

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY, 5 JUNE 2019**

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Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, and Minister for Fishing and Boating.....	The Hon. JL Pulford, MLC
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FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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The Hon. DM ANDREWS

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

The Hon. JA MERLINO

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

The Hon. MA O'BRIEN

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party**

The Hon. LG McLEISH

**Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

The Hon. PL WALSH

**Deputy Leader of The Nationals**

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**Leader of the House**

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Mr KA WELLS

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*Assembly:* Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

*Council:* Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

*Parliamentary Services:* Secretary: Mr P Lochert

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**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
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Cheeseman, Mr Darren Leicester	South Barwon	ALP	Read, Dr Tim	Brunswick	Greens
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Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
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Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Labor Party; Greens—The Greens;  
Ind—Independent; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals.

## Legislative Assembly committees

### **Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee**

Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Connolly, Mr Eren, Mr Rowswell, Ms Ryan and Ms Theophanous.

### **Environment and Planning Standing Committee**

Mr Cheeseman, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Mr Morris and Mr T Smith.

### **Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**

Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Mr Newbury, Ms Settle, Mr Southwick, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

### **Privileges Committee**

Ms Allan, Mr Guy, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Neville, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan and Mr Wells.

### **Standing Orders Committee**

The Speaker, Ms Allan, Ms Edwards, Ms Halfpenny, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, Mr Staikos, Ms Staley and Mr Walsh.

## Joint committees

### **Dispute Resolution Committee**

*Assembly:* Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Jennings, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.

### **Electoral Matters Committee**

*Assembly:* Ms Blandthorn, Ms Hall, Dr Read and Ms Spence.

*Council:* Mr Atkinson, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell and Mr Quilty.

### **House Committee**

*Assembly:* The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.

*Council:* The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Ms Pulford and Ms Stitt.

### **Integrity and Oversight Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr Halse, Mr McGhie, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor and Mr Wells.

*Council:* Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

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

*Assembly:* Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Riordan and Ms Vallenge.

*Council:* Ms Stitt.

### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Assembly:* Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Ms Kilkenny.

*Council:* Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.

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**Wednesday, 5 June 2019**

**The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.32 a.m. and read the prayer.**

**Petitions**

**Following petition presented to house by Clerk:**

**HAZELWOOD PONDAGE**

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of the Latrobe Valley and wider Gippsland region draws to the attention of the House the fact that Hazelwood Pondage is currently closed for use by the general public including to organisations such as the Latrobe Valley Yacht Club who deliver the important Sailability program for persons with a disability.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call upon the State Government to explore every option available to it, with the objective of reopening Hazelwood Pondage for recreational use by locals and visitors alike.

**By Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (3228 signatures).**

**Tabled.**

**Ordered that petition be considered next day on motion of Mr NORTHE (Morwell).**

**Documents**

**DOCUMENTS**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General—Child and Youth Mental Health—Ordered to be published

*Planning and Environment Act 1987*—Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Banyule—C154, GC131  
Cardinia—GC128  
Casey—GC128  
Greater Geelong—GC128  
Hobsons Bay—GC128  
Hume—C238  
Kingston—GC131  
Manningham—C126, GC131  
Maribyrnong—C160  
Melton—GC128  
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Moonee Valley—GC128  
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Nillumbik—GC128  
Port of Melbourne—GC128  
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Whittlesea—C239, GC131

Wyndham—GC131

Yarra—GC128

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*—Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Electricity Industry Act 2000*—Order under s 17.

### Bills

#### APPROPRIATION (2019–2020) BILL 2019

##### *Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (09:34): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Appropriation (2019–2020) Bill 2019 without amendment.

#### DISABILITY (NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME TRANSITION) AMENDMENT BILL 2019

#### FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2019

##### *Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (09:34): I have received messages from the Lieutenant-Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Disability (National Disability Insurance Scheme Transition) Amendment Bill 2019 and the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019.

### Members statements

#### ***BEHIND THE WIRE***

**Ms McLEISH** (Eildon) (09:34): I recently attended an exhibition focused on Vietnam veterans at the Healesville RSL. The *Behind the Wire* exhibition was different in that it exhibited images and stories of those who went to Vietnam but it covered a very broad range of people who went. Susan Gordon-Brown did a great job in bringing this exhibition to life. It showed the war from so many different aspects, depending on the roles of those who went. Their day-to-day roles were explored as their jobs and their experiences were put together in their own words. Susan spoke to them at length, interviewed them over a long period of time, and she talked to people such as cooks, dental assistants, truck drivers, tank drivers, forward scouts, riflemen, training team members, civilian nurses and more. So it was a very touching exhibition. There was a book that I was very happy to purchase, and the proceeds were going to the healing garden at the Healesville hospital.

#### **MARYSVILLE CARAVAN AND HOLIDAY PARK**

**Ms McLEISH**: On the weekend I attended a 10-year celebration at the Marysville Caravan and Holiday Park. From the bushfires in 2009 to now it has been a long journey. Christine and Ken Adams were brilliant hosts. Half of the town of Marysville were there. It was supported by the Marysville & District Lions Club with the marquee and catering, and there was exceptional dessert catering from Christine and Ashraf Doos, who made absolutely delectable treats for everybody. It is great to see the caravan park looking absolutely brilliant, and it is a wonderful place to go. They have got wonderful rates of— (*Time expired*)

### **FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:36): Freedom of thought, of political expression and of religious belief are an important part of our democratic society. Victorians recognise this and the importance of ensuring the principles of our democratic rights in a diverse and inclusive society. Our Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities reflects and enshrines a range of rights, including the right to freedom of thought,

conscience, religion and belief, so we watch the current debate in the federal government on this issue with great interest.

As the commonwealth's own inquiry has found, no-one's freedom and practice of their religion in Australia is under threat. That is not to say that laws protecting people of faith and others based on their identity, race or gender, especially from mounting waves of hate speech designed to incite division if not violence, are not needed—they are. For too long the Muslim community, the Jewish community, the South Sudanese community and others have been subject to racist and violent hate speech. Fascists gathering on St Kilda Beach delivering Nazi salutes are a shocking development. People of faith should be protected from discrimination, as should LGBTIQ people.

The argument within the federal government should not be used by conservatives to give licence to discriminate against LGBTIQ people. The debate around legal reform is not an opportunity to exclude LGBTIQ people from the legitimate protections that they are entitled to or to give licence to faith-based groups to refuse critical services. This is an opportunity to build a better, more inclusive and stronger Australia, not a more divided one.

### GOLD ROYALTY

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (09:37):** The recent budget handed down by the Treasurer last week contains bad news for Ripon in a number of ways. I draw the attention of the house to two of those. The introduction of a gold tax is particularly problematic for the Stawell Gold Mine, and in fact the chief executive of Arete Capital Partners, the operator of that mine, said that he was 'shocked and a bit stunned' about the planned royalty rate since there had been no discussion whatsoever. He went on to say that:

This forces our investors to review everything, we are getting questions from abroad about what is going on and where this has come from.

Jobs in Stawell are hard to come by sometimes, and it is certainly hard to come by the quality of jobs at the Stawell Gold Mine. This mine was closed and has reopened, and now the Treasurer is putting a tax on this mine that calls into question those 160 jobs.

### LUXURY CAR TAX

**Ms STALEY:** There is another tax that the Treasurer introduced that is of particular interest to people in Ripon, and that is the LandCruiser tax. Many, many people in Ripon buy LandCruisers, either because they enjoy going around Australia towing a caravan and a LandCruiser is their preferred vehicle or because the roads are so bad under this government that they need a car like a LandCruiser to safely negotiate those roads. This is clearly a budget that does not account for the needs of Ripon.

### FAMILY VIOLENCE

**Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (09:39):** Patients in Victorian public hospitals will get the support they need if they are experiencing family violence, with new funding to train health workers in spotting the signs and offering help. I was pleased to join the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence to announce the funding on Monday at Bendigo Health.

The Victorian budget this year includes a \$7.8 million boost to the Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence initiative. Under the initiative more than 28 000 healthcare workers in Victorian public hospitals have already been trained to identify and support patients experiencing family violence, learning to recognise warning signs, responding sensitively and respectfully and connecting victims to services that they need. Healthcare workers are often the first to see signs of violence, so it is crucial they have the tools to identify victims and connect them to the services and support that they need. The Andrews Labor government is investing \$38.4 million over five years to deliver the Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence initiative in response to recommendation 95 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Family violence, as we know, is a national emergency, with one woman murdered at the hands of a current or former partner every week, and it is the leading cause of death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44. When it comes to addressing family violence Victoria has led the way, with the landmark royal commission that brought down 227 recommendations; the Andrews Labor government has committed to fulfilling all of them, with more than half completed already. Family violence is indeed a national crisis, and we need the whole community's help in preventing violence and providing help for victims.

#### **BONANG ROAD UPGRADE**

**Mr T BULL** (Gippsland East) (09:40): Bonang Road is a very important thoroughfare for the people living in the far north-east of my electorate of Gippsland East, and there is a large section of that road that remains unsealed. The federal government through the local MP, Darren Chester, recently committed \$2 million, which is half of the funding that is required to seal that road. The other half is required from the state government, and I would urge the minister to strongly consider matching that federal funding to seal this very important stretch of road.

#### **MACALISTER IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

**Mr T BULL**: Another commitment that has been made by the federal government is \$31 million for phase 2 of the Macalister irrigation district. That district provides such a strong input to our local economy in East Gippsland—and water, obviously, is the key. The upgrade is very, very important for water savings and it has been done in a number of stages. The federal government has committed its share for phase 2, the final stage, and I urge the minister to come to the party and fund the state's share.

#### **STATE PARLIAMENT VICTORIA LIONS CLUB**

**Mr T BULL**: Lions clubs are a great organisation in our country and internationally, and in the state Parliament we have a Lions Club that meets pretty regularly. I know, Speaker, that you have been a part of that club for a long time. It is very important that we get members along and it is very important that the members who have signed up pay their fees, so I will just give a little reminder to the member for Euroa that hers are overdue.

#### **NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK**

**Ms COUZENS** (Geelong) (09:42): In recognition of National Reconciliation Week the Geelong Football Club held the Djilang round to recognise the impact of our nation's first people on the great game of Australian Rules football. Djilang is the Wadawurrung word for Geelong. This will be the eighth year that the Cats have dedicated a match day to highlight the ongoing contribution to our community by the First Nations people. Some highlights of the match included the great Polly Farmer's daughter, Lisa, who was invited to ring the bell and start the match on the day. Players wore a guernsey designed by the incredibly talented Quinton Narkle. There was a formal welcome to country performed and a pre-game performance by the Deadly Dancers. At half-time Auskick matches and grid games were played by Aboriginal children from across the Geelong region, including participants of the Next Generation Academy who showed off their skills. Congratulations to the Geelong Football Club and all the Aboriginal community members who organised and participated in this fantastic event—and of course the Cats beat the Sydney Swans.

On Sunday I attended the annual Reconciliation in the Park organised by Wadawurrung, Wathaurong and One Fire. I congratulate Corrina Eccles, Kylie Clarke, Vicky Grosser and their hardworking team for an outstanding event that attracted hundreds of people. There was lots of talk about treaty. In Victoria we have listened. I am very proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government's commitment to treaty and self-determination for the First People of Victoria.

### LATIN AMERICA ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

**Mr GUY** (Bulleen) (09:43): I rise to make some comments about a recent delegation I led to Argentina and Chile and, importantly, talk in a bipartisan manner about how Victoria should spend more time and energy on engaging South American economies and building these relationships for mutual benefit. Victoria's South American engagement strategy is a positive step. It outlines a number of key areas where Victoria should be engaging a continent of more than half a billion people, both benefiting our economy and also educating a number of emerging economies about world's best practice.

Education, high-end manufacturing, e-trade, sporting major events and benefiting from a diverse multicultural workforce are commonalities Victoria has with South American economies. However, in my delegation to Argentina the discussions always pivoted back to agriculture. Argentina's enormous reliance on it, as 35 per cent of their international trade base, and Victoria's future agricultural economic output and historical significance to our economy are paramount. I do not have the time to speak longer, but again let me put on record how important South America is to our state. As members of Parliament and sales people for Victoria I encourage all members to take an interest in the strategy, the work of a number of previous strategies by other governments, and also to ensure that our state diversifies its economic focus beyond the Asia-Pacific region and North America.

