it seems to me is a perfectly straightforward and sensible person on all matters educational, as Minister Stitt is – that this is an issue that we must focus on and that is ripe for reform.

I want to see a better curriculum. Despite the fact that I am on the record as being almost rabidly pro teachers and I want to have a complex conversation about teacher quality, the best curriculum in the world and the most amazing teachers in the world will count for nothing if our children are not going to school in the first place.

I am not going to dwell on the idiotic decisions of the government in the last term to close schools right across the state directly against the advice of the World Health Organization. It does not help to simply dredge over those catastrophic decisions. Even though the World Health Organization said that school should only be closed as a last resort – that is what they said, word for word – and even though the World Health Organization said that schools should only be closed in areas with intense local transmission, the education minister at the time – obviously that has changed because everybody has changed on the government benches – said that we should close schools in country areas to level the playing field. It is an amazing thing that an education minister anywhere would think that there is a level playing field between kids in the city and kids in our regions. I would refer anybody interested to the excellent speech of my friend and colleague Ms Bath, a former maths teacher. She was right

when she talked about educational disadvantage. We should all be able to join hands in our combined concern about increasing inequality in our education system across regions and certainly across socio-economic divides. I was concerned, I confess, that even though there was a strong forward agenda that we on this side of the house want to support and champion in early childhood, there was no such reform agenda in the broader education portfolio.

I was also concerned that there was nothing presented in the Governor's speech from the government when it came to child protection. I appreciate the recent comments of the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, who has joined us in the chamber, and indeed the Premier, that work will commence after eight years of extraordinary failure to seek to reduce the appalling over-representation of Indigenous children in our child protection system. Indigenous children are taken from their parents at a rate of one in 10. One in nine Aboriginal babies is removed by the state. I do not know the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services well – she seems like a perfectly reasonable person to me – but I was surprised that she sought to attack me today in question time on the basis that I politicise this issue. If she thinks I do not care desperately about vulnerable children in our child protection system, she misjudges me. I have been saying that the government should do a whole range of things in child protection for Indigenous children that are in fact exactly the same as the things that Aunty Muriel Bamblett has been saying. I am not sure if the minister's position is that Aunty Muriel Bamblett should just shut up and stop advocating because that is politicising –

**A member** interjected.

**Matthew BACH:** You're offended, Gayle? Can we stop the clock?

**Lizzie Blandthorn:** On a point of order, President, I was having my position from earlier in the day mischaracterised and I was ignoring it, but at the point that the language became unparliamentary I would seek that it be withdrawn.

**Matthew BACH:** On the point of order, President, the language was most certainly not unparliamentary, and I should be allowed to carry on. There is no point of order.

**The PRESIDENT:** I apologise because I did not hear. Further on the point of order?

**Harriet Shing:** I have a separate point of order, President, if you would like to rule on that one.

**The PRESIDENT:** No, I will do this one first. I apologise to the house.

**Lizzie Blandthorn:** I think that the member opposite, Mr Bach, used the words 'shut up', and I think that is unparliamentary. I would ask that he withdraw them.

**The PRESIDENT:** Dr Bach, if a member has taken offence, the best course of action is for you to withdraw.

**Matthew BACH:** Of course. Thank you so much. And I will.

I was immensely surprised in question time today that, notwithstanding the government's appalling failure in this area, since coming to government back in 2014 the proportion of Indigenous children in care has increased by 63 per cent and yet the minister sought to characterise my advocacy on this issue as politicisation of this issue. Thirty Aboriginal children died in the care of the state over the last three years, and yet me having the gall to talk about it is politicisation according to this new minister, my fifth since coming to this portfolio less than two years ago.

As I said before the ridiculous and frivolous points of order were raised, the points that I have been making are entirely the same as the points that Aunty Muriel Bamblett has made. She has shared my comments. She has shared my speeches, as has the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and so the minister and her staff, who I dare say wrote her ministers statement today, should go back to the drawing board to try to find another means of attacking me. Yesterday it was that my title is not quite right and needs to include 'family services'. Well, that one fell flat. Today it was the utterly offensive

and patently ridiculous and stupid notion that I seek to politicise the appalling and unacceptable outcomes that this government has achieved for Aboriginal young people in care over eight long years, despite the fact that Labor used to criticise the Liberal Party for Aboriginal over-representation. Since then Indigenous over-representation in care has increased by 63 per cent, and I appreciate the fact that the Premier has now said, after eight long years, that this should be a priority. I would have expected and I know that many in the Indigenous community expected to see firm commitments in the government's agenda, as outlined by the Governor. It is deeply disappointing that that was not the case.

I mean what I say when I take the minister at her word that she is passionate about this. She is new to the portfolio, and so despite her highly partisan and idiotic comments today I look forward to working with her to seek to achieve far better outcomes for Aboriginal children.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:02): It is absolutely a pleasure to rise to make a contribution for this address-in-reply. It does give me the opportunity to put on the record my absolute privilege to be re-elected to represent the fine people of Melbourne's west – the best place in Melbourne, frankly. It is absolutely wonderful to be given the opportunity to represent the Western Metropolitan Region again in the Legislative Council this term, and as somebody who has lived in the west of Melbourne for over 30 years I am really proud of our government's record of investing in our growing western suburbs. I am really delighted that Minister Blandthorn is joining me in the Western Metropolitan Region. I know that we are going to be doing some great work in our local community as we see our government's agenda – the Andrews Labor government's third-term agenda – rolled out and election commitments delivered to people right across the region.

I have lived in the west for many years, and I must say I have never seen so much investment across so many different portfolios occurring in Melbourne's west. And I know that often it is hard to communicate that perfectly all the time to the electorate, but I do think that this term will see some very exciting projects completed, which will actually make a huge difference in Melbourne's west, including some of our important Big Build projects like the Metro Tunnel, which will mean that people in Melbourne's west, particularly along the Sunbury line and other lines in the west, will be able to literally turn up like some of the great modern cities in the world and a train will arrive within 5 minutes. We are all incredibly excited about that project and the impacts it will have on public transport networks in Melbourne's west.

Obviously living close to Sunshine, I think that the transformation of Sunshine as a regional hub will also mean that Sunshine will be able to actually make the most of the economic benefits that will come from that revitalisation project.

It is an exciting time, and that upgrading of the Albion station, an \$80 million election commitment, will bring back to life one of the great jewels of the west in my opinion. It is a really historic flour mill that sits alongside the Albion station. I tell you what, if it was in Albert Park or South Melbourne, it would be a mecca for the local community, and that is the vision that we have for Albion when this project kicks off. So I am very excited about the commitments that have been made in public transport for the west.

We have obviously got some fantastic health infrastructure projects that are also in progress in the west. Footscray Hospital is going to be an amazing facility and will make such a huge difference. It will also be a learning hospital, so we will be able to train the next generation of nurses and doctors and allied health professionals at that hospital, and it will obviously link in with the other hospital networks in the west. We know that our population is absolutely booming, so it is incredibly important to deliver these projects and we are getting on with doing that.

I want to also just call out some of the issues that during the election campaign I know resonated very strongly with people in my region, including of course bringing back the SEC. I think everybody

agrees that the system in Victoria, where it really is a for-profit system, has failed consumers. This is the opportunity to reset that and put power back in the hands of Victorians but also be an absolute driver of innovation, traineeships and apprenticeships in our state. I am just so proud that our government and our Premier led such a bold policy offering during the election campaign, and I think that it was something that really resonated with people in Melbourne's west. Everybody had a story about struggling with their power bills and struggling with trying to navigate a system where it is not always transparent where you can get the best deal. So of course not only has our \$250 power saving bonus given money back to consumers in their pockets, it has also given them the ability to find a much better deal for their households, and that is so important at the moment when families are struggling with the cost of living.