### NORTH EAST LINK

**Mr GUY**: I raise the direct concerns of my local residents about the government's conduct in the planning stages of the North East Link. The RACV has highlighted that traffic is at its worst in Melbourne's north-east. While many talk about bad traffic in the north-east, we are living the worst of it. But north-east Melburnians want this issue solved sensibly, not in a head-rush, haphazard approach. Residents of the Applewood retirement village back onto the Eastern Freeway. It is some of the best over-55s living in Australia. They want simple answers about removal of vegetation that currently acts as a noise wall for their homes. When they cannot get simple answers about vegetation removal, despite the authority having full knowledge of what is planned for this section, they feel, quite rightly, that they are being misled, poorly treated and, frankly, lied to.

### FEDERAL ELECTION

**Mr EREN** (Lara) (09:45): While the federal election results were disappointing for those on this side of the house, I would like to congratulate my local federal colleagues on their success. Congratulations to Libby Coker, who was voted in by the good people of Corangamite to represent them in Canberra.

Congratulations also to my good friend and long-time colleague Richard Marles on his re-election to the seat of Corio. The wonderful residents of the Corio electorate, many of whom we share in my seat of Lara, have placed their faith in a man who has proven over the last 12 years that he works tirelessly to represent them at a federal level, and he certainly does a fantastic job of that. I would also like to congratulate Richard on his elevation to the important role of deputy leader of the federal Labor Party. Richard is well regarded in the community and the Labor Party, and he has great communication skills, a unifying ability and a knack for reading the play. He is a marvellous lateral thinker who comes up with a solution to whatever problem is before him. That is a skill that not many have, and that is why I know he will be such a great deputy leader complementing the new leader of the Labor Party, Anthony Albanese.

I would also like to congratulate of course Anthony on this elevation along with the Senate leadership team, Penny Wong and Kristina Keneally. This is such a strong Labor team. It is the first all-female Senate leadership team in history, and it is a team that I am sure will be elected at the next federal election and do amazing things representing our country and our state.

**MOOROOLBARK TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Mr HODGETT** (Croydon) (09:46): My statement this morning comprises two local issues that are continually raised with my office in Croydon. The Manchester Road level crossing removal was promised in 2014, it was re-announced in 2018 and my successive opponents have both campaigned solemnly for the removal, yet residents are still kept in the dark and have been offered very little information about the project. During the 2018 campaign a new 450-vehicle car park was also promised for commuters at Mooroolbark station, yet there is no funding in the 2019–20 budget for the projects to go ahead. Residents have been advised that the crossing will be removed by the end of 2022, but surely it would make sense to remove the crossing and construct a new car park at the same time.

Can the relevant ministers please confirm whether the Manchester Road level crossing removal will be under-rail or whether residents and business owners in Mooroolbark will be faced with a sky rail option? Residents also want to know what the government's time line is for the construction of a new car park, whether they will be expected to pay for the parking and how the fees will be passed on to commuters. Will the government be imposing a betterment levy on local residents and local businesses within 1 kilometre of the level crossing removal? And given the cost blowout on level crossing removals and Labor's failure to manage and deliver major projects on time and on budget, we will continue to watch these two projects with great interest.

**SYDNEY STACK**

**Mr HODGETT**: On another matter can I congratulate Sydney Stack of the Richmond Football Club on his round 11 Rising Star nomination. Go the mighty Tigers.

**SYDENHAM PARK**

**Ms HUTCHINS** (Sydenham) (09:48): Last Sunday I joined many local residents to celebrate World Environment Day by planting local native trees and grasses in Sydenham Park. Over the last five years the community has planted almost 10 000 trees and many pods of native grass. Incredibly, over that time we have had 12 different species of birds return to the area. It is heartwarming to look upon the trees we planted in earlier years, see their progress and know the true benefit that will come for our children.

Sydenham Park is a hidden gem just up Kings Road over the Calder Freeway and features significant flora and fauna, Aboriginal cultural heritage and European cultural heritage. Most significantly it is the junction of Deep Creek and Jacksons Creek and the beginning of the Maribyrnong River. In 2004 Brimbank City Council released a Sydenham Park strategy plan to develop these significant opportunities, including extensive space for sporting facilities. Brimbank's own research on projected population growth shows we are going to need an extra 10 football fields—that includes both soccer and football—and four netball courts by 2027. Sadly, that 2004 plan has been shelved and left waiting. Last year Brimbank council established a committee to master plan the site. While the committee was initially chaired by a Taylors Ward councillor, the mayor has since taken over the chair. Community groups have informed me that they believe that council is in discussions to sell parts of the park to the Melbourne Cemetery Trust for the establishment of a cemetery there.

**SOLAR HOMES PACKAGE**

**Ms KEALY** (Lowan) (09:49): I wish to raise the ongoing concerns of my constituents regarding the solar panel rebate scheme with the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Local constituents who have installed a solar panel system are waiting at least weeks and up to months to receive the promised solar panel rebate. Emma Weatherly from Tarrington submitted solar rebate claim documentation on 20 May. This week she was informed by Solar Victoria that there will be a four to six-week delay in processing the rebate documentation. Emma stated:

This is the first we have heard from Solar Victoria about a delay in processing rebate documentation and we did budgets based on receiving the rebate soon after sending in the documentation. The current delay therefore makes things financially difficult for us.

The Hamilton *Spectator* recently reported that Ian Lewis had submitted solar rebate documentation 14 days after having panels installed on 15 February, but as of 30 May he was still waiting to receive the rebate. Lachlan Hick of Natimuk Solar has raised concerns that the changes to the solar panel rebate scheme due to come into effect on 1 July will not address the key issues that have plagued solar panel installation businesses after the rebate cap was applied overnight, resulting in a significant cut to staff hours. Another local solar retailer has raised concerns about unscrupulous installers, who do not care if customers get the rebate and are continuing to install on the promise of access to a solar rebate but with no guarantee this will be delivered to customers—likening Labor’s solar rebate program to the disastrous pink batts scheme.

From 1 July solar rebates will be paid directly to the installer rather than the customer. This will rely on Solar Victoria processing claims in a timely way. I urge the minister to address this appropriately.

### GLENROY SPECIALIST SCHOOL

**Ms BLANDTHORN** (Pascoe Vale) (09:51): I would like to refer to my recent visit to Glenroy Specialist School, where I was delighted to meet their new principal, Mr Allan Waterson, who gave me a tour of their facilities and took me inside their classrooms. I was reminded yet again of what a wonderful school this is and the excellent educational opportunities and experiences the staff at this school are providing for their students. This is a fantastic school, which provides innovative and inclusive educational opportunities to students from the north-western suburbs of Melbourne from five to 18 years of age who have physical or multiple disabilities or complex health needs. Some of the needs of these students are very extreme.

All students deserve a great education regardless of their physical, mental or social abilities, and the students at Glenroy Specialist School are certainly getting this. The facilities and teaching throughout this school are world class. Every classroom presents its own unique teaching and learning benefits, whether it be in sensory equipment or audio-visual technology. As you walk through the corridors of this school you see firsthand the inspiring level of engagement in learning and opportunity. Staff at this school are interested in and understand each individual student’s needs and work hard to ensure they are given every chance to reach their true potential. I thank the Glenroy Specialist School community for welcoming me to their school yet again. I am looking forward to continuing to work with the new principal, Mr Allan Waterson. Can I also just take this opportunity to acknowledge the outgoing principal, Raelene Kenny. Raelene Kenny served this school community with distinction for many years.

### WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

**Dr READ** (Brunswick) (09:52): Victoria’s coasts and marine waters are a precious asset. As much as 80 per cent of the marine life found in Victoria is found nowhere else in the world. But, sadly, our oceans and coastlines are under constant and increasing threat from plastic pollution, new gas drilling and climate change. Just 5 per cent of Victorian waters are in marine protected areas, and that is only half of what Australia has signed up to under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and about half of what scientists say is necessary to protect endangered species and help ecosystems resist rising temperatures and ocean acidification. It is particularly important to have marine protected areas to preserve stable fish stocks.

Areas such as pristine Westernport Bay and the beautiful Otway Basin are under threat in Victoria from new fossil fuel projects. In Westernport Bay, AGL want to build a giant gas import ship, and on Victoria’s western coastline the government could allow new gas drilling as early as this year. There is also an ill-conceived carbon sequestration project occurring off Golden Beach off the Ninety Mile

Beach. So today, on World Environment Day, I call on the government to say no to risky new fossil fuel projects in our oceans and to double the area we protect through marine reserves.

#### EID AL-FITR

**Ms HALL** (Footscray) (09:54): I would like to wish everyone in my electorate of Footscray who observed Ramadan a very happy Eid al-Fitr. I feel like I have learnt a great deal this year about the observance of Ramadan, its meaning and its significance. In Footscray we have many generous community organisations who have opened their doors and hosted iftar dinners with others, not just sharing a meal together but sharing understanding. To the East Africa Women's Foundation, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, the Australia Light Foundation, Sunshine mosque, Maidstone mosque and the African-Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services, thank you for your acts of charity during Ramadan and your commitment to our harmonious community. Thank you to local community leader Fatih Yargi, who invited my family to his house for an iftar shared with his family, as well as my office manager, Sel Sanli, and his wife, Emel, for welcoming Sam, Tilly, Ned and I into their home for a meal too.

#### SUNSHINE COLLEGE

**Ms HALL**: I would also like to take this opportunity to celebrate a big budget win for Sunshine College. Last year, when ATARs were released, there was a huge splash in the *Herald Sun* celebrating Sunshine College's students. It read 'A Class Act: Teachers give the extra time, and it shows in ATAR average'. The teachers of Sunshine College certainly are very committed, and they are ably led by principal Tim Blunt. Tim has been determined over many years to ensure the talented students and hardworking teachers of Sunshine College have the facilities to match their efforts. This budget delivers a further \$12.75 million for the transformation of the west campus.

#### BRIGHTON SECONDARY COLLEGE

**Mr NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:55): Brighton Secondary College is an impressive school led by Richard Minack that prides itself on providing inclusive, comprehensive and wide-ranging educational opportunities. It is also a large school that serves 1200 students. I recently visited the school for arts and international week. For the first time the school hosted a smoking ceremony and welcome to country. As part of the welcome, Boon Wurrung elder Janet Galpin spoke about the importance of leading lives with purpose. The school has an incredible arts program. In late March, I attended the school's annual house choral competition. One of the highlights was a performance by the teachers. Congratulations also to Ellie Kara on being awarded best solo performance.

#### KIDS FOUNDATION

**Mr NEWBURY**: Childhood injuries are reportedly the leading cause of death and hospitalisation in Australian children aged between one and 14 years. After encountering a young girl with cigarette burns on her hands some 40 years ago, Dr Susie O'Neill has dedicated her life to children at risk, and in 1993 established the KIDS Foundation. The foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that directly touches the lives of more than 100 000 children each year. The organisation proactively delivers programs aimed at both prevention and injury recovery. Proactively the organisation runs programs that teach children to manage injury risk and to be safe, whilst the organisation also creates a better life for those living with serious injuries and burns. The KIDS Foundation does special work in our community, and Susie O'Neill is an incredible woman.

#### BRENTWOOD PARK NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

**Mr MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (09:57): On 16 May I had the pleasure of joining the Premier in visiting Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House to formally congratulate them on their successful Pick My Project grant application. The Pick My Project initiative empowers Victorians by giving them the opportunity to create projects that will make their community a better place. Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House, in partnership with other local community centres, was successful in receiving

a \$200 000 grant from this scheme. The \$200 000 grant will go towards the neighbourhood house's community garden project, which will see the construction of a community garden that will help teach local residents how to grow their own food.

Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House, along with many other community centres in the Narre Warren South electorate, are dedicated to promoting inclusivity among people of all ages and cultural backgrounds in the local area. They deliver and host a variety of events and activities which promote togetherness through shared experiences. These include dance lessons, language training programs, sewing classes and men's discussion groups.

My thanks to the Premier for taking a strong interest in our local community support services, to the neighbourhood house manager Samar Mougharbel and to the committee members, staff and families of Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House for their hard work. I wish them every success in the coming years and look forward to visiting again when the community garden is in full bloom.

#### **MOUNT WAVERLEY RESERVE MASTER PLAN**

**Mr FREGON** (Mount Waverley) (09:58): I am very happy to share that the Andrews Labor government is fulfilling another election commitment by providing \$150 000 to fund the master plan for the redevelopment of Mount Waverley Reserve. The master plan will greatly benefit the three clubs who play on this reserve, the Waverley Blues Football Netball Club, the Mount Waverley Cricket Club and the Mount Waverley Tennis Club. Each club has not only been a permanent fixture in our community for many years but has also seen continued growth in participation, and it is fair to say that they have outgrown their facilities. I have had many a family day where all the food is served on the outside. I have also had many conversations with the clubs and my community regarding this reserve, and we have a great example here of how benefits do come about from working together. Their passion and commitment to providing the best for their players, members and our community is clear to us all, and I am proud to be able to help them get this crucial first step underway.

I wish to thank all the club presidents, coaches, players, families and volunteers who all come together to make this important step possible. A special shout-out to club presidents Stephen Pewtress, David Grossman and Andrew Rydell. Your shared vision for grassroots sport in Mount Waverley and your commitment to working together has been integral in ensuring this first step in getting the reserve developed has been achieved. I cannot wait to see your shared vision in its entirety.

While I am at it, a special happy birthday to the Waverley Blues, who in their current form will be celebrating their 21st birthday on 13 July.

#### **BOROONDARA CARES FOUNDATION**

**Mr KENNEDY** (Hawthorn) (10:00): I would like to speak about a charitable initiative within my Hawthorn electorate: the Boroondara Cares Foundation Chances scholarship program. This program helps motivated and talented young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, aiding them to excel in their school environment free of financial burdens. These scholarships are made possible through the hard efforts of eight Rotary clubs, Swinburne University and multiple businesses in my electorate and surrounding electorates, and I commend them for contributing to such a wonderful cause.

A Chances scholarship provides money for resources such as textbooks, laptops and myki cards, helping recipients to stay in and flourish at school. They provide the platform which every young person deserves, keeping these talented students from falling by the wayside due to financial troubles. Since 2006 this fabulous endeavour has so far provided over 1000 scholarships, with many of these recipients going on to achieve their education goals and many completing a degree or vocational qualifications. I once again commend all those who have helped to provide the opportunities of education that everyone, without exception, deserves.

**BUDGET 2019–20**

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (10:01): I stand in this house today as a member of a government that gets things done—a government that sees what needs to be done and then does it. I am still coming down from the excitement of the budget early last week, I really am, because one of the things we are doing is getting people moving. We are building the transport network for the future—a network to cater for our growing needs. We are building the Suburban Rail Loop. We are getting rid of 75 level crossings. We are upgrading train stations, building the Metro Tunnel and giving more people more opportunities to catch public transport. Those opposite are very, very jealous.

But we are also building roads. We are building the missing link in Melbourne’s freeway network: the fully funded \$15.8 billion North East Link. It will connect an upgraded Eastern Freeway to the M80 ring-road. This project includes overhauling the Eastern Freeway by creating new lanes, which will get people moving faster, safer and sooner, as well as creating a dedicated express bus lane. You will be able to get to the airport without stopping at one single traffic light. But that is not the only thing this project creates: this fantastic project will slash travel times, get trucks off local roads, connect the growing northern and south-eastern suburbs and create thousands of local jobs for Victorians.

Speaking about roads, the residents of my electorate benefit enormously from the North East Link, but also I was very proud that last week’s budget announced a \$1.6 million investment into upgrading the intersection at Bedford Road and Canterbury Road in Heathmont, making it safer for residents. We are getting on with delivering the roads and infrastructure that Victorians need.

**BROADMEADOWS ELECTORATE REVITALISATION**

**Mr McGUIRE** (Broadmeadows) (10:03): I have invited the Prime Minister to Broadmeadows. This is a matter of urgency following his government’s commitment to a north-west Melbourne city deal. Such deals can be worth hundreds of millions of dollars and I want to fast track this opportunity. Broadmeadows is the designated capital of Melbourne’s north and we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revitalise this community and get the jobs of the future. The Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure, the Honourable Alan Tudge, declared:

A North West Melbourne City Deal would provide the platform to deliver the vision, planning and investment needed to support a fast growing population, housing and jobs, and ensure the region acts as an efficient gateway to Melbourne.

...

The North and West regions of Melbourne are undergoing dramatic population growth, with the area expected to grow by around 460 000 people—over 35 per cent—by 2031. The region’s residential areas are growing and the economy continues to transition from traditional manufacturing, with exciting emerging employment clusters and industries.

This is even more important, with the hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in the iconic Ford sites in Broadmeadows and Geelong. Here is the opportunity to get this coordinated. A lot of work is already being done through the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board. We stand ready to deliver.

**Statements on parliamentary committee reports****PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE***Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office*

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (10:05): It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on the only report that has so far been tabled in this term of Parliament, the *Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office*, and in so doing I really wanted to reflect on just how important the Auditor-General is to this place and to the integrity of government. The Victorian-Auditor General’s Office (VAGO) obviously tables a number of reports in this place over

four years. Today we have seen the Auditor-General table a report into child and youth mental health, which will no doubt contain findings of great interest to all members of this chamber.

But the Auditor-General's role is even more important when you have a government that is spending such huge quantities of money. It is doubling debt and is failing to meet many of its budget performance measures. I particularly wanted to reflect on some of the failings of the government around public transport, most particularly V/Line. I note that the Auditor-General tabled a report in August 2017 into V/Line passenger services, where he made some salient points around the fact that V/Line often failed to meet its performance targets, particularly on services to the outside of the city. But if you have a look at this year's budget papers, it actually shows that V/Line has now posted its worst performance in 10 years. The scheduled services delivered for regional trains are at their lowest in 10 years, at 96.3 per cent and well below the target of 98.5 per cent.

**Mr Pearson:** On a point of order, Speaker, I just seek your guidance. I note the member is making a contribution that relates to the Auditor-General, but my understanding is that the time allocated for the consideration of parliamentary reports relates to those reports that are generated by the committee itself. This report that has been tabled is a very narrow report. It relates to the appointment of a financial auditor to conduct an audit of VAGO. It does not relate to the actions of VAGO. It does not relate to reports that may or may not have been tabled yet by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, so I just seek your guidance as to whether the member is actually speaking on the appropriate report.

**Ms RYAN:** On the point of order, Speaker, the report does actually note the very important role of the Auditor-General in assessing, particularly, budget performance measures, and so to that end I put it to you that I am being entirely relevant in talking about the reports that VAGO has previously tabled in this place.

**The SPEAKER:** I uphold the point of order raised by the member for Essendon. The report that the honourable member is speaking to is a fairly narrow report. I am prepared to accept some comments in broader policy areas to put this report in context, but the member's contribution should not be entirely on policy areas or other Auditor-General's reports. The member should confine her remarks to the report that is in front of us.

**Ms RYAN:** In the 1 minute and 30 seconds remaining I would reflect on the fact that the tabling of this report on the appointment of an auditor for the Victorian Auditor-General's Office reveals how important the role of VAGO is to this place. When you consider the reports that VAGO has brought forward over the last four years I do think they demonstrate that the government has a range of problems, and the one that I was highlighting in particular was public transport and the fact that the government has failed to deliver on its budget measures, which fundamentally is the role of the Victorian Auditor-General—to highlight to the Victorian public where the government is failing and where there is a need for improvement.

There can be absolutely no doubt that V/Line is one of those agencies where the government is failing to adhere to those benchmarks that it has set out. It would be my hope that in the next 12 months we may see the Auditor-General undertake further inquiry into why V/Line has now posted its worst performance in a decade under the watch of the Andrews Labor government.

#### **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

##### *Report on the Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office*

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon) (10:09): I am delighted to make a contribution on the appointment of a financial auditor for the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO). As the member for Euroa has indicated, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office does play an important function. We need to make sure as a Parliament that the Auditor-General's office continues to conduct itself to the highest

standard, and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) has been allocated these roles and functions on behalf of the Parliament.

Certainly from my perspective I loved my time on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I think the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee plays a really vitally important role in terms of supporting the functions of the Parliament and providing a degree of contact, guidance and engagement with the Victorian Auditor-General's Office. I think it is fair to say that over the course of the journey PAEC has had differing relations with the various Auditors-General that have held the post, but I think that at all times it is important that there is the capacity and the ability to make sure that Parliament has some line of sight as to the way in which VAGO is conducting itself and its operations. That is done via the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

There are two aspects that are regular, I suppose, bread-and-butter issues that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee performs in relation to the Auditor-General's office. The first relates to the performance audit function, and the second relates to the financial audit function. Now, with the performance audit function, this is a very large engagement that occurs every three years. It looks at the way in which the Auditor-General conducts its work and tries to do an assessment about the way in which the Auditor-General's office runs performance audits. As members would know, when the Auditor-General tables his or her reports they either relate to performance audits or they relate to financial audits. Performance audits relate to the way in which a public sector entity discharges its statutory obligations and duties. Financial audits purely relate to the way in which financial moneys are expended, making sure, basically, that all the columns add up. So a financial audit function is probably more low level than a performance audit function, but they are both really important issues.

In relation to stepping back a step and looking at VAGO, there is a need to make sure that, in relation to the money that is appropriated to the Auditor-General's office, that money is fairly accounted for and expensed. In addition to that, there is a need to make sure that the performance audits that the office is doing are done as best as they can. It is important that there is a degree of contestability and rigour in these processes to ensure that the way in which VAGO conducts itself is at the leading edge and is the best it can be.

I really enjoyed my time working, in the case of the 58th Parliament, with KPMG, which did the performance audit report, looking at the way in which VAGO went about its business and making recommendations about its systems and processes and how it can be better, because we can never allow a situation where there is not that robustness and where there is not that contestability of performance and contestability of ideas. We need to make sure that there is the capacity for the Parliament to say to VAGO, 'Look, we really want to make sure that what you are doing is the best it can be and that you are doing the best that you can do, and we want to make sure you get the support you need to do that'.

Obviously in relation to this report, this relates more to financial audit functions. Again, it is making sure that the money that is provided by the appropriation bill to VAGO is properly accounted for. It is a fairly small-scale audit—I think that in relation to a financial audit of this scope it is around about \$35 000 to \$40 000 a year. A performance audit is considerably more, as you would expect. But we do have a really important role to play as a Parliament to make sure that there are those appropriate checks and balances in place on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and to try to encourage a way in which we can ensure that they can be the best that they can be, because if we have got a strong VAGO and they have the capacity to make very good policy insights in relation to their performance audits, then hopefully it will follow that the performance audits produced are of a high standard.

**Bills****MINERAL RESOURCES (SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT) AMENDMENT BILL 2019***Statement of compatibility*

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (10:16): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Bill 2019.

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

**Overview**

The main purposes of the Bill are to establish the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority (the Authority) and its Board, provide for the rehabilitation of declared mine land and the establishment of a declared mine land register, and establish the Declared Mine Fund. The Bill achieves these purposes by making relevant amendments, to the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* (the Act) and consequential amendments to other Acts. Declared mine land is defined to mean land covered by a mining licence that includes a declared mine, or land covered by other specifically identified licences. Declared mines are defined in the Act as specified mines that the Minister considers to pose a significant risk to public safety, the environment or infrastructure, and are subsequently declared to be so by Ministerial order.

I note at the outset that the holders of the licences effected by the Bill are primarily corporations rather than individuals; however, to the extent that some licence holders may be individuals, I discuss the relevant human rights issues raised by this Bill below.

I also note that the Authority will replace and succeed the Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner, and will be given the current functions and powers of the Commissioner under the Act, as well as some additional functions and powers. To the extent that these powers and functions may interfere with human rights, I only discuss the additional functions and powers.

**Human Rights Issues****Privacy and property rights**

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference with privacy will not be ‘unlawful’ where it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed. Interferences with privacy will not be ‘arbitrary’ provided they are reasonable in the particular circumstances, and just and proportionate to the legitimate end they seek to achieve.

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. An interference with property may amount to a ‘deprivation’ in circumstances where it effectively prevents a person from using or dealing with their property. However, the Charter permits deprivations of property so long as the powers which authorise the deprivation are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

Some provisions in the Bill may interfere with privacy and property rights; however, in my view these interferences are minimal, are likely to apply to corporations rather than individuals, and, in any event, are clear, reasonable and proportionate. I therefore consider the provisions not to limit these Charter rights.