I do also just want to talk a little bit about some of the commitments we have made in my two portfolios. In the environment we have a few really wonderful projects that will be of great benefit to people not only in Melbourne's west but in other parts of the state as well. We have committed to a \$6.14 million wildlife welfare package to support sick and injured wildlife, something I know people care very deeply about, particularly in the aftermath of some of the emergencies that we have had in the state – bushfires, floods and storm events. We also committed \$11 million in funding to protect and enhance the You Yangs, which I know is an important public land offering for people not only in Geelong but also in the outer west. It is a very popular place, and we will be upgrading that facility to the tune of \$11 million in infrastructure upgrades, so that is terrific.

There are a range of other initiatives, including – and this gives me a chance to get Wilbur and Charlie back into *Hansard*, because that has not happened for a while; I have not had that opportunity – \$13.4 million to build six new dog parks in Armstrong Creek, Wollert, Sydenham, Mount Waverley, Wantirna and Endeavour Hills and upgrades to 22 dog parks, so there will be lots of very happy good boys and good girls right across Victoria, I am sure. We are literally the dog capital of the world, I think. Dog ownership in Victoria is sky-high. We have also obviously got a number of really important commitments around suburban parks, which will be exciting.

And in Melbourne's west the government is investing \$5 million to plant 500,000 trees in the west so that we can actually get that tree canopy percentage in the west up where it should be. It is much, much lower in percentage terms than other parts of our city, and we know that there are so many heat-related illnesses and that heat stress is becoming more and more of a problem as we see the weather patterns changing and climate change taking effect. This is something incredibly practical to address that problem and something that I think generations to come will thank us for, so I am very excited to get on with that work.

I did want to just talk a little bit about our Best Start, Best Life reforms. There is no question that many young families were absolutely thrilled with our free kinder election commitment, and of course that is only one part of the reform agenda that we have in our early childhood education and care portfolio. Ninety per cent of a child's brain develops before they are five, so this is an investment in not only those young children when they are young but it is an investment in our people for the future. We want people to realise their full potential, and all the research tells us that early childhood education is the best way to deliver that outcome, the best way to give people the best start in life. We know that free kindergarten has been taken up by 97 per cent of services, which is an incredible tick of approval by our kindergarten providers for this initiative. Despite what Dr Bach says about some high-fee-charging kindergartens, our government is funding kindergartens better than we ever have and we have struck the rate per kinder place at a very generous level compared to what it was at, so that is something I am very proud that we have been able to do to support our fantastic kindergarten services.

Free kinder is going to save families around \$2500 per child per year. When we introduced free kinder as a COVID-recovery measure in 2021, we saw the participation rate of children attending kinder go up. And I have got no doubt, from the anecdotal evidence that I am hearing from the sector, that free kinder, going forward, will have exactly the same effect. People who had never taken their children to kinder before, in 2021 turned up for the first time, and often they were families that may not have

really understood or been able to afford kindergarten before we made it free. So I hope this is something that is a bipartisan issue and that nobody in their right mind would argue that we should not be offering free kindergarten. It is an absolute game changer for families who might not have been able to afford to send their children to kinder prior to this initiative, so we are pushing on with these reforms.

We have also committed to introducing a free pre-prep year. Between now and 2032 we will roll out 30 hours a week of play-based learning for every four-year-old, so that they will be receiving 30 hours of free kinder in the year before they go to school. That is effectively doubling the dose that they get now. We are sitting at 15 hours of four-year-old kinder at the moment. That will also have a profound impact on their ability to start school and really thrive once they get to prep.

I could not begin to think how we would be able to roll out these important reforms without our wonderful workforce. They really are special people, kindergarten teachers and educators. They go above and beyond every day. I know that, a little bit like maternal child health nurses, they are a really trusted person in the community. I know when I had young kids I really relied on the advice of my kinder teacher for my kids, and just as a nice little segue, I went and opened a kinder in North Melbourne last year and my children's kindergarten teacher came up to me and said, 'Ingrid, I don't know if you would remember me, but I was Shauna and Darcy's kinder teacher.' And I said, 'I do remember you, Michelle, and they remember you too.' So that was just a really nice thing. Of course saying thank you and being appreciative is one thing, but we need to invest in our workforce, and that is what our government will do. We have committed \$370 million to attract and retain the workforce that we will need to deliver these reforms over the next decade, and I am determined that we are going to be able to land those big numbers of teachers and educators that we need to attract to the sector, and we will be supporting them in every way we can so that they can get on with what they do best: delivering wonderful early childhood education and care right across our state.

Just a little final word on infrastructure. One of the reasons why we are taking the time to roll out these reforms in a steady, logical way across the state is we learned from our three-year-old reforms that you cannot just turn the tap on; you have got to be able to build the workforce you need and have the kindergarten infrastructure in place before you start increasing the hours that are available to families. So we have a massive infrastructure program that we are pursuing, and I am looking forward to the opportunity to update the house regularly about how that is going. But we are literally going to be building kindergartens in all parts of the state, and we will also be delivering 50 early learning centres and running them in areas where we know there are not enough places available for families to get that long day care offering. So it is an exciting time in the early childhood sector and the early childhood portfolio, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to outline some of the initiatives today.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:18): I move:

That debate on the address-in-reply be adjourned until later this day.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.**

*Questions on notice*

**Answers**

**The PRESIDENT** (17:18): I have received a written request from Mr Davis seeking the reinstatement of a number of questions on notice. Having reviewed the responses, I order that questions on notice 7, 8 and 9 be reinstated in full, as the responses have not addressed the time frame information sought by Mr Davis.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (17:18): I have also been asked to review a written response to a question asked by Mr Davis to Minister Shing yesterday in question time. Mr Davis’s supplementary question has not been answered at all in the written response, so I will order a second written response to that question. The substantive question was fully answered by the minister.

**Bills**

**Building and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2022**

*Introduction and first reading*

**The PRESIDENT** (17:19): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Building Act 1993**, the **Architects Act 1991**, the **Surveying Act 2004** and the **Planning and Environment Act 1987** and for other purposes’.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:19): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:20): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Building and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

In my opinion, the Building and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

**Overview of the Bill**

Parts 2 and 3 of the Bill amend the *Building Act 1993*, the *Architects Act 1991* and the *Surveying Act 2004* to –

- support the operation of automatic mutual recognition under the *Mutual Recognition (Victoria) Act 1998* with respect to land surveyors, building practitioners, plumbers and architects; and
- enable the Victorian Building Authority to issue a restricted plumbing licence for more than one class or particular type of plumbing work.

Part 4 of the Bill amends the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to increase protection of metropolitan green wedges and amend the distinctive areas and landscapes statement of planning policy endorsement process.

**Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill**

Clauses 13 and 28 of the Bill provide for recording the details of criminal sanctions on public registers for plumbers and architects. These provisions may engage:

1. the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter which provides that a person has a right “not to have that person’s privacy ... unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with”.

2. the right against discrimination in section 8(2) of the Charter, which provides that “every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination”. Section 3(1) of the Charter defines discrimination to have the same meaning as in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* on the basis of an attribute listed in section 6 of the Act. These attributes include a ‘spent conviction’.

While clauses 13 and 28 of the Bill engage the Charter’s rights against unlawful or arbitrary interferences in privacy, any interference is lawful and not arbitrary because it is required to ensure regulators have the necessary information to enforce the law and better protect consumers from unsafe or unfit practitioners.

The information recorded in the registers is also necessary to support the implementation of the Commonwealth’s Automatic Mutual Recognition (AMR) scheme under the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* of the Commonwealth. This scheme excludes certain individuals from an entitlement to automatic deemed registration and imposes certain obligations on local registration authorities. Under AMR, a person is not entitled to automatic deemed registration if they are subject to criminal proceedings in any state in relation to an occupation that covers an activity a person intends to carry out under automatic deemed registration. Additionally, if a person is personally prohibited from carrying out the activity, or an occupation that covers the activity, or is subject to any conditions in carrying out the activity, as a result of criminal proceedings in any state, they will not be entitled to automatic deemed registration.