**Rehabilitation works**

Clause 10 of the Bill amends section 83(1)(a) of the Act to insert additional grounds on which the Minister may take necessary action to rehabilitate certain land. The additional grounds include where the land is declared mine land and the Minister is not satisfied that the land has been rehabilitated, or the Minister is satisfied that it requires further rehabilitation in accordance with an applicable declared mine land rehabilitation plan. The primary responsibility for rehabilitation under the Act remains with the relevant licensee or authority holder; under section 81(3), the Minister may only carry out rehabilitation if they have requested the licensee or authority holder to do so and this has not been done within a reasonable period. Under section 81(4), the Minister may recover as a debt due to the Crown any amount by which the rehabilitation costs exceed the relevant bond otherwise owing to the licensee or authority holder.

Rehabilitation works may in some instances interfere with the privacy and property of relevant licensees and authority holders. However, in my view any such interferences will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary, and therefore do not amount to a limit on either right under the Charter. The obligations to rehabilitate land are set

out in the relevant rehabilitation plans, authorities and licence conditions that apply to that land, which licensees and authority holders are aware of and have elected to be subject to by virtue of their involvement with relevant land. The Minister will only conduct rehabilitation works to the extent that such works are necessary, due to the failure of the licensee or authority holder to discharge those obligations themselves. As such, I consider any interference with privacy or property occasioned by clause 10 to be lawful and proportionate to the objectives of the provision.

#### **Notices requiring authority holder to take action or stop work**

Clause 45 of the Bill amends section 110(1)(b) of the Act to provide an additional ground on which the Minister may issue a notice to require an authority holder to take specified action in relation to certain contraventions (here, failure to comply with a declared rehabilitation plan), cease certain activities for a specified period, supply certain plans or information, or carry out or arrange monitoring, surveys, audits or assessments and report to the Minister as to the results. Further, clause 45 extends the application of this provision to former licensees and clause 46 inserts new section 110B of the Act to provide that the Minister may issue a notice to require such action on the part of owners of registered mine land.

In my view, any interferences with the privacy or property rights of authority holders, mine land owners or former licensees occasioned by these provisions are appropriately circumscribed and directly linked to their purpose such that they are neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The Minister may only issue the relevant notices if they believe on reasonable grounds that certain things have or are likely to occur; namely, a contravention of a relevant plan or the Act, or an act or omission that is likely to result in a risk to public safety, the environment, land, property or infrastructure. It is reasonable for authority holders and licensees, both current and former, and owners of relevant land, to be held accountable for the fulfilment of their obligations, including avoiding and remedying contraventions, and to avoid, minimise or remove the risks associated with declared mine land.

#### **Register of declared mine land and comments on licence applications**

Clause 44 of the Bill inserts new section 84AZZL(1) into the Act to provide that the Authority must establish and maintain a register of declared mine land registered under new Part 7C of the Act. New section 84AZZL(3) provides that the register must include various documents including copies of any applicable licence (whether or not it is in force) and new 84AZZL(2) provides that the register may be inspected by any person. The register is highly unlikely to contain any personal information; however, to extent that it may (for example, the name of an individual licence holder), any interference occasioned by the inclusion of that information in the register will be minimal. Further, a relevant licensee will have very little expectation of privacy over the information, and given the nature of the land to which the licences apply, and the public interest in ensuring transparency and accountability with respect to such land, it is reasonable for this information to be contained in a public register. In my view, the right to privacy is therefore not limited.

Clause 55 inserts new section 24A into the Act to provide that any person may provide written comments to the Minister on a licence being granted. These comments must then be made available for inspection by any person until the application for the licence is granted or refused. This provision is an extension of existing provisions enabling any person to object to a licence being granted and for such objections to be available for public inspection. For the same reasons as set out above with respect to the register of declared mine land, in my view clause 55 does not limit the right to privacy of licence applicants.

**Tim Pallas MP**  
**Treasurer**  
**Minister for Economic Development**

#### *Second reading*

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (10:16): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

#### **Incorporated speech as follows:**

##### Background

The main purpose of the Bill is to fulfil the Government's commitments to the Latrobe Valley community and the people of Victoria to implement the recommendations of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

In February 2014, a fire broke out at the Hazelwood coal mine which lasted 45 days, and had significant adverse impacts on the local community. In 2016, the Inquiry established to investigate the fire recommended that a Statutory Authority be established by 2026 or earlier if one of the mines should close. The Inquiry wanted the Authority to have 'ongoing tenure until all mines have been successfully rehabilitated, and monitoring and maintenance of the Latrobe Valley mines is no longer required.'

In June 2016 the Andrews Labor Government committed to meet the Inquiry's recommendations through the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Implementation Plan. ENGIE ceased mining at Hazelwood in March 2017.

This Bill will support the Latrobe Valley and other Victorian communities that face long term impacts from mining and quarrying.

#### Overview of Bill

The Bill establishes a Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority, clarifies rehabilitation, closure and post-closure obligations and sets up a post closure fund.

The Bill enables the Minister to apply this new regime to future mines that present a significant risk to public safety, the environment and infrastructure using an existing statutory power to declare mines. The Latrobe Valley coal mines are currently the only declared mines.

#### Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority

The Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority will be established on 1 July 2020. The Authority will take over the Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner's current roles in relation to rehabilitation and the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy. The Authority's rehabilitation role will extend to declared mines. The Authority will be engaged in monitoring, maintaining and managing registered declared mine land.

The Authority will register post-closure declared mine land. The Authority may become the owner of registered declared mine land, if this is needed to protect the public, infrastructure and the environment. The Authority will be empowered to perform or contract for any functions arising from its role as landholder of declared mine land, for example managing any ongoing risks of fire or other emergencies.

#### Declared mine land rehabilitation and closure obligations

Declared mines will be required to have declared mine rehabilitation plans. Declared mine rehabilitation plans will include closure criteria and a post closure plan. The Bill clarifies that rehabilitation will be satisfactory and bonds returned if closure criteria are met. This will be the point of closure. Declared mine rehabilitation plans will continue in force until closure.

#### Post-closure obligations and the Declared Mine Fund

After a mine is closed the land owner will be responsible for monitoring and maintaining the land. The post closure plan will be registered against the title of the land. The Minister will have the power to enforce the post-closure plan.

The Bill establishes a Declared Mine Fund. The Authority will use the Declared Mine Fund to meet the ongoing costs of managing declared mine land post-closure. The criteria and processes for assessing contributions to the Fund will be set in regulations.

It is intended that amounts contributed by individual licensees to the Declared Mine Fund will be used for the maintenance and management of that specific mine, avoiding risks associated with cross-subsidisation. These amendments make the liabilities and responsibilities of mine operators more explicit rather than increase them.

The declared mine land rehabilitation framework in the Bill is enabling—detail will be in regulations. The changes will start to come into force from 1 July 2020 giving time for full consultation. The time frame for rehabilitation plan changes will be set following this consultation.

#### Other amendments

The Bill contains three other amendments to the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.

The Bill enables the public to comment on the grant and refusal of licence applications. Currently only objections are allowed. This amendment increases the ability of the community to participate in decision-making about exploration and mining.

The Bill allows land owners and mine licence holders to include agreements on non-financial compensation in registered compensation agreements. This amendment gives people who are affected by mining on private land more scope to develop solutions that meet their needs.

The Bill extends the term of prospecting licences to seven years, from the current five years. Prospecting licences were introduced in 2010. They are used by small-scale prospectors and miners. The area of land in a prospecting licence must not exceed five hectares. Prospecting licences cannot be renewed. At present the use

of these licences is limited because it can take several years for licensees to fulfil the statutory conditions to commence work. The 2-year extension to the term of prospecting licences will ensure that they remain an effective form of licensing for small scale prospectors.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (10:16):** I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 19 June.**

## SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2019

### *Statement of compatibility*

**Mr SCOTT (Preston—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Veterans) (10:18):** In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2019.

In my opinion, the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2019, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

#### **Overview**

The objectives of the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 are to:

- amend the *Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986* (ESSA) to provide that where a member of the Emergency Services Defined Benefit Scheme (ES DB Scheme) has reached the maximum benefit multiple, the employer shall pay contributions to an accumulation fund in respect of the employee at 3 per cent in 2019–20 rising to 12 per cent by 2026–27;
- amend the ESSA to provide that a member's superable salary is maintained following a salary reduction unless otherwise advised by the member;
- amend the ESSA to provide that contributions payable for the financial year will be fixed and based upon the superable salary at the start of the financial year;
- amend the ESSA to allow members to take a transition to retirement pension;
- amend the ESSA to allow members on unpaid parental and carer's leave to choose their level of contributions (and therefore benefit accrual);
- amend the ESSA to provide members with the opportunity to make higher 'catch up' contributions;
- amend the ESSA to change the method of calculating death benefits in respect of police recruits who do not have dependants; and
- amend the ESSA, the *State Superannuation Act 1988* (SSA), the *Transport Superannuation Act 1988* (TSA) and the *State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979* (SERB) to provide that the Late Payment of Interest provisions apply from the date the member becomes entitled to a benefit.

#### **Human Rights Issues**

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

The Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill does not impinge on any rights protected by the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

##### Are the relevant Charter rights actually limited by the Bill?

The proposals outlined in the Bill will not limit any individual's human rights contained in the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

**Robin Scott MP**  
**Assistant Treasurer**

### *Second reading*

**Mr SCOTT (Preston—Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Veterans) (10:18):** I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

This Bill amends the **Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1988** to provide for significant improvements to the superannuation benefits for Victoria's emergency services workers.

In February 2017, the Government engaged Dr David Knox of Mercer and Ms Robbie Campo of Circa Consulting to undertake a review of certain aspects of the Emergency Services Defined Benefit Scheme (ES DB Scheme). The terms of reference for this review were to:

- i. review certain design elements of the ES DB Scheme such as the maximum multiple, the calculation of death and disability benefits, the calculation of the resignation benefit and the feasibility of introducing a transition to retirement pension; and
- ii. also review gender equity.

After considering the recommendations of this review the Government made an election commitment endorsing reforms to the ES DB Scheme. This Bill implements these reforms. I will now speak to each of these reforms in turn.

Paying additional accumulation contributions for certain members

At present, ES DB Scheme members can accrue an (untaxed) maximum benefit of 8.4 times their final average salary. A member contributing at 7 per cent of salary will reach this maximum multiple after 30 years service.

Once the maximum multiple has been reached, there are no further accruals and the member's benefit only increases with salary growth. This has been an issue of concern to members for many years and it has been argued that the lack of accrual beyond the maximum multiple may result inexperienced staff retiring prematurely.

To address this concern, the Bill will require employers pay contributions in respect of ES DB Scheme members who have reached the maximum benefit multiple at the following rates, as a percentage of salary:

In 2019–20 and 2020–21—3 per cent; in 2021–22 and 2022–23—6 per cent; in 2023–24—8 per cent; in 2024–25—9 per cent; in 2025–26—11 per cent; and in 2026–27—12 per cent.

Superable salary maintenance

The rules of the ES DB Scheme do not currently provide for the automatic maintenance of a member's superable salary if a member's actual salary reduces. Therefore, if a member takes a lower substantive position, or ceases a period of higher duties which have been recognised as superable, the lower salary is taken into account immediately for superannuation purposes.

Currently, a contributor may apply to the Board to maintain a higher salary for superannuation purposes. Any such requests are considered on a case by case basis and require consultation with the relevant employer who, along with the contributor, is required to make contributions based on the higher salary if this is approved.

The Bill amends this provision to align the salary and contribution rules for the ES DB Scheme with those that apply to members of the former State Superannuation Fund. That is, following a salary reduction the previous higher salary is maintained automatically for superannuation purposes unless the member elects otherwise.

Fix contribution amounts at the start of the financial year

Under the current rules of the ES DB Scheme, member and employer contributions vary every time a member's superable salary changes, even if only by a small amount. This increases the administrative effort required by both employers and the Scheme. The frequent fluctuations in contributions also increase the likelihood of contribution arrears and/or advances arising.

Therefore, the Bill includes a provision to fix contributions at the start of each financial year based on a member's salary at that time. The contributions payable by the member would then only vary if the member changed their rate of contribution or varied their work hours.

This and the preceding proposal are interdependent as it would be problematic to fix the contribution amount for the financial year and then allow a member's superable salary to decrease.

Introduction of transition to retirement pensions

In the mid-2000s, Commonwealth superannuation laws were changed to enable superannuation funds to offer transition to retirement pensions (TTRPs). A TTRPs allows members who have reached their preservation age to access their superannuation benefits prior to completely retiring from the workforce. This can assist

those wanting to transition into retirement by reducing their working hours as it allows them to draw down their superannuation to supplement their reduced salary income.

The Bill allows members of the ES DB Scheme to take out a TTRP.

Under Commonwealth law, there are lower and upper limits on how much can be withdrawn from a TTRP each year.

Based on the prevailing limits, a person wanting to supplement their income by \$20 000 per annum would need to invest more than \$200 000 in a TTRP. Therefore, any cap on the amount a member of the ES DB Scheme can draw down needs to be high enough to provide a meaningful income from the TTRP while also considering the residual retirement benefit and the fact that the contributor is taking on the investment risk. With this in mind, the Bill will allow members to withdraw up to 50 per cent of their accrued benefit to purchase a TTRP.

To ensure that the policy is used as a genuine way to supplement a member's income while they continue to work, the Bill requires that at least 20 per cent of a member's accrued benefit is withdrawn to purchase a TTRP.

If a contributor takes out a TTRP, their accrued multiple will be reduced to ensure that their accrued benefit decreases to reflect the amount withdrawn. The member's maximum accrued multiple will also be reduced.

The necessary reductions will be determined using a methodology approved by the Minister on the advice of an actuary appointed by the Board.

#### More flexible arrangements for those on unpaid parental and carer's leave

The review panel noted that members on unpaid sick leave can choose their level of notional contribution (and thus benefit accrual). On resuming work, the accumulated unpaid contributions, plus interest, are either recovered via higher member contributions or deducted from a member's final benefit.

At present, members on unpaid parental leave continue to be covered for death and disability benefits for the first twelve months and they accrue benefits at the rate applicable to a zero contributor, of 8.5 per cent of final average salary per year. The Bill amends the ES DB Scheme's governing rules to provide those on unpaid parental and carer's leave with the ability to choose their contribution (and accrual) rate.

#### Improved 'catch up' contribution provisions

The ES DB Scheme allows members to make additional 'catch up' contributions at 8 per cent of salary if their average member contribution rate has been less than 7 per cent. This allows a member to accrue benefits at a faster rate than is otherwise permitted to make up for periods when their contributions, and accrual, were lower than the maximum possible. This flexibility is valuable for members who, at times, may not have been able to contribute at a rate that maximises their accrual due to the cost of raising a family or periods of unpaid leave. Currently, around 17 per cent of ES DB Scheme members are contributing at the catch up rate of 8 per cent.

The review panel noted that the catch up provisions are relatively slow, as they only allow an additional 1 per cent of salary to be paid each year, and suggested that members be allowed to contribute at a higher rate. The panel suggested that such a change may be particularly beneficial for women who are returning to the workforce after having children.

The Bill therefore amends the ES DB Scheme's governing rules to provide for catch up contributions of up to 10 per cent of salary.

#### Death benefits for police recruits

The review panel noted that police recruits are not members of the ES DB Scheme and that the death benefit paid in respect of recruits without dependants is far lower than that paid in respect of a police recruit with dependants.

The panel noted that this distinction only applies to police recruits and is inconsistent with the provision of death benefits for other emergency services personnel.

The Bill amends the ES DB Scheme's governing rules to remove this distinction by increasing the death benefit payable in respect of police recruits without dependants.

#### Late payment of interest provisions

In addition to the proposed amendments to the **Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1988** that have been developed following the review into the ES DB Scheme, the Bill contains an amendment to the Late Payment of Interest (LPI) provisions. Currently the Late Payment of Interest (LPI) provisions in the **Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1988**, **State Superannuation Act 1988**, the **Transport Superannuation Act 1988** and the **State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979** allow the payment of interest if a benefit is paid more than 14 days after the member became entitled to the benefit.

The current 14 day period is inconsistent with industry standards. The Bill therefore amends the LPI provisions in the schemes' governing legislation to allow for LPI to apply from the date a member becomes entitled to a benefit.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Ms McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:18): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 19 June.**

## LEGAL PROFESSION UNIFORM LAW APPLICATION AMENDMENT BILL 2019

### *Statement of compatibility*

**Ms HENNESSY** (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety) (10:19): In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Amendment Bill 2019.

In my opinion, the Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Amendment Bill 2019, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

#### **Overview**

Part 3 of the Bill retrospectively confirms that the Victorian Legal Services Commissioner (VLSC) is the entity with power to deal with disciplinary complaints and investigations commenced under the *Legal Profession Act 2004*. Part 3 clearly prescribes that the VLSC is the correct body to deal with such complaints and investigations, and provides that anything that the VLSC (or the Victorian Legal Services Board or any court or tribunal) has previously done in relation to such complaints and investigations has effect as though the VLSC had been so prescribed. Part 3 might limit rights under the Charter. However, those limitations are justified in view of the amendment's objective of protecting the public from legal practitioners who have engaged in misconduct.

#### **Human Rights Issues**

##### *Right to a fair hearing*

The right to a fair hearing in section 24 of the Charter is engaged by proposed new s 186, inserted by clause 10 of the Bill. This is because this provision may affect the outcome of court proceedings by changing the substantive law by retrospectively validating acts that may otherwise have been subject to challenge. However, although the provision amends the substantive law in a way that may affect legal rights, it does not interfere with any procedural rights. It does not interfere with a person's ability to have their legal rights heard and determined before a fair and impartial decision maker. As such, the right to a fair hearing is not limited by these provisions.

##### *Right against self-incrimination*

Section 25(k) of the Charter protects the right of a person not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt (the right against self-incrimination). This right may be limited to some degree by ss 185 and 186, because these provisions authorise and retrospectively validate the exercise of coercive investigatory powers under the *Legal Profession Act 2004*. In particular, the right against self-incrimination may be limited by the exercise of the powers in s 4.4.11 of that Act to require a lawyer, a law practice, or an associate of a law practice, to provide an explanation, documents or information, even where to do so would tend to incriminate the person providing those documents or information.

However, authorising the use of these powers is reasonable and justifiable for the same reasons that the powers were justifiable under the *Legal Profession Act 2004* prior to the introduction of the Uniform Law. The powers are necessary to ensure adequate compliance with the regulatory scheme by lawyers. They go no further than necessary to achieve this purpose: where a person objects to producing a document or providing information on the grounds of self-incrimination, the document or information cannot be used against that person in a proceeding for a criminal offence, other than an offence against the *Legal Profession Act 2004*, an offence relating to trust accounts, or a perjury offence. Further, the provision applies only to lawyers, law

practices and associates of law practices, who have voluntarily chosen to take part in the profession and comply with its regulatory scheme.

While retrospective validation of the use of coercive powers would not generally be appropriate, in this case, it is justifiable to do so on the basis of the amendment's overarching purpose of protecting the public from legal practitioners who have engaged in misconduct. The amendments are reasonable and justified to ensure the continuity and validity of the scheme for professional regulation of legal practitioners as set out in the *Legal Profession Act 2004* and the *Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014*.

Further, it was clearly intended that the VLSC should have jurisdiction over complaints and investigations commenced under the *Legal Profession Act 2004*. The Bill does not introduce or extend any powers that limit rights, it simply clarifies that the VLSC is able to exercise the powers that the *Legal Profession Act 2004* gave to the Legal Services Commissioner.

*Right to privacy and reputation*

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with and the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. These rights are engaged by these provisions, because they authorise the VLSC to exercise powers that may involve disclosure of private information, and to conduct investigations which may negatively impact upon the reputation of legal practitioners. However, to the extent that privacy and reputation are interfered with by the VLSC, any such interference will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The lawfulness of any interference is provided for by the provisions themselves, and the powers in the *Legal Profession Act 2004* can only be exercised for the purposes and in the specific circumstances set out in the Act, and therefore will not be arbitrary. As such, the rights in s 13 are not limited by these provisions.

For the reasons outlined above, the amendments contained in this Bill are compatible with human rights set out in the Charter.

**Hon Jill Hennessy MP**  
**Attorney-General**

*Second reading*

**Ms HENNESSY** (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety) (10:19): I move:

That this bill now be read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Bill will amend the *Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014* (the Application Act), including the Legal Profession Uniform Law (the Uniform Law), which is a schedule to the Application Act.

The Act commenced on 1 July 2015, and created a harmonised system for the regulation of the legal profession in Victoria and New South Wales. Victoria is the 'host jurisdiction' for the Uniform Law, and amendments made to the Uniform Law are automatically applied in other participating jurisdictions.

In February, the New South Wales, Victorian, and Western Australian Attorneys-General signed a new intergovernmental agreement on behalf of their respective jurisdictions, to formalise Western Australia's entry into the Uniform Law scheme.

The expansion of the Uniform Law scheme to Western Australia is a major step in the evolution of the scheme. A significant majority of Australia's lawyers and law practices will be covered by the scheme, delivering benefits to the legal industry and consumers alike.

Victorian legal practitioners and law practices will benefit through the harmonisation of regulation in another jurisdiction, thereby further reducing barriers to interstate legal practice.

Some of the scheme's existing governance arrangements reflect the fact that when the scheme was established, there were only two participating jurisdictions. To reflect the expansion of the scheme to include Western Australia, changes to the governance of the scheme are necessary. These changes should also position the scheme to accommodate new states and territories in the future.

The Bill will amend the Uniform Law to facilitate Western Australia's participation in the Uniform Law scheme, by increasing the total number of members of the Legal Services Council, the peak interjurisdictional body that oversees the scheme and sets policy under the scheme. The Legal Services Council will increase from five members to seven and the Uniform Law will be amended to provide that, at all times, at least one member of the Council is drawn from each participating jurisdiction. The Bill will also provide for greater

inter-jurisdictional participation on the Admissions Committee, which supports the Legal Services Council by making uniform rules relating to the admission of lawyers. The Bill will remove the current seven-member limit on the size of the Admissions Committee, and provide that the Admissions Committee must include a current or former Supreme Court judge from each participating jurisdiction.

These amendments to the Uniform Law will ensure that the membership of the key governance bodies under the Uniform Law scheme is appropriately balanced between its respective participating jurisdictions.

Once the amendments to the Uniform Law have been passed in Victoria, Western Australia will introduce a Bill to adopt the Uniform Law. The Western Australian Attorney-General has announced that the Uniform Law will formally commence in Western Australia on 1 July 2020.

The Bill also includes amendments to the Application Act, to retrospectively clarify that the Victorian Legal Services Commissioner (VLSC) is the responsible entity for continuing disciplinary complaints and investigations against legal practitioners that were commenced under the legislation that preceded the Application Act—that is, the *Legal Profession Act 2004*. Although it was clearly intended that the VLSC should have jurisdiction in respect of such earlier matters, the Bill will clearly prescribe that the VLSC is the correct body to deal with such complaints and investigations, and will provide that anything that the VLSC (or the Victorian Legal Services Board or any court or tribunal) has previously done in relation to such complaints and investigations has the effect as though the VLSC had been so prescribed.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (10:19): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 19 June.**

## **ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TREATMENT AMENDMENT (CONSENT) BILL 2019**

### *Statement of compatibility*

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:21): In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment (Consent) Bill 2019.

In my opinion, the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment (Consent) Bill 2019 (the Bill), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

### **Overview**

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008* (the ART Act) to remove the requirement that a woman needs the consent of her spouse to access assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm if she is separated but not divorced from her spouse. The Bill also amends the *Status of Children Act 1974* (the SOC Act) to ensure it operates consistently with the ART Act and to replace a redundant reference in a provision regarding counselling requirements relating to substitute parentage orders granted by a court for surrogacy arrangements.

### **Human Rights Issues**

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

The Bill promotes the following human rights protected by the Charter:

- the right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8 of the Charter)
- the right to privacy (section 13 of the Charter)
- the right to protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter).

#### **The right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8 of the Charter)**

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law, is entitled to equal protection without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

The ART Act requires a married woman to obtain the consent of her spouse to undergo an assisted reproductive treatment procedure using donor sperm. The spouse's consent is required, even where the woman is separated but not divorced from her spouse.

In September 2018 the Federal Court was asked to consider the consent requirements in the ART Act in the circumstances of a married woman who was separated from her husband but not divorced and who wished to undergo assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm without her husband's consent. The Court found that the provision in the ART Act that required the woman to have her spouse's consent discriminated against the woman because of her marital status, as the same consent requirements would not apply to a woman who had separated from a domestic partner to whom she was not married [*EHT18 v Melbourne IVF* [2018] FCA 1421].