Section 42V(2) of the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* of the Commonwealth requires the local registration authority (for example, the Victorian Building Authority or the Architects Registration Board of Victoria) to give to the local registration authority in another state, as soon as reasonably practicable, any information reasonably required about a person using automatic deemed registration – including information relating to a criminal prosecution taken against the person. Clauses 13 and 28 therefore support implementation of this requirement, by enabling details of any criminal sanctions to be recorded in the relevant register. This will ensure practitioners who have received a criminal sanction can be identified if they seek to register in Victoria.

Clauses 13 and 28 of the Bill are consistent with the spent conviction scheme in Victoria under the *Spent Convictions Act 2021* and are therefore compatible with the Charter rights against discrimination. The information on the Register of Plumbers and Register of Architects about ‘criminal sanctions’ will not include information about spent convictions.

I am therefore satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

**The Hon. Harriet Shing, MP**  
**Minister for Water**  
**Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy**  
**Minister for Equality**  
**Minister for Regional Development**

### *Second reading*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:20): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

### **Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:**

The Victorian Government is committed to improving the efficiency, clarity and operation of the building and planning systems.

The Bill will amend the *Building Act 1993*, the *Architects Act 1991*, the *Surveying Act 2004* and the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to create the following reforms:

- Strengthen legislative protection of Melbourne’s green wedges;
- Streamline the endorsement process for a distinctive area and landscape;
- Support the implementation of Automatic Mutual Recognition in Victoria; and
- Clarify the power to issue restricted plumbing work licences for private plumbing work.

**Protection of Green Wedge Land**

The Government is committed to protecting Melbourne's green wedges for current and future generations. The Bill articulates the Government's objectives for green wedge land and introduces a legislative requirement for municipal councils to prepare and review Green Wedge Management Plans. Furthermore, the Bill will enable the Minister for Planning to issue directions in relation to the preparation and content of Green Wedge Management Plans, which will provide improved guidance to councils on the structure, form and content of Green Wedge Management Plans.

**Distinctive areas and landscapes**

Part 3AAB of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (PE Act), introduced in 2018 enables the Governor in Council, following the recommendation of the Minister for Planning, to declare an area of Victoria to be a distinctive area and landscape. Macedon Ranges, Surf and Bass Coasts and the Bellarine Peninsula have already been declared under this legislation. This experience has repeatedly shown that it is difficult to prepare, consult on and obtain the endorsement and approval of a Statement of Planning Policy within the timeframe specified in the PE Act. The Bill streamlines the process for endorsement by responsible entities of a Statement of Planning Policy for a distinctive area and landscape.

**Automatic Mutual Recognition**

The *Mutual Recognition Act 1992* (Cth) was amended in 2021 to introduce an Automatic Mutual Recognition (AMR) scheme to be adopted by all States and Territories. AMR is intended to create a 'driver's licence' model for occupational licensing, enabling a person to use the occupational licence issued by their home state to carry out the same activities it authorises in other participating Australian jurisdictions.

The Government agreed to participate in the AMR scheme last year. The Bill makes amendments to ensure that important consumer protection requirements that apply to Victorian architects, land surveyors, building practitioners and plumbers also apply to workers using AMR to carry out building and plumbing work in Victoria. The changes enable regulators to regularly check if both Victorian and AMR workers are covered by any required insurance.

Consumers will also benefit from improvements to information on the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) register of building practitioners and plumbers and the register of architects maintained by the Architects Registration Board of Victoria. Consumers will be able to make more informed choices before engaging practitioners, using the register to check if any Victorian or AMR worker they have engaged is appropriately registered for that work.

**Restricted Plumbing Licences**

Minor amendments are being made to the Building Act to provide certainty regarding the VBA's continuing ability to issue restricted plumbing licences to authorise the carrying out of multiple classes of plumbing work that is private plumbing work.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:20): I move, on behalf of my colleague Mr Davis:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.**

**Racing Amendment (Unauthorised Access) Bill 2022***Introduction and first reading*

**The PRESIDENT** (17:21): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Racing Act 1958** to prohibit unauthorised access to certain areas of race-courses during race-meetings and official trial meetings and for other purposes'.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:21): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:22): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Racing Amendment (Unauthorised Access) Bill 2022 (the **Bill**).

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

#### **Overview of the Bill**

The Bill amends the *Racing Act 1958* (the **Act**) to:

- prohibit unauthorised access to certain areas of race courses during race meetings and official trial meetings;
- to prohibit certain conduct during race meetings and official trial meetings; and
- to provide enforcement of these provisions.

The purpose of these amendments is to promote the safety and welfare of all patrons and participants, including animals, at race meetings and official trial meetings and to avoid the potential consequences of incursions and disruptive conduct. The consequences of disruptive behaviour or incursions onto a race-track (or a restricted racing area) can be significant, including serious injury or death to humans and animals. Notably, the *Major Events Act 2009* currently contains crowd management provisions; however, these only apply to eight major feature thoroughbred race meetings. The Bill seeks to include in the Act equivalent arrangements to specified crowd management provisions contained in the *Major Events Act 2009* so that equivalent conduct is prohibited at all race-meetings and official trial meetings (as defined in the Act and the Bill).

#### **Human Rights Issues**

This statement of compatibility commences with an outline of the human rights that are relevant to this Bill. It then discusses how relevant provisions of the Bill engage those rights.

#### *Protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (s 10)*

Sections 10(a)–(b) of the Charter provide that a person must not be subjected to torture or treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way. The right is concerned with the physical and mental integrity of individuals, and their inherent dignity as human beings.

Cruel or inhuman treatment or punishment includes acts which do not constitute torture, but which nevertheless possess a minimum level of severity. Degrading treatment or punishment involves acts of a less severe nature again but which inflict a level of humiliation or debasement of the victim. Whether conduct meets the necessary threshold will depend upon all the circumstances, including the duration and manner of the treatment, its physical or mental effects on the affected person, and that person's age, sex and state of health.

#### *Right to freedom of movement (s 12)*

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria, to enter and leave Victoria, and to choose where to live in Victoria. The right extends, generally, to movement without impediment throughout the State, including a right of access to public places and premises, subject to (amongst other things) the private and property rights of others. It is one of the most qualified of rights.

Privacy (s 13)

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. It is wide in scope, and includes protecting a person's interests in the freedom of their personal, spatial and social sphere, including their right to identity, social relations, dignity and employment. Section 13(a) contains internal qualifications – namely, an interference with privacy will only limit the right if it is unlawful, in that an applicable law is infringed; or it is arbitrary, in that it is capricious, or has resulted from conduct which is unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable in the sense of not being proportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Freedom of expression (s 15)

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. However, section 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association (s 16)

Section 16(1) of the Charter provides that every person has the right of peaceful assembly. The right of peaceful assembly encompasses the right to privately and publicly gather or associate with others to attain a particular end and the right to organise and to participate in public demonstrations and marches. The right only extends to protect peaceful gatherings, and violent assemblies, such as riots and affrays, are not protected.

Right to be presumed innocent (s 25(1))

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

***Offence to enter or remain in a restricted racing area during a race-meeting or an official trial meeting***

Under new Division 4A, section 32A makes it an offence for a person, without reasonable excuse, to enter or remain in a restricted racing area during a race-meeting or an official trial meeting unless the person is authorised or acting in accordance with an engagement in the management or conduct of the meeting.

Freedom of movement

While prohibiting persons from entering certain areas may interfere with their freedom of movement, it is doubtful as to whether the right would extend to protect unfettered access to a racing area on a premises, where an occupier is otherwise able to exercise their property right to exclude entry.