The Bill will:

- amend the ART Act so that a woman who is married and separated from her spouse does not need the consent of her spouse to access assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm
- make consequential amendments to the SOC Act so that the presumptions of parentage in the Act operate consistently with the amendments to the ART Act. The amendments ensure that the provisions concerning parentage that apply to a child born to a woman who underwent assisted reproductive treatment and who does not have a partner, are the provisions that apply to a woman who underwent treatment and who is married to but separated from her spouse.

Clause 4 of the Bill amends the definition of partner in section 3 of the ART Act so as to exclude from that definition a spouse from whom the person has separated.

Clause 6 of the Bill makes a consequential amendment to Part III of the SOC Act so that a married woman who is separated from her spouse at the time she undergoes an assisted reproductive treatment procedure will be treated as a woman without a partner for the purposes of the presumptions in Part III as to the parentage of a child born as a result of that treatment procedure.

The amended definition of partner in the ART Act will also have an effect on whether a surrogate mother has a partner for the purposes of Part 4 of the ART Act, which deals with the use of assisted reproductive treatment in surrogacy arrangements.

The ART Act requires the surrogate mother and her partner, if any, to undergo counselling and be provided with legal advice before a surrogacy arrangement is entered into.

The effect of the amended definition of partner will be that a married surrogate mother who is separated from her spouse but not divorced at the time she enters into a surrogate arrangement will be regarded as not having a partner for the purposes of the counselling and legal advice provisions relating to surrogacy arrangements. In effect this means a married but separated surrogate mother is treated the same as a surrogate mother who has recently separated from a domestic partner.

These amendments promote equality before the law for women who are married but separated from their spouse. They provide for women who are separated from their spouse and women who are separated from their domestic partner to be treated equally with respect to the consent, counselling and legal advice requirements under the ART Act, and with respect to the presumptions about the parentage of children born as a result of assisted reproductive treatment under the SOC Act.

#### The right to privacy (section 13 of the Charter)

Section 13(1) of the Charter recognises the right of a person not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. This right encompasses physical and psychological integrity and the autonomy and inherent dignity of the person.

The amendment made by clause 4 of the Bill to the definition of partner in the ART Act will allow for a woman who is married to but separated from her spouse to access assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm without requiring the consent of her spouse.

This promotes the right to privacy by:

- allowing a married but separated woman to make the decision to access assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm autonomously
- preventing the arbitrary interference with privacy that might result if the consent of the woman's separated spouse is required and he or she is thus informed about the woman's decision to access assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm.

The protection of families and children (section 17 of the Charter)

Section 17(1) of the Charter recognises that families are the fundamental group unit of society and that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State. Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests, in recognition of a child's special vulnerability because they are a child.

The amended definition of partner updates the ART Act so that it better reflects the make-up of modern families. The amendment to Part III of the SOC Act promotes the right to protection of families and children by providing certainty about the parentage of children born as a result of assisted reproductive treatment to women who are married but separated from their spouse.

**Martin Foley MP**  
**Minister for Mental Health**  
**Minister for Equality**  
**Minister for Creative Industries**

*Second reading*

**Mr FOLEY** (Albert Park—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:21): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

**Incorporated speech as follows:**

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to promoting equality and removing discrimination in all its forms. The Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment (Consent) Bill 2019 will address an outdated law that allows men to control the reproductive rights of women.

Specifically, this Bill will remove the requirement that women need the approval of their former partner to access assisted reproductive treatment using donor sperm. In doing so, it will ensure that women are not discriminated against on the basis of their marital status when accessing treatment.

Implementing this Bill will acquit one of the government's key election commitments. It forms part of the government's continued commitment to review and strengthen Victoria's assisted reproductive treatment laws.

**Amendments to the *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008***

The *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008* requires a woman and her partner, if any, to consent to undergo a treatment procedure. To ensure that a person does not need the consent of their spouse where they are still married but have separated, the Bill amends the definition of partner in the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act. The amendment will mean that a person's spouse, that is, the person to whom the person is legally married, is not a 'partner' for the purposes of assisted reproductive treatment, if the spouse is separated from the person. The amendment will apply equally to women in same-sex and heterosexual marriages.

**Consequential amendments to the *Status of Children Act 1974***

The *Status of Children Act 1974* sets out presumptions that determine when a person will be recognised as a parent, including when children are born as a result of assisted reproductive treatment. The presumptions form the basis of recording parentage on birth certificates by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

The Bill makes consequential amendments to the Status of Children Act to ensure that the presumptions about who is the parent operate consistently with the amendments to the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act. The amendments provide that where a married woman is separated from her partner and has a child with the assistance of a registered assisted reproductive treatment provider, using donor sperm, the presumptions as to parentage are the same as those that apply to a woman who undergoes such a treatment without a partner. This means that the woman's estranged spouse is not presumed to be the parent of a child.

**Other minor amendments**

The Bill makes a further minor amendment to the Status of Children Act to replace a redundant reference to the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act. The amendment will clarify who can provide counselling required for parties to certain surrogacy arrangements for the purposes of a substitute parentage order.

The Bill also includes minor statute law revision amendments to the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act.

**Commencement**

The amendments to the definition of partner in the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act and the consequential amendments to the Status of Children Act will commence 28 days after the Bill receives Royal Assent. This will allow sufficient time for assisted reproductive treatment providers to prepare for implementation.

The amendments to counselling provisions in the Status of Children Act and the statute law revision amendments will commence the day after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Ms McLEISH** (Eildon) (10:21): I move:

The debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 19 June.**

**FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2019**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Mr FOLEY:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr BATTIN** (Gembrook) (10:22): And it is groundhog day. We are back in this place debating a piece of legislation that is bad for fire services, bad for safety in Victoria and, most importantly, terrible for volunteers across this state. Three years ago today we had thousands of volunteers on the front steps of this Parliament calling out this government for bringing in legislation to effectively tear apart the service that they love, the one they support and the one that has supported our communities for so long.

But it is vital we go back to the start. We have to go over some of the arguments yet again because obviously some in the government have not listened, particularly those in the country areas that have volunteer stations that represent and work in their community. November 2014 is where all of this started; it was prior to the 2014 election. It was in that election that the United Firefighters Union (UFU) went out and doorknocked thousands of doors, made thousands of phone calls, sent out so many letters on behalf of Daniel Andrews, the Leader of the Opposition at the time. That was not us saying that; that was Peter Marshall leaking that to the *Herald Sun* to remind Daniel Andrews who was in charge. When he sent that letter out he reminded Daniel Andrews for every day of his time as the Premier of this state that Peter Marshall was in the background. He is the puppetmaster handling what he wants for the fire services into the future.

March 2015 was when payment started to come forward and the UFU put forward an enterprise bargaining agreement, an EBA that had flaws in it that were so serious that it was going to put at jeopardy and risk how our fire services operate throughout this state. It was an EBA that changed words like 'consult'. Our side of Parliament have no issue with 'consult'; we have major issues with 'consult and agree'. When you start to hand the power away from management, when you start to take the power away from the chief officers who are put in that place to protect us—the chiefs that can work to ensure they can move firefighters from one location to another in the best interest of community safety. As an example, when we had a heatwave back in 2009, chief officers worked with Ambulance Victoria to ensure they could get extra firefighters on the road to make sure they could protect Victorians who had heatstroke and who were vulnerable. As we all know, the Black Saturday fires took 173 lives; the heatwave took more than 300.

The chiefs wanted to make sure that we had extra fire trucks, not for fires but for medical emergencies. And what happened? The United Firefighters Union intervened, took it to Fair Work Australia and tried to stop the chief using his powers to have staff on the road to protect Victorians in their houses—

to stop five extra fire trucks assisting ambulances to come out and respond when people were in their greatest time of need for medical emergency response. That ended up in Fair Work Australia until the early hours of the morning, and it was only then, when the chief turned around and said the responsibility should fall back on the UFU if anyone dies the next day. They withdrew their application. At 2 o'clock in the morning, in Fair Work Australia, they withdrew that. They are the conditions they wanted to put inside this EBA—another major flaw.

This government talks about all they want to do with equality, having people have the rights to do what they want, yet they bring in a piece of legislation that discriminates against people wanting to return to work in a part-time mode. If someone goes off work to have a child and then wants to return in a part-time capacity as a frontline firefighter, they cannot do it. It is interesting: the former minister said in this place that there are part-time firefighters on the frontline in the Victorian fire services. Yet when I go and speak to the chiefs, they are having trouble finding them because they are not on the frontline fire services. The frontline fire services have a 10 and 14-hour roster, and with that 10 and 14-hour roster, if you are a career firefighter, you can at the moment, without promotion and without change, see what you are doing for the next 20 years, including your leave and what shifts you are doing. It is so stable for the firefighter. That is not in the best interests of community safety. We need to make sure there is flexibility in that roster. We need to make sure, like the police service, like the ambulance, that they can rotate people, move people around. In the police force at the moment they can move people based on incidence of crime. They can move people from one location to the next at the orders of the Chief Commissioner of Police. The chief commissioner works and gives those powers through different ranks of the police services to ensure that the police can have people where they are needed when they are needed. If there is a crime spree happening in Dandenong, then move extra police down to Dandenong.

But at the moment you cannot move firefighters around without permission from the United Firefighters Union. That is not in the best interest of community safety. And that is what this side of Parliament is all about—ensuring that we get that. The enterprise bargaining agreement was eventually knocked back. It was declined; the CFA EBA was knocked back. It was interesting how many of those people who knocked it back still remain.

Now we all know, and not in order, that Jane Garrett was the Minister for Emergency Services, and Jane Garrett openly said that she could not support this legislation. It was interesting that one person came out in the media at the time who said that Jane Garrett was not in the right position to say that—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the member for Gembrook to refer to members of Parliament by their correct titles.

**Mr BATTIN:** Yes—the member for Eastern Victoria Region.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr BATTIN:** Yes, Jane Garrett in the upper house—thank you very much—the former minister. Someone came out at that time and said that basically Jane Garrett from the upper house was not in a position to come out and talk about the issues and to put on record publicly, not just inside the cabinet room, her concerns of how it was going to affect our fire services. The person who came out in the media and said that is now the emergency services minister. They came out and said that Jane Garrett, the member for Eastern Victoria Region, could not state publicly what she thought, that the bill that this government wanted to bring in at the time and still tries to force through is damaging to our fire services.

Then the new minister, the member for Monbulk—another former Minister for Emergency Services—decided the way to fix this was to take on that role. He went against everything he had already said to his volunteers. We had stat decs signed against the member for Monbulk from his local volunteers of the lies that he had said in this place around the 100-day delivery of presumptive rights legislation. He said the easiest way to do this was to sack the board. So if you do not agree, you sack the board. So an

independent board who had run the fire services successfully for a long period of time were dismissed because they would not agree with the Premier and the then emergency services minister—that is, Claire Higgins, John Peberdy, Ross Coyle, Katherine Forrest, Michael Freshwater, Peter Harmsworth, James Holyman, John Schurink and Michael Tudball, all people who were respected within the fire services. Some of them were volunteers in the fire services, some of them served in the fire services, and they are the ones who were dismissed.

Then on top of that this government went out and headhunted Lucinda Nolan for the position of the CEO of the fire services. Lucinda Nolan had a wonderful history within the Victoria Police service. That is why this government headhunted her. She was the right person at the right time to make the changes that need to happen within the CFA. She was a person who was all about community safety. But she would never do it—never do it—and disrespect volunteers, and she would not just bow to every demand of the United Firefighters Union. And what happened to her? She was forced out of the fire services. She had to resign and then had to sign a confidentiality agreement because the government were afraid that she would go out there and disclose exactly how bad this legislation was and how much it was going to cost. So they brought in Joe Buffone, and Joe Buffone came out and publicly sent a letter to the minister to say exactly what this was going to do and what risks it was going to pose the community. And what did they do to Joe Buffone? They got rid of Joe Buffone—and any person that spoke up.

Worse than getting rid of Joe Buffone—a person who has served our state for years, for decades, in emergency services; a man who has protected our community; a man who only believes in community safety and not politics—the member for Monbulk came in here and said the only reason he was gone was because of money, because he asked for a pay rise. They tried to tarnish a man who had the respect of the fire services, the respect of the community, and they came in here and said basically they did it because of money.

Let us put it on record then: we have now got a chief officer/CEO, and Steve Warrington is taking on that role. The role that he has got, I will guarantee you, pays more than Joe Buffone was ever on. So if someone agrees 100 per cent with the government, they tend to get a fairly decent pay rise. I will put it out there that Steve Warrington's role is now exactly what Joe Buffone said should have been happening. Joe Buffone had issues with the structure and the rank structure within the fire services. It was not about money, but he wanted to make sure that the chief officer could ensure that the fire services were where they were needed and when they were needed, and that was important.

Other people that have gone since then include Paul Stacchino and Jim Higgins. We have got the 10 senior MFB firefighters who complained of bullying who have also gone, and we should not forget Peter Rau, again a respected member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. He is someone who had served for a long period of time. He protected his community, and he was bullied out. He was pushed out of the fire services in no uncertain terms in a disgraceful act—a disgraceful act—and what is worse is that now that investigation, as we have seen in the paper recently, has been pushed aside because there was more than one time of bullying. I would have thought WorkSafe should be investigating and charging anyone responsible for bullying within the workplace to a degree where a person is at home and who has come out publicly and spoken about mental health issues—and again, what did this government do? When Peter Rau left, what did this government do? They went out and said—that is right, the current minister said in answer to the question, why did he leave?—he left because he is a bit unwell, or for family reasons, when he actually left because of mental health reasons.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr BATTIN:** Did I apologise? No, the minister went out and misled the community on exactly what happened and tried to cover up the fact that he was bullied out. Now we are seeing that investigation pushed under the rug, and Peter Rau will not get what he is entitled to. He was asked why he has not sued the MFB. The reason he has not sued the MFB is that Peter Rau is not after

money; he is after the best fire services in Victoria. He is not after cash; he is about ensuring that the bullying, the thuggery and the intimidation in our fire services is gone once and for good.

We are seeing with this legislation today some major, major concerns, and one of them is that the government keep telling us it is very similar to the legislation we debated last time. I will put it to the government that this is not the same legislation that was debated through this house last time because they put through amendments in the upper house, and some of those amendments are in relation to a fire registration board, which members of this house have not had an opportunity to talk about and how that is going to affect firefighters in the future. You are going to have a position where any person who wants to become, at the moment, a career firefighter—and there is nothing stopping this going into volunteer firefighters in the future—will be given fire registration by a board or a panel. They will have to be registered with this board before they can become a firefighter. So who is going to be on that firefighting panel? Who is going to be on it? One person is appointed by the minister. It could be a good retirement plan for Peter Marshall. What do you reckon, Minister? It could be a good one for him. We could put him on there.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr BATTIN:** Through the Chair—you might want to ask the minister should they want to have that. The second person appointed will be someone appointed as a current firefighter voted for by firefighters. The third person appointed will be a former senior firefighter as appointed by firefighters, and the fourth person appointed will be an academic voted for by the firefighters. So effectively you are giving three UFU members—three UFU sympathisers—the power for who the chiefs can and cannot employ.

Now, as we bring in Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) they keep trying to tell the volunteers, ‘You know what, volunteers? Don’t worry, don’t worry, nothing’s going to change. However, when we do make these changes anyone employed within the CFA will be done by the chief’. But then you go through the subsections in 25C, take out the fact that the chief can have a say, and then the chief goes, ‘Look, there’s no-one here that I think is suitable for this role’—the new regional role maybe up in Bendigo, and they have got the new regional manager up there—and they go, ‘Look, there’s no-one really suitable at the moment. What we’re going to have to do is go externally’, and the chief goes, ‘Oh, that’s fantastic’. So we go out, we go external, we look around, we find someone from New South Wales and we bring that person down. They go through the interview process and the chief says, ‘This is great. I love it. Fantastic’. You would think then the chief has the final say? No, no. He has then got to send it off to the UFU and their little panel to decide whether they can be registered. If the UFU panel decides no, they are not going to be registered, the chief does not have the right to employ who he wants. He has lost that power. He has to go through a UFU-selected board before he can get them on board. That is a disgrace.

The chief CFA officer should, in any new legislation, be able to employ who they need in the interests of public safety. As soon as you take that away from them, again you are taking away the democratic process, you are taking away the power of the chief and you are reducing what they can and cannot do. The chief fire officer is there to protect Victorians. The chief fire officer is to make sure that the management system of the CFA is there to support the volunteers. If he—or she, in the future—cannot have a say in who is appointed, then you have taken away the rights and that power and that is a disgrace.

Last time this piece of legislation went through in the upper house they had the fire services inquiry, and the Victorian government actually responded to this inquiry and at the time they had some pretty interesting statements around what they were going to do. Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) has come out fairly strong on this and said that there were some areas in this that people supported and some they did not support. Some examples of those recommendations:

The Government ensure compliance with its consultation obligations under the Volunteer Charter and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 prior to proceeding with any further reform of the fire services.

The government's response? 'Support'. I am not sure. I do not think there have been any consultation. We have only had about 12 hours since this piece of legislation has come back into the Parliament. We have had 12 hours! VFBV was called in yesterday.

**Ms Neville** interjected.

**Mr BATTIN:** The minister is saying that it was on the website—for how long? A year? Well, this legislation was only introduced yesterday, so we have to make sure it has got a check. We have got to go out and consult with the VFBV and to make sure there are no changes, because a word change like 'must' to 'would' or to 'could' can make a major difference in any legislation, and I am going to be honest—I cannot trust the government that there are no changes. I just cannot trust them. Why? Because the government ensured compliance with its consultation clause before the last time the legislation was introduced when we on this side of the house legislated that all volunteers must be respected. When we legislated that they should be consulted the government, then in opposition, supported that right up until the time that Peter Marshall said to them, 'No. You only consult with us. You only deal with us because we are the ones that knocked on thousands of doors'.

Another recommendation:

The Government undertake meaningful and balanced consultation with Emergency Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, staff and volunteer representatives prior to proposing any further reform of the fire services.

What do you think the government said? 'Support'. Another fail. VFBV was called in here yesterday morning for their consultation. They were in here yesterday morning for their consultation, and I actually understand the VFBV is in quite a difficult position because they 100 per cent support their volunteers. I note that yesterday the member for Frankston spoke about another volunteer organisation. The VFBV are known and will be known as the organisation that genuinely represent a majority of volunteers. However, when you are looking at these things and at getting them in here yesterday for the consultation, what fear do you think you would have if you were the VFBV at the moment? Because where is your funding coming from? It is very difficult for the VFBV at the moment with the government, who will hardly deal with them and hardly consult with them and who freeze them out. What fear have they got if they come in here and actually come out and say anything? Where does their funding go? We need the government to go on record to say that their funding is guaranteed for the future. We did. When we went to the election we said that, no matter what, we would guarantee VFBV's funding.

**Ms Neville:** And you lost.

**Mr BATTIN:** Hold on, I will just put that on record—and we lost. So I will send a message to the VFBV and say in this message, 'The minister said, "And you lost"'. I will take that as meaning their funding is gone, this government is not going to fund the VFBV going into the future. You are not going to do it.

The next recommendation:

The Government develop and publish a detailed implementation plan in parallel with any further fire services reform proposal.

'Support'—no; failed. Have not done it; have not achieved it.

A further recommendation:

CFA staff should continue to be employed directly by the CFA ...

'Support in principle'. Well, that is a, 'Yeah, maybe. We'll let them support them as long as the UFU employ the people and show that they support the people coming through'. So it is all about who is going to employ them from there. And there are many other examples to go through there.

But we do have concerns about the fire services board. When they are going to be having a selection panel and a process that comes through, our fear is how this can be expanded into the future. On fire services boards, the plan from the UFU all along is about taking over and controlling the fire services, including volunteers, including who is doing what and where. They want to have a position where every person who wants to be a firefighter has to be registered through this board in the future. That means that a UFU board in the future could potentially have a position where they expand this through regulation to actually include volunteers. The problem we have got with a lot of this legislation is a lot of it is based around 'Trust us; the regulation later'.

Now, I am going to go onto the separate part here for the firefighters presumptive rights compensation. In this term of Parliament we attempted to introduce a standalone piece of legislation. When we attempted to introduce that legislation the government denied us leave. They denied leave to introduce presumptive rights legislation when it was supposed to come through. The government is failing on what it committed to originally, which they spoke about publicly—'We'll deliver it within 18 months'. They failed on that from the original election commitment, but more importantly they failed on the 100-day commitment that the member for Monbulk made to his own volunteers in his area.

And that is why I think it is too important to have these pieces of legislation together, so I am going to move a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this bill be withdrawn and redrafted as two separate bills to:

- (1) retain the provisions providing for the presumptive rights of firefighters; and
- (2) take into account further consultation with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, volunteer firefighters and other associated organisations about the proposed amendments to the *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958* and the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*.'

And the reason that we want to separate this is because fire presumptive rights legislation is too important to play politics with. We need to make sure that presumptive rights legislation comes through immediately. People who protect us—we need to protect them. We need to make sure that this presumptive rights legislation is put through in the fastest possible manner, and we will do anything on this side of the house to support that going through. Attaching it with the FRV to pretend that it is all part of one package is disrespectful to every firefighter. To bring in presumptive rights legislation that is not equal between career and volunteer firefighters is not fair on our volunteer firefighters.

I do not care what side of the house you are on—any member of this house: if you think the presumptive rights legislation is equal between career and volunteer firefighters, you cannot read legislation. The bill blatantly has a panel where volunteer firefighters will have to go before that panel to justify that they are a firefighter. They are going to have to justify that position. Now, the government are saying, 'Trust us. We'll do some regulations about the definition of that volunteer firefighter'. This is the same government that sent a letter out saying that they wanted volunteer firefighters to have 150 turnouts before they could qualify for presumptive rights legislation. This is the government that wanted to totally discriminate and bring in the original Tasmanian model of presumptive rights legislation that, just to let you know, a Liberal government fixed, making it equal in Tasmania for all firefighters. They want to bring in the old model that says that volunteer firefighters will be treated differently.

Someone said today, 'Same fire, same smoke, same cancer—they should be treated the same'. To not treat them the same is disrespectful—to put them in a position where they have to go and justify that they are firefighter. The records should be there. The CFA has a responsibility to keep those records. The CFA has a responsibility to make sure it is all there. However, when you have not got how it is going to be defined, it is very difficult to argue anything other than to assume that this government is hiding something. They are hiding the fact of what they want to put in the background to make it difficult for our volunteer firefighters. They are hiding so that volunteer firefighters are not out there in force and saying, 'This is a disgrace, and you must treat us the same as you're treating everybody else'.

In terms of the attachment of this bill to the FRV and the timing, we have gone on and we had our debate—the procedural debate—around bringing it in, and we note today that every other bill has two weeks until it is debated. What was interesting was that they brought in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Bill 2019 earlier today, and someone on this side said—I think it might have actually been the member for Murray Plains—‘Two weeks? Oh, that’s good. That’s good to bring it in in two weeks’. And the Treasurer responded, ‘Yes, because this is an important bill’. As opposed to presumptive rights legislation? That is not important? Is fire services reform not important? Actually, even worse is the Disability (National Disability Insurance Scheme Transition) Amendment Bill 2019. They have just said that is not important because they have given us no time to consult. The Treasurer said that—the Treasurer said these bills are not important. And then they are saying that they are in a hurry to get this bill through—that they have got this to get this legislation through.

During the briefing today, when we had the discussion with the department, we spoke about the importance of this bill. And when we were talking about the timing, they actually said, ‘No, no, we’re not really in a hurry. Politically wise we’re in a hurry because we don’t want it sitting on the paper all through winter, but we’re not really in a hurry’. ‘We wanted to bring it in after the federal election’ is probably one reason—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr BATTIN:** No, they were my words there, the words ‘not really in a hurry’ because the minister has stated that ‘We’re not going to implement this until the middle of next year’. So if we went through to August and through a normal consultation process, that would still give them 12 months.

**Ms Neville:** Yes, because we have got work to do.

**Mr BATTIN:** The minister says, ‘There’s work to do’. Obviously the minister is not very good at work, because 12 months from August to August is no drama at all. You should be able to implement it—no drama. Two weeks would make no difference at all, and we wanted to make sure that we could go out and we could consult. We wanted to make sure that people had a say. All this is is the government trying to hide the things that are going to affect our volunteers in Victoria.