In the event that the provision is considered to limit freedom of movement, in my view, any interference is justified. Significantly, the limits serve the important purpose of promoting safety and order at race events and are aimed at protecting public order and, in turn, the rights and freedoms of others. The extent of the interference will be limited as the restrictions on movement are confined as they only affect specified 'restricted racing areas'. The provision includes a 'reasonable excuse' defence for non-compliance, which safeguards against any further interference with the right. I am therefore satisfied that the provision is compatible with this right.

Peaceful assembly

New section 32A may also engage and limit the right to peaceful assembly, which entitles persons to gather intentionally and temporarily for a specific purpose. However, the right to peaceful assembly may be justifiably limited on private property, or on Crown land where access is restricted, as long as the circumstances including the purpose behind restricting access, are proportional under 7(2) of the Charter.

I consider the limits on peaceful assembly to be reasonably necessary and proportionate to achieve the legislative purpose. The limits imposed on the right to peacefully gather is for a significant and important purpose, that is, safety and good order during race-meetings and official trial meetings. Also, the extent of the limit on peaceful assembly only apply to 'restricted racing areas' of limited scope, being: the track which is being used for racing; space which is being used for the saddling and keeping of animals; pathways which connect 2 or more restricted racing areas and a prescribed land area. Finally, the extent of any limitation is confined, in that there remain other means available for a person or group to exercise this right, such as peacefully gathering in neighbouring or adjoining areas that do not pose a danger to patrons and racing participants. Accordingly, I am satisfied that any interference with this right is compatible with the Charter.

***Offences for disrupting, climbing, or causing objects to enter, fly into or land in a restricted racing area during an official trial or race-meeting***

The Bill seeks to create a number of offences around unsafe or unreasonable behaviours, subject to a 'reasonable excuse' exception. New section 32B creates an offence where a person, who is in a restricted racing area during a race-meeting or an official trial meeting, disrupts the meeting; further sections makes it an offence to throw or kick projectiles or otherwise cause them to land in a restricted racing area (32C) or climb on fences, barriers or barricades within the restricted racing area during a race meeting or an official trial meeting, unless the person is authorised or is acting in accordance with an engagement in the management or conduct of the meeting (section 32D).

***Freedom of expression***

As disorderly conduct can have an expressive component, new sections 32B, 32C and 32D may engage section 15 of the Charter. It is well recognised that the right to freedom of expression protects the expression of ideas that offend, shock or disturb and covers behaviour that is irritating, contentious, heretical, unwelcome or provocative – provided that any relevant expression does not tend to provoke violence or itself constitute violence or damage to property.

However, as noted above, section 15(3) provides that the right to freedom of expression can be subject to lawful restrictions that are reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputation of other persons or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality. The offences concern prohibiting unsafe or anti-social conduct during meetings (s 32B, 32C and 32D) and serve the legitimate purpose of protecting public order and safety at such events. As any limits are proportionately tailored to the important objective, which is only concerned with behaviour that is unsafe or poses risks, I consider these provisions to be compatible with the right to freedom of expression.

***Powers to direct a person to leave and not enter a restricted racing area***

New section 32E provides an authorised officer with powers to direct a person to leave and not re-enter a restricted racing area or race-course for the duration of a race-meeting or an official trial meeting if an authorised officer believes on reasonable grounds that the person is committing or has committed one of the offences outlined above (see 32A 32B, 32C or 32D). 32F(1) makes in an offence to not comply with direction issued under s 32E.

These powers of direction are relevant to the rights to freedom of movement and peaceful assembly.

***Freedom of movement and peaceful assembly***

Following the discussion above, it is doubtful as to whether this power of direction, which is limited to being exercised in relation to ordering a person to leave and not re-enter a restricted racing area or race-course, would limit freedom of movement in light of ordinary powers of an occupier to exclude a person from such premises. Additionally, as the power is able to be exercised in relation to disruptive or anti-social conduct, it may also be beyond the scope of protection afforded by the right to peaceful assembly.

However, to the extent that the exercise of this power constitutes a limit on either right, I consider that such rights will not be limited under 7(2) of the Charter. The directions power provides authorised officers with an immediate tool to prevent or mitigate an identified risk to safety and public order at race meetings and official trials. The scope of the power is precisely prescribed to meet the objective, in that there is a clear and rational connection between the limitation on rights and the purpose of the provision. An authorised officer can only make a direction where they believe on reasonable grounds that a specified offence has been committed, they have informed the person of that belief and the person has refused to comply. The effect of the direction is limited to the duration of the race-meeting or official trial meeting during which it was exercised. I am thus satisfied that any limits on rights are reasonably justified and the power is compatible with the Charter.

***Powers to use force to prevent or remove a person from a restricted racing area***

The Bill inserts new section 32F(4), which provides a police officer with powers to use 'no more force than is reasonably necessary' in order to prevent a person from entering or re-entering a restricted racing area or race-course contrary to a direction given under s 32E, or remove a person from such areas who has refused to comply with such a direction.

***Protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (s 10)***

The use of force on a person may engage a person's right to protection from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, however I do not consider the right to be limited. For a use of force power to be compatible with the Charter, it must be precisely circumscribed and aimed at achieving the legitimate objective, only authorise necessary force and the minimum needed to be considered effective, generally be a measure of last resort and be subject to adequate training and governance.

The power is directed to ensuring the legitimate objective of safety and good order at race meetings and trials. It is only exercisable by police officers (and not authorised officers) who will have the requisite training regarding the proportionate use of force. The power is only enlivened in relation to a person who has already been issued a direction to leave or not enter under s 32E, and can only be used for the purpose of preventing a person from entering and removing a person from a restricted racing area or race-course. The provision contains the internal qualification permitting 'no more force than is reasonably necessary', which ensures that any force used by a police officer is proportionate and necessary in the circumstances to achieve the public order and public safety objectives. Accordingly, I am satisfied that this power is compatible with the Charter.

#### ***Powers to make 'ban orders'***

The Bill inserts new section 32G, which seeks to enable a court to make a ban order when a person is found guilty of one of the specified offences (32A, 32B, 32C, 32D or 32F). A ban order will mean that a person is barred from attending specified race-meetings or official trial meetings, or categories of those meetings. The penalties under this section range from banning that person from attending one race or official trial meeting, through to imposing a ban order on participation at meetings of up to five years.

#### ***Freedom of movement and privacy***

New section 32G creates ban orders which prohibit a person from attending race and official trial meetings and penalises them for non-compliance, limiting that person's right to freedom of movement. Additionally, a ban order made under section 32G may interfere with the right to privacy in circumstances where they impact on a person's employment or social identity to the extent that it involves attendance at such events. However, I consider that any interference with these rights will be compatible with the Charter, in that any limit on the freedom of movement will be reasonable and justifiable under s 7(2) of the Charter, and any interference with privacy will not be arbitrary.

The ban orders are for a preventative purpose of preventing repeat offending and are only enlivened following a finding of guilt of specified offences outlined above involving disruptive, unsafe or anti-social conduct. Given the dangerous nature of the proposed prohibited conduct, the orders provide a significant additional deterrent and ensure public safety where the offending conduct is particularly serious. The ban order is a discretionary order of the court, and subject to the objective standards and criteria within a court's jurisdiction, as well as an independent and fair hearing. The order is also limited in maximum duration (up to five years) and scope (applies only to specified race-meetings or official trial meetings where the offence was committed, or to specified categories of race-meetings or official trial meetings). This allows the orders to be appropriately tailored to the nature of the offence. I consider there is no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose of the limitations. I also note that these orders are consistent with existing provisions that apply to other events under the *Major Events Act 2009*. Accordingly, I consider these orders to be compatible with the Charter.

#### ***New offence provisions***

The Bill inserts new sections 32A, 32B, 32C, 32D and 32J, which are offence provisions. The new sections inserted all include exceptions based on authorisations or on having a reasonable excuse. New section 32A creates an offence to enter into a restricted racing area without a reasonable excuse. Section 32B makes it an offence to disrupt an official trial meeting or race-meeting without a reasonable excuse. Section 32C makes it an offence to throw or kick things or cause an object to fly into or land in a restricted racing area without authority. Section 32D prohibits climbing certain infrastructure without authority. 32J prohibits obstructing an authorised officer without a reasonable excuse.

#### ***Presumption of innocence***

As these offences are summary offences, section 72 of the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* will apply to require an accused who wishes to rely on the 'lawful authority or excuse' defence to present or point to evidence that suggests a reasonable possibility of the existence of facts that, if they existed, would establish the excuse. By providing for a 'reasonable excuse' offence exception, the offence provisions may be viewed as placing an evidential burden on the accused, in that it requires the accused to raise evidence as to a reasonable excuse. However, in doing so, this offence does not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the essential elements of the offence. Case law has held that an evidential onus imposed on establishing an excuse or exception does not limit the Charter's right to a presumption of innocence, as such an evidentiary onus falls short of imposing any burden of persuasion on an accused. Accordingly, I do not consider that an evidential onus such as this limits the right to be presumed innocent.

#### ***Powers to request a person's name and address***

New section 32K provides an authorised officer with powers to request a person's name and address if the authorised officer believes on reasonable grounds that the person has committed an offence against 32A, 32B,

32C, 32D or 32F. Section 32L makes it an offence to refuse to give a name and address to an authorised officer under 32K. Section 32M provides that, if an authorised officer believes that a person required to give information under 32K is giving false information they may require that person to produce evidence of their name and address, which the person must comply with.

*Privacy*

The right to privacy is relevant to these provisions as they effectively compel a person to disclose their name and address, which is personal information. However, in my view, this section does not limit the right to privacy because any interference is permitted by law (this Bill) which is precise and appropriately circumscribed. The section is not arbitrary because it is for the clear and legitimate purpose of enabling authorised officers to enforce offences under the Bill where necessary. It is not possible for an authorised officer to prosecute offences and enforce directions to leave without the power to confirm the identity of the suspect.

The provision is subject to reasonable limitations in that the powers can only be exercised where an authorised officer has formed a belief on reasonable grounds that a person has committed an offence or when directing a person to leave. Authorised officers who are not police officers are required to produce their identity card, inform the person and state that they believe that a relevant offence has been committed. The power to compel a person to produce evidence of their name and address is only enlivened when an authorised officer believes on reasonable grounds that the name and address given a person may be false. Further, 32N requires that an authorised officer must not disclose any information obtained in the course of the authorised officer's duty or incur a penalty of 50 penalty units. These provide effective safeguards against inappropriate disclosure by an authorised officer obtained in the course of their duties.

*Authority to disclose information*

The Bill inserts new section 32N, which provides that authorised officers may disclose the information obtained in the course of the officer's duties or the exercise of a power under provisions 32K or 32M in certain circumstances (being details or evidence of a person's name and address).

*Privacy*

New section 32N will engage the right to privacy as it allows for an authorised officer to disclose personal information. In order for information to be disclosed under this provision, an authorised officer must hold a reasonable belief that disclosure is necessary for the purposes of the Act. The section enumerates limited circumstances in which the information can be shared; and imposes 50 penalty units if the information is not shared for these strict purposes.

In my view, this section will not be arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, as any disclosure of personal information authorised by this section will only occur to the extent necessary to carry out the functions of the authorised officers under the Act, or for other specified purposes such as in the course of legal proceedings or pursuant to a court or tribunal order. Consequently, I consider that new section 32N is compatible with section 13 of the Charter.

**The Hon Gayle Tierney**  
**Minister for Training and Skills**  
**Minister for Higher Education**  
**Minister for Agriculture**

*Second reading*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:22): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:**

The Victorian racing industry contributes \$4.7 billion annually to the Victorian economy and helps sustain 34,900 full-time-equivalent jobs across our State. The Government is committed to ensuring the Victorian racing industry remains a pre-eminent racing jurisdiction in Australia.

There is at least one Victorian racing industry meeting conducted on every day of the year, except for Christmas Day. There were almost 2,300 Victorian race meetings conducted in 2021–22. This included 538 thoroughbred racing meetings, 436 harness racing meetings and 1,312 greyhound racing meetings.

In recent years there have been instances of unauthorised entry to a racetrack area during the running of horse races at Victorian racecourses. While the frequency of track incursions by spectators is relatively low, the potential consequences are significant, and could result in serious injury or death to patrons, human and animal participants, and officials.

This Bill amends the *Racing Act 1958* (Racing Act) to provide for offences and penalties to ensure the safety and welfare of all patrons and participants, including animals, at all Victorian race meetings and official trial meetings.

To this end, the Bill identifies certain parts of a racecourse as restricted areas for the purposes of new offences and penalties relating to unauthorised access to those areas during a race or official trial meeting. The areas that have been identified reflect the current operational arrangements that are already in place at racecourses across Victoria. Access to these areas usually requires a person to produce an authorisation to enter, and include racing and training tracks, and other areas used by racing animals and their handlers, such as mounting yards, parade rings, stabling and kennelling facilities, and pathways between these areas.

Importantly, the introduction of restricted areas on racecourses will not affect the enjoyment of race goers. As race goers are already prohibited from entering restricted areas, those provisions will not affect their enjoyment or change the areas of the racecourse that they can access. The Bill will not alter who is authorised to enter restricted areas and what they are authorised to do.

The new crowd management offences and penalties apply to behaviours in or near restricted areas. They do not apply to the general conduct of persons in other parts of the racecourse.

#### **New offences to manage crowd behaviour**

The Bill will insert provisions into the Racing Act to create offences with regard to specific behaviours in and around the restricted areas, without a reasonable excuse.

The offences are consistent with similar offences in the *Major Events Act 2009* (Major Events Act) which apply at major sporting events covered by that Act. This includes eight of Victoria's feature race meetings during the Spring Racing Carnival: Caulfield Racecourse on Caulfield Cup Day, Caulfield Guineas Day and Thousand Guineas Day, Flemington Racecourse on a day that a race meeting of the Melbourne Cup Carnival takes place, and Moonee Valley Racecourse on Cox Plate Day.

The Bill will not affect the operation of the Major Events Act. It is important that those race meetings continue to be subject to all relevant provisions of the Major Events Act, which extend beyond the management of crowd behaviour.

The offences relate to of the disruption of a race meeting or official trial meeting; throwing or kicking projectiles, or otherwise causing projectiles to enter into a restricted racing area; and climbing on fences or barricades that are adjacent to a restricted racing area. The latter activity could lead to animals reacting unpredictably creating a risk of injury to persons near the area. It could also result in patrons inadvertently entering a racetrack area, endangering themselves and participants, and disrupting races.

These new statutory offences and related penalties will provide a clear and strong deterrent to persons who are not authorised to access certain areas of the racecourse from engaging in dangerous and disruptive conduct.

#### **Racing industry participants**

It is not intended that the new offences under the Bill apply to those persons who are licensed or registered to participate in the conduct of the meeting, or who are engaged in the management or conduct of the meeting, while they are carrying out their roles at the meetings.

For example, there may be times when a person engaged at a race meeting throws to a jockey on the race track a towel or water bottle. This type of action, which takes place in the general conduct of a race meeting, would not constitute an offence under this Bill.

This Bill does not alter who is authorised to enter restricted areas and what they are authorised to do. It also has no impact on activities that are not connected with the restricted areas.

The Victorian racing industry is fully supportive of the Bill. The new offence and penalty provisions will enable racing clubs and the racing code bodies to provide clear warnings to patrons about the consequences of dangerous and anti-social behaviour at the races.

**Authorised officers**

The new offences will be enforced by Victoria Police or authorised officers appointed by the Secretary of the relevant department.

Victoria Police will have primary responsibility for the enforcement of the provisions at those race meetings where a sworn officer is in attendance.

However, most Victorian race meetings are conducted without any police presence. In those instances, the offences will be enforced by other authorised officers. The Bill inserts new provisions into the Racing Act that enable the Secretary of the relevant department to appoint racing stewards and persons who have appropriate skills, qualifications, knowledge, or experience as authorised officers. It is intended that at least one authorised officer will be present at every Victorian race meeting or official trial meeting.

The Bill provides that the Secretary can delegate this power of appointment to other Executives within the Secretary's department.

**Dealing with offenders**

Authorised officers will also have powers to manage people who are reasonably believed to have committed offences. Authorised officers will have the power to direct a person, reasonably believed to have committed an offence under the new provisions, to leave the restricted racing area or racecourse for the duration of the race meeting or official trial meeting. The objective of the provision is to ensure that the person does not cause further disruption at the meeting.

To assist with enforcement of the new offences to manage crowd behaviour, the Bill provides authorised officers with the power to require a person reasonably believed to have committed an offence against the new provisions to provide their name and address.

The Bill provides that safeguards are in place for the disclosure of information obtained by authorised officers in the course of exercising their powers under these new provisions.

Infringement notices are an effective and efficient way to enforce crowd management laws. The Bill empowers authorised officers to serve an infringement notice on a person reasonably believed to have, without reasonable excuse, entered a restricted racing area without authorisation, thrown or kicked a projectile, or otherwise caused a projectile to enter into a restricted racing area, or climbed any fence, barrier or barricade of a restricted racing area.

There may be some instances where a more severe penalty is warranted where an individual repeatedly offends against the provisions, or where the consequences of the offending are serious or significant. To address this, the Bill provides the courts with the option of imposing a ban order against an individual.

The ban order may specify the race meeting or official trial meeting, or category of race meetings or official trial meetings and racecourse or racecourses to which the order will apply.

Where a person's conduct is serious enough for a court to ban the person from all thoroughbred race meetings and official trial meetings, the ban could also apply to race meetings which are covered in the Major Events Act to ensure that there are no gaps in the regulatory framework.

**Conclusion**

Fortunately, the conduct this Bill seeks to discourage doesn't occur frequently. Nevertheless, the potential consequences are so serious that any occurrence is extremely concerning. That is why these additional deterrents, which are already in place at other major sporting events, are needed to help ensure the safety and welfare of all participants, animals, and patrons at Victorian race meetings and official trial meetings.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:22): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.**

### *Adjournment*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (17:22): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

#### **Maternal and child health services**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:22): (25) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to the suspension of maternal and child health nurse visits. This is an issue that I have been raising for some time in this house. Twelve months ago I raised the issue when these vital services were suspended during Victoria's code brown. It caused an enormous amount of distress at that time. As I was saying at the time, families in vulnerable areas were not able to get maternal and child health visits. The issue is still very significant, and it is again causing great concern for so many mothers and families who have got newborns who are not getting appropriate follow-up.

There is now an indefinite suspension of face-to-face visits in some areas of Melbourne, including in these rapid population growth areas. I was referring to Wyndham and other areas last year, but it is including not only Wyndham and Melton but also Casey. The visits in these areas are restricted to babies up to eight weeks of age. This means that from two months of age parents are denied six out of the 10 key age and stage visits. Anyone will understand how vital these visits are. As I have explained before, they pick up so many issues, whether they are milestone issues or growth and development issues, feeding issues, domestic violence, a whole range of things, and it is absolutely critical for these visits to be occurring. This is an unacceptable situation that is impacting thousands of families. These visits are critical, as I said. They help a baby and their mother bond, but they also give support to those new parents.

The government, as I said, has known about this issue and the need to boost maternal and child health nurses. We had a review into the perinatal shortage back in 2018, and the government did nothing. That was pre COVID. The government will conveniently use COVID as an excuse, but when you have got newborn babies and you have got mothers and their families not being able to access this basic, vital service, it demonstrates just how dire the situation in our health system is. There is a rising demand in these areas, as we know, but if it is not addressed, the situation is only going to get worse. So the action I seek is for the government to restore these services as a matter of urgency.

#### **Gambling harm**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:25): (26) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and my ask is that she introduces mandatory precommitment and cashless gaming across all poker machines in Victoria. Poker machines are deliberately designed to be addictive. They are disproportionately located in already stressed communities where residents experience the highest losses and the highest rates of gambling harm. Since they were introduced into this state in 1991, regrettably, Victorians have lost more than \$66 billion on the poker machines. In the last 30 years successive governments have completely failed to introduce any meaningful statewide reform of the industry, letting Victorians lose record amounts at the poker machines year on year and allowing the gambling industry to expand its power in this state, which is already too significant.

But in the last two years we have begun to see signs of change, which is very welcome. The landmark Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence was scathing of Crown's behaviour and its failure to keep patrons safe from gambling harm, and in response this government has actually embarked on a reform program at the casino, including the introduction of carded gaming and mandatory precommitment at the casino from 1 December 2025. But they have been noticeably silent on wider pokies reform, and given that the vast majority of the state's poker machines are located outside of the casino and in our communities, out in clubs and hotels, the government's reform is

barely scratching the surface and doing little when it could be doing a lot more to tackle gambling harm.

And now we are being shown up by the rest of the country. Both Tasmania and New South Wales have announced plans to introduce mandatory cashless gaming on all poker machines in their states, and although in New South Wales there is a bit of a law and order agenda and it is about tackling money laundering, a well-designed mandatory cashless gaming card scheme also has the potential to significantly reduce gambling harm, because cashless cards can be implemented alongside a series of evidence-based harm minimisation measures – and they need to be. For example, the cards can set maximum daily limits on how much can be spent and lost on any one day, they can require users to preset their own limits on losses or playtime and they can limit how much money can be loaded onto a card at any one time.

This kind of mandatory precommitment and these kinds of limits on losses would be a game changer for reducing gambling harm in our state. It is the ambitious poker machine reform that the Victorian Labor government should be embracing, so it is disappointing that in Victoria we are limiting our reforms to the casino and that the government has so far not embraced the possibility of extending these reforms to all poker machines in the state. It is hard not to wonder if their silence on wider poker machine reform has something to do with their close ties to the gambling industry. I think Victoria can do this as well as Tasmania and New South Wales, and I ask the minister to introduce mandatory precommitment and cashless gaming across all poker machines in Victoria.

#### **Rural and regional roads**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:28): (27) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the deplorable condition of roads in regional Victoria. The action that I seek is for the minister to convey to the Victorian public her plan to address the dangerous conditions of many roads in regional Victoria, including in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region, and I call on her to match or better the coalition's election commitment and provide funding of at least a billion dollars a year for the next 10 years to complete the intensive road maintenance program needed to fix these dangerous roads.

Despite the repeated claims by Labor members to the contrary, it is obvious that the Andrews government has never prioritised the maintenance and safety of roads in regional Victoria. The first sign of Labor's neglect was their decision upon winning government in 2014 to scrap the coalition's country roads and bridges program. This successful program provided \$160 million to 40 small regional councils and shires to repair and maintain their road networks. The chronic underinvestment in regional road maintenance by the Andrews Labor government over the last eight years has now led us to a point where some regional roads are recognised as some of the worst in Australia.

This lack of investment has attracted deserved criticism from regional communities, transport business groups and even high-ranking public servants. In a *Weekly Times* article, 'Broken roads "frustrating"', dated 25 January 2023, Victoria Police road policing command assistant commissioner Glenn Weir was quoted as saying officers were 'constantly' alerting road authorities or local councils to the parlous condition of Victoria's road network. In the same article, chief of regional transport for the department of transport Paul Northey was quoted as saying there was a current shortfall in money available for regional road repair.

Recently I was contacted by a constituent from Nathalia complaining about the dangerous condition of the Katamatite-Nathalia Road between the townships of Numurkah and Nathalia. This road has a large pothole located just before a sweeping bend, causing some drivers to cross onto the wrong side of the road – an action that is extremely dangerous. This pothole, like so many others, has been filled several times; however, the repair only lasts a few days, as the contractor just fills it with pre-mix, which begins to break up with the first vehicle that crosses it. This practice of not repairing potholes properly has led to sections of roads in my electorate being extremely dangerous for prolonged periods. This is just one example, of many stories, and I am sure every single country member in this place

would have the same experience. The government require all road users to ensure their cars are roadworthy, but unfortunately the Andrews government are not providing Victorians with roads that are roadworthy.

### **Macedon road safety**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:32): (28) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place, and the action I seek is for her to implement urgent speed limit reductions in the Macedon area, particularly Moffats Lane, Romsey, and Gap Road, Cherokee, to 50 kilometres an hour. Whilst most speed limits on minor rural access roads have not changed in the last 30 years, the surrounding environment has. Neighbouring landowners have become actively involved in revegetation programs to help restore the fragile environment in Macedon.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Georgie PURCELL**: This successful community effort has led to the return of many species to their habitats, who are now living in constant threat of road strike. A colony of wombats recently moved back to the area, including Moffats Lane, after 36 years, only for the first victim of car strike to be found days after by one of the community members leading this effort – which I am sure is very exciting to Mrs McArthur.

It was recently estimated in an NRMA Insurance wildlife road safety report that 10 million animals are killed on Australian roads each year, which also presents a major safety concern for drivers and their passengers. Since approval is not required to establish the legal effect of default limits and the Department of Transport and Planning speed-zoning guidelines do not mention wildlife at all, I am concerned that community efforts to restore wildlife habitat in the region are not being supported and that the risk to human safety has been overlooked. I hope the minister will consider a speed limit reduction to 50 kilometres an hour on Moffats Lane and Gap Road to help protect our native wildlife.

### **Woodchop events**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:33): (29) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture, and I am pleased that she is at the table to listen to this. I am sure she will listen with a sympathetic ear, because it is actually a great predicament that they are in through an adverse effect – and this relates to the hardwood log supplies for woodchopping. Practised for over 140 years and actually instigated – I think the argument is – in Tasmania 140 years ago, the sport of woodchopping is part of our history and our heritage. Our Victorian athletes have been both international and national champions on a number of fronts and over a number of decades, but this fantastic event, which is often at our many agricultural shows and specialty events, is under grave threat. In fact they are having to cancel, and we see that unfortunately it may be cancelled at the Melbourne Royal Show in September.

There has been an agreement, and I have had discussions with the president of the Victorian Axemen's Council – his name is Brad Meyer, and a very amazing person he was during the fires in helping fight the fires with their machinery. But Brad is really concerned that there is an agreement that was signed in 2006 with the Victorian government to sponsor, through VicForests, the cost of the hardwood logs for woodchopping events, and then the industry or the various organisations pick up the haulage at harvest, so the cost is split.

Now, this agreement is negotiated every couple of years, and the current agreement runs until 2024. However, court injunctions are having an adverse effect on this heritage sport, and it is really affecting the mental health of many people in our rural and regional towns.

As I said, speaking with Brad Meyer – I have received correspondence, and the minister may have also received similar correspondence – 100 woodchopping events are at risk this year if they cannot source the hardwood. He writes:

We urgently seek your assistance in supporting the continuation of this commitment to our Sport and the retention of this part of our Heritage.

So the action I seek is for you to honour the current agreement and facilitate VicForests to supply the hardwood logs for competition, noting as Brad says, it is actually only a minute amount in the scale of things – only 2000 cubic metres – that is required annually. Thanks, Minister, for your consideration.

### **Short-stay accommodation**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (17:36): (30) My adjournment is to the minister representing the Minister for Consumer Affairs and relates to short-stay accommodation regulations. Rural and regional Victorians are experiencing a rental crisis. Rental vacancy rates are currently lower than in metropolitan Melbourne, and many areas of regional Victoria have some of the tightest rental markets in the country. In my region of Western Victoria, the Surf Coast shire has vacancy rates below 1 per cent and at times during the past few years has had a vacancy rate of zero. In Warrnambool, rental costs have risen by 36.4 per cent over the past five years. Meanwhile, the neighbouring Colac Otway shire has the highest rate of homelessness in Victoria, with over 30 per cent of the shire's households experiencing rental stress, meaning they are spending more than 30 per cent of their household income on rent.

The consequences for people and our regional economies are significant. People are experiencing homelessness, poverty and displacement from their communities. Businesses, including hospitality and farms, and essential services like health, early childhood education and teaching are unable to attract workers. In these areas short-stay accommodation is abundant, but many of these holiday homes sit empty for much of the year at the expense of a family or an essential worker having access to a secure home. Victoria has some of the weakest regulation of short-stay accommodation in the country. The only thing the government has done in relation to short-stays was the implementation of a minor reform to the Owners Corporations Act 2006 in 2018. At the time, the government committed to a post-implementation review in 2020. It is now three years overdue. This government's failure to properly regulate the short-stay industry is putting regional Victorians at direct risk of homelessness. I call on the minister to urgently commit to a complete overhaul of short-stay regulations to increase the supply of housing available for families and workers in rural and regional communities.

### **Bushfire preparedness**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:38): (31) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services. 16 February next week sees the 40th anniversary of the Ash Wednesday bushfires. More than 180 fires fanned by 110-kilometre-per-hour winds caused devastation across 210,000 hectares of land, destroying more than 2500 homes. Livestock losses were enormous – more than 340,000 sheep and 18,000 cattle. 2676 people were injured, and tragically 47 Victorians lost their lives, with 28 further deaths in South Australia. The fires brought an enormous volunteer effort, with 130,000 firefighters, defence force personnel, relief workers and support crews. The anniversary is a time to pause and remember what we lost, but it must also be a reminder to redouble our efforts – a warning against complacency.

Bushfires in Australia have always been with us and always will be, but we must take action to reduce their frequency and mitigate the damage to lives and property they cause. Despite countless inquiries, commissions and reports, I worry the most important lesson has not been learned. At other times I have talked about various concerns, including overhead powerlines, misguided policies to lock up state forests and the assault on the CFA. But the biggest lesson has to be on fuel load reduction. From the point of view of land managers, it is the only tool they have, yet the fashion appears again to have moved against it. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission prescribed long-term annual burns

over a minimum 5 per cent of public land, but this target has been watered down. As my great friend former CSIRO scientist and fire expert David Packham insists, even that 5 per cent should have been a bare minimum. We have failed to learn from the Western Australian example of systematic extensive burns, despite more extreme weather. Since 1962 they have had two bushfire fatalities; Victoria has suffered 312. What does that tell you?

In Victoria currently I am alarmed to hear of the efforts of local CFA brigades to undertake their vital and once routine practice of roadside fire prevention. No more can they apply for a blanket permit for the fire season. Instead, specific burn plans are centrally created and include severe, unrealistic, ridiculous conditions. So the action I seek from the minister is your assistance in helping these brigades. They ask me: have the CFA outdoor regulations regarding schedule 12 burning permits been changed? What can you do to fight the bureaucratic hurdles making these essential efforts impossible?

### David Penington

**David ETTERS**HANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:41): (32) My adjournment matter today is for the Premier, and the action I seek is consideration of a state funeral for Emeritus Professor David Penington. On 6 January this year the world lost a great person who made an enormous contribution to this state. Professor Penington spent most of his 92 years on this earth in Victoria, and over his long life he has saved countless lives and transformed our health system on so many levels for the better.

Professor Penington had a long and distinguished association with the University of Melbourne: 17 years as professor of medicine, eight as dean of the faculty of medicine and eight as vice-chancellor, from 1988 to 1995. As dean of medicine, he developed new approaches to undergraduate medical education and made access to medical school a possibility for socially and educationally disadvantaged students, including refugees, principally from Vietnam. He really was a visionary.

From 1983 Professor Penington led Australia's response to HIV and AIDS. He was chair of the National AIDS Task Force, and his tireless efforts over many years helped to make Australia a world leader in HIV/AIDS public health strategies and in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While he is widely credited for the Grim Reaper campaign, I think his biggest achievement at the time was changing Australia's response to drug use. Without him we would not have had needle exchanges, in Australia or around the world. Without him countless people would have contracted and died from HIV.

He continued to be one of Australia's leading public intellectuals and health experts. He courageously advocated for sensible drug policy, publicly and politically, as the chair of Premier Kennett's Drug Advisory Council and Premier Bracks's Drug Policy Expert Committee. In 2014 when he was awarded Victorian of the Year he said:

We've got to find better ways to handle illicit drugs ... The reality is that prohibition just hasn't worked for 100 years and the problems are getting worse. We need to talk about drugs as a health issue ...

We honour many great people who have done wonderful things for Victorians and for Victoria. Professor Penington's legacy to Victoria and his commitment to improving the lives of Victorians should also be recognised. I believe that a state funeral for this brilliant and compassionate Victorian is the least we can do to acknowledge this extraordinary person.

### Powerline replacement grants

**Renee** HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:44): (33) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The issue that I wish to bring forward is the object and eligibility of the private overhead electrical line, or POEL, replacement grant. The grants were established to assist in the recovery of the areas affected by the 2019–20 summer bushfires and to increase community safety by reducing the risk posed by bare wire powerlines. The grant covers 100 per cent of the cost of the powerline undergrounding and replacement works, including contractors, suppliers and planning

approvals. However, the eligibility criteria for the grants restrict their accessibility to only designated sets of local government areas in the eastern and western regions of Victoria.

Despite facing the same risk and exposure to bushfires, many properties in my region are not included in this program's eligibility. I was approached by a local family in Gembrook whose property was issued a defect notice by AusNet, entirely shutting down the power supply to their property. This occurred after one of their private overhead electrical lines began to spark and presented itself as a fire hazard. The property has since been without power for over a month. The family was issued an emergency notice during the 2019–20 fires. This family meets all of the requirements to receive the grant other than the property being situated in the wrong LGA; it sits just outside of an LGA that is allowed to have the funding.

As we know, bushfires do not discriminate one LGA from another. In October 2021 the POEL scheme was extended into an additional 10 surrounding LGAs with high powerline bushfire risk, yet this expansion did not include these areas. It is imperative that this government takes action to address the issue and makes the POEL replacement grant accessible to all people that are facing the same risk from and exposure to bushfires. Many properties in the Cardinia shire were issued warnings in March 2019 in relation to multiple out-of-control bushfires near the Bunyip State Park.

The action that I seek is that the minister extend the eligibility criteria for the POEL replacement grant to include properties in the Cardinia Shire Council area and other areas that were issued with urgency warnings during the 2019–20 fires. Can the grant immediately be made available to the family in Gembrook who received an emergency warning on 2 March 2019 and who have now been without power and see no resolution in sight?

### **Bail laws**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:47): (34) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General and is concerning the ongoing crisis in Victoria's justice system. Ten years old – amid all the government's delays and talk about needing to get things right, it is important to remember that the law currently allows kids as young as 10 years old to be locked up. That is too young for an Instagram account; that is young enough to have baby teeth – and we are supposed to accept that these children should be charged, convicted and imprisoned. I am honestly left wondering how anyone could justify this.

It is our job as lawmakers to encourage and maintain an equitable and just society that works for all Victorians. When kids mess up, when kids break the law, they should be supported and guided to learn and grow. Countless studies have shown that when children have contact with the criminal justice system the damage to them, their families and their communities is devastating and lasting. The younger a child is when they are sentenced, the more likely they are to reoffend violently, to continue offending and to end up in prison as an adult. According to Victoria's Sentencing Advisory Council 2016 report, 94 per cent of children in detention aged 10 to 12 returned to prison before they were 18. Right now the government is ignoring these facts and the widespread calls for urgent reform from community groups, legal experts and even the federal government. They are ignoring that this is part of a system set up to disproportionately criminalise First Nations people at every stage of life and that it is working extremely effectively.

This inaction is not surprising coming from a government that is dragging its feet while Victoria's broken bail laws keep people languishing in prison. The government has known since 2019 what needs to be done, and the Greens have a bill ready to go. There are vulnerable people in pre-trial detention right now for no reason other than so the people in this building can score political points in the name of making the community safer.

Acting now does not bring back Veronica Nelson. It does not bring back any of the First Nations people who have died while in the custody of the state. It does not undo the untold damage to communities and families from politicised and weaponised justice. We can never undo that harm, but

we can do everything in our power to prevent it from continuing. These are not the only reforms we need to our justice system, not even the only urgent reforms. But I ask the Attorney-General to act with urgency and follow federal government advice to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14.

### Child protection

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:50): (35) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, and the action I seek is for her to join with me in coming to Dandenong, which is really the epicentre of Victoria's Indigenous child removal crisis, to meet with me with Indigenous leaders in that community.

During the election campaign I travelled to Dandenong to meet with the Aboriginal community forum committee. I had been invited there to talk with them – and more importantly listen to Indigenous people in that community – about the mass removal of Aboriginal children and babies. Members from all political parties were invited. The idea was that there would be a panel and that all of us would speak. It was in an election campaign, but despite the fact that I have been accused today by the fifth minister for child protection that I have faced off against in the past year of politicising these issues, I thought it was really important to go. It was the middle of the election campaign, but this is a very serious issue obviously, so I went – of course I went. No-one else came. The minister – Minister Brooks, who holds his seat by about 20 points – did not come. He is a good bloke, Colin, I like him very much, but he did not come. Members of other political parties were invited. Nobody came. Public servants were invited. They did not come. Anyway, I went, and I listened, because of course I do, despite the fact that the minister says that I politicise these issues.

What I heard at that huge community meeting of Indigenous people who have been so mistreated for so long by the state under governments no matter which persuasion – who cares, it does not matter – was that there was such deep trauma and they wanted us to listen. The minister has said on a number of occasions this week when I have asked her questions that she wants to work with me. Well, all right, great. That is nice. She said she cares deeply about foster carers, despite the fact that foster carers do not have the basic payments from the government to cover dental bills, for example, or school supplies, but that is fine. I am going to take this new minister – the fifth I have faced off against in the last two years – at her word. If she really wants to work with me, despite the fact that she accuses me of politicising Indigenous issues, then she should come with me in good faith to Dandenong to talk with Indigenous leaders there.

These issues are very much related to the issues that Mr Puglielli has just discussed and the issues that Mr Ettershank discussed. I would caution Mr Puglielli, who is new to this house, that he had better be careful talking about Indigenous issues in this place or he will be accused of politicising problems, but I agree entirely with what Mr Puglielli said. We funnel so many Indigenous young people into our criminal justice system, and we have got to have exactly the sorts of conversations that he talked about.

I would say quickly that I used to be a coalition government's adviser on drug law reform, and I would echo the sentiments entirely of Mr Ettershank.

### Responses

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (17:53): This evening there were 11 matters raised in the adjournment debate, and all of those matters, ranging from health, gaming, roads, woodchopping, pokies, emergency services, state funerals, extended ground pole replacement funds, raising the age and child protection, will be referred to the relevant ministers.

Just in terms of making a comment with respect to woodchopping, Ms Bath, yes, it is true my office, along with many other people, would have received some correspondence in relation to this matter, in particular from members of the Victorian Axemen's Council. My office is, with the department,

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processing that correspondence. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the advocacy of the stakeholders that are contacting the office at the moment, and we will be able to have a clearer situation shortly. Can I also say that this is a consequence of the timber shortage that we have. There are obviously impacts on the industry and on workers and families, but there are consequential impacts that some people had not even thought of that are coming up as well, and we are dealing with them as they come to us.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 5:55 pm.**