There is another issue that they will all bring up on the other side. Let us be honest: not one of them will miss this one, so I will get in before them. They will not bring up the fact that we were debating on Good Friday, because that is the part they want to ignore. Every single one of them will talk about pairing. I am going to put it on record—and I will proudly say it—that I have been around just a few of the CFA volunteers and I have been up through the communities and I represent an area of high fire danger, and when a fire comes through the Dandenong Ranges, which could happen in any summer season, and a family is packing their things and deciding, ‘Do I take the dog or the wedding photos?’, and they are in a hurry to get out of there, not one of them is going to go, ‘Remember that day there was a fight between politicians in the Parliament?’. But they are going to go, ‘Labor took away 1000 volunteers that should be here protecting us. They’ve reduced our services, and they’ve reduced our search capacity’.

They are now putting FRV and CFA into, they say, integrated stations. They are not integrated; they are putting two organisations within the one building. The department today could not even explain exactly how it is going to go with primary response. Who is going to do primary response? What areas are the primary response going to be in? It is all going to be with what is within the board later on and the panel later on. They can all say it, but at the end of the day the FRV legislation allows for the board to change and for boundaries to change. When the boundaries change, those boundaries can then take away—

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much audible conversation in the chamber.

**Mr BATTIN:** I will invite you one day out to an area of a CFA station, and you might understand—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gembrook! Through the Chair.

**Mr BATTIN:** So when we are out at those CFA stations where we have got integrated stations, some of them work very successfully. However, we know what the government's plan is here, and we are starting to see it come into action. Lucas fire brigade—there are no volunteers at Lucas; there are never going to be volunteers at Lucas. That was not part of the plan we had at the election. What about Armstrong Creek? How many volunteers are going to be at Armstrong Creek? Zero. The commitment was for a CFA station at Armstrong Creek. It did not say about there being no volunteers. Latrobe—they are going to have a career-only station. Morwell are voting to get out and change so that they do not have volunteers in there. Pakenham are considering what is happening with volunteer and career stations. They are in a position now where they are going to have two separate organisations and two chains of command; everything is going to be separate. You are going to need to put a piece of sticky tape down the middle of the station, a line of demarcation, to mark who can go where and when. If you think—

**A member:** A Berlin Wall.

**Mr BATTIN:** That is exactly right—a Berlin Wall through these stations. If you think that is bad, it is already happening. There are already stations—Warrnambool is an example—where volunteers are not allowed in parts of those stations, the stations of the community they built, they love and they protect, and they are now told they cannot go into certain parts of those stations. Why? If it is truly integrated, then it should be a station for all. They should be in the same truck. They should be in the same uniform. Why, in some of these areas, are they FRV and CFA? Even when we asked about uniforms today when they go across on secondment, the answer was, 'Oh, yes. CFA uniforms'. So I said, 'So every FRV person who goes across is going to have two uniforms, depending on what day their duty is. They are going to go back and forth with uniforms'. At the end of the day you are going to have people who are coming across from the FRV to effectively control, manage and do as they please within the volunteer fire services.

I want to finish off on volunteer CFA, which has been in operation since the 1940s. It is an organisation that has the ability to change. It is an organisation that has the ability and the legislation currently to modernise. It is an organisation that already has some stations that have changed and modernised—for example, Dandenong. Dandenong has CFA volunteers and career firefighters fighting fires in that area. They back each other up, and they work together. Changing that to FRV will separate them into their organisations and show total and utter disrespect to those in the CFA. On top of this, in the future, we have got no guarantees from the government. There is nothing in there to protect the rights of volunteers. The government's argument is that they have got things in this legislation to protect them. They have not got a charter for volunteers in the FRV to make sure that the FRV people protect the CFA. At the end of the day there is a little bit in this bill that does state they must show respect. But, let us be honest, this government ignored the charter that was legislated by this side of the Parliament.

At the end of the day we need to protect our volunteers. We need to support our volunteers. We need to stand up for our volunteers. But most importantly, on both sides you need to not have the politics in it and put it back to community safety. What they have done is they have gone 100 per cent away from community safety, and they are focused on paybacks to the United Firefighters Union.

**Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:52):** I rise to speak in support of the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019 again. We have heard from those champions of firefighters their obstructionist scaremongering. Really, all they had to offer was that. There was no mention of firefighter safety or increased community safety, which is what this bill is about. When I spoke on this bill in the last Parliament, I spoke in support of the legislation of course, and my intention was then and will always be to protect and empower our firefighters, be they

career or volunteer, and provide them with the support, the certainty and the recognition they so thoroughly deserve.

We are fortunate to have the best firefighters in the world. I have seen that firsthand, and I would argue that with anybody. When they are called out to protect their communities, they put their lives on the line. They answer the call, they leave their families and they go to work. They flock to emergencies in support of their communities. They do so together, like they always have done and they always will do. But they deserve to know that they have got a government that has their backs, and it would be nice to have a Parliament that has their backs.

We plan to put in place modern and supportive governance and leadership structures that reflect the changing risks and that will empower these firefighters to meet the challenges and the opportunities of the 21st century, as 21st century Victoria bears very little resemblance to 1950s Victoria, when this legislation was put in place originally for the CFA. We have got a growing population, ever-expanding suburbs, urban fringes and regional centres and a rapidly changing environment as well. That is what this legislation achieves. It provides much-needed and long overdue reforms to the state's fire services that ensure Victorians can rely on modern and effective local fire services to keep them safe wherever they live. It gives fire services the interoperability that they have needed for years. Equally as important, this bill will provide presumptive rights to cancer compensation for both career and volunteer firefighters. These presumptive rights are long overdue; we cannot wait any longer.

It would be remiss of me not to mention that this bill would already be law if it were not for the deceptive, reprehensible behaviour of those opposite, where two members of the other place misled the upper house and the Victorian people on Good Friday last year. If it were not for them, firefighters who are currently suffering from cancer, putting their families through just unimaginable trauma, would already have this. They would already be covered. We on this side recognise the invaluable work of our firefighters, which often requires them to work in very, very dangerous situations, and we will put in place the very best presumptive rights in the country.

I know that those opposite will scream that they have not had time to look at this bill and review the legislation. Well, I can assure them right now that this bill is largely identical to the previous one. In fact in good faith we have actually put the amendments that were made in the Legislative Council in the last term in this bill—the amendments that you actually came to the table with and sometimes asked for. This bill has been on the parliamentary website ever since Good Friday last year, and it is incredibly important that we get this done now. When we introduced this bill into the house last year, the government felt very, very strongly that these reforms should not be debated over a fire season. The fire season is over, and it was a long fire season. We had over 17 000 volunteers attend many fires during that fire season. But we all know that our fire season will be back before too long and these reforms will take time to embed. No-one is saying that they will not. There is lots of work to do between now and then, and that is why we must pass this legislation now to give our fire services time to transition and provide that certainty to our career and volunteer firefighters when they are on the fireground and let them get back to their jobs, serving their communities as they do year in and year out.

This bill establishes the new Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), which will cover the existing Metropolitan Fire Brigade boundaries and serve metropolitan Melbourne, outer urban areas and larger regional centres across Victoria. These will be known as Fire Rescue Victoria districts, and this structure brings Victoria into line with most other states in Australia that have reformed their fire services since 1979. It will bring the CFA's 38 integrated stations into the new FRV organisation, including the extra 450 career firefighters which the last Andrews Labor government guaranteed and delivered.

Our current fire service arrangements and boundaries were conceived in the 1950s. They have played an important role in responding to emergencies and statewide disasters in Victoria. Do not get me wrong—I am proud to have served under these boundaries. I do not want anyone to think that I was not. I respect history. I respect all those firefighters, both career and volunteer, who actually operated under these boundaries tirelessly, selflessly and with great courage. I am proud to have been part of it,

but now is the time to change those structures that have been mostly unchanged since the 1950s. They must be updated to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The population is growing in our cities and in our urban corridors. Victoria has expanded from 3.2 million in 1966 to 6.5 million people in 2018. By 2051 we will reach 10 million people in Victoria, and we need a fire service to match that. Most of those people would be expected to live in the outer suburbs of Melbourne and the regional centres, and this is played out by statistics. There was a 51.7 per cent increase in the number of fires responded to by integrated brigades over a recent 10-year period. Our fire services must reflect that change to keep our community safe. It is as simple as that.

By making this reform we are delivering on the recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, which found that the metropolitan fire district is not reflective of metropolitan Melbourne. This reform also delivers on recommendation 63 of the royal commission by establishing the independent Fire District Review Panel, which will advise on future changes based on a risk assessment of the assignment of responsibility for a given area.

We have heard from those opposite with their scaremongering, but let me guarantee you that those that sit on the fire district review panel must be qualified to do so. They cannot be serving officers, employees or representatives of the fire agencies—the legislation makes that very, very clear. There is no chance of a conflict of interest, despite what those opposite might say. Where the CFA currently determines where firefighters go through policy, this legislation enshrines that CFA volunteer brigades are consulted and supported to meet the growing demands on them in our growing suburbs. That does not actually exist at the moment.

This reform will ensure our fire services adapt in line with our state and that Victorians can rely on a fire service that is modern and responsive to local needs, regardless of their location. Under the reforms the CFA will be further protected under law as a volunteer service and our 1220 CFA brigades will continue to serve their communities day to day as they have always done as well as providing vital surge capacity during emergencies.

Just on the scaremongering around the fire registration board, those opposite are saying it does not protect volunteers. I would refer them to part 8 of the bill, which says clearly that the registration board will only be for employees of FRV. It will affect paid and career staff, not volunteers.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

**Questions without notice and ministers statements**

**JOHN SETKA**

**Mr M O'BRIEN** (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:01): My question is for the Minister for Workplace Safety. When former Labor candidate John Anderson was outed for harassing others online, the minister intervened immediately and demanded he resign from a government board. Since learning CFMMEU boss John Setka will plead guilty to charges of harassing a woman and breaching a court order, has the minister demanded that Mr Setka be removed from all government boards?

**The SPEAKER:** I again remind the house of the convention of sub judice in this place, but I ask the minister to respond to matters—

**Mr R Smith** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Warrandyte is warned.

**Ms HENNESSY** (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety) (11:01): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The short answer to his question is no, I have not. WorkSafe is an independent statutory body. In terms of any appointments that are made to independent statutory bodies I have not appointed anyone in the terms that the Leader of the Opposition has so described.

**Mr M O'BRIEN** (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:02): In a media release from the minister dated 8 March 2019 the minister said:

Sadly, it is common for family violence perpetrators to target women in the workplace, creating a health and safety risk.

Why won't the minister ensure that women are safe in their workplaces by demanding that John Setka is removed from all government boards and all government worksites?

**Ms HENNESSY** (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety) (11:02): Effectively I have nothing further to add to what I have already put forward. I would make the following point: some of the matters to which the opposition refers are still before the court, so I shall not be making any pronouncements about that.

I am very proud of our government's commitment to family violence because it is a commitment that is real in a policy sense and it is a commitment that is real in a financial sense. That is not the sort of leadership we saw by the opposition before the last election when they squibbed it on the recommendations from the royal commission.

**Mr M O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. Her own words refer to the common practice of family violence perpetrators targeting women in the workplace. She is the Minister for Workplace Safety, so I am asking her, why won't she take specific action in relation to somebody who is a known risk in relation to family violence in the workplace?

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has been relevant to the question asked. The minister has concluded her answer.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:04): I am pleased to rise to advise the house of the government's winter construction blitz, which will see further work to transform our suburban and regional rail network. This is the latest instalment of the biggest ever boost—the biggest ever program of works—in road and rail that our state has ever seen, and on some measures the biggest boost and the biggest program that the nation has ever seen.

I was very pleased this morning to be joined by the Minister for Transport Infrastructure down in North Melbourne at the site where two tunnel boring machines will be very soon launched—two TBMs, a very, very important milestone to mark. That station box, together with the broader Metro Tunnel, thousands of jobs—it is not only on budget but it is ahead of time. We are delivering on the commitments that we made.

In order to continue that infrastructure program on large and small projects there will need to be substantial disruption to the Cranbourne-Pakenham line and of course the Frankston line and the Ballarat line in coming weeks. We are trying to give Victorians as much notice as possible. There will be alternative arrangements and we apologise for the progress that we are making. We apologise for the inconvenience that will come from those works, but they are essential. We are getting on with it. We are delivering the projects that we said we would deliver. The point that needs to be made is that these projects are creating thousands of jobs. They are getting us closer to that turn-up-and-go system. The alternative of course is to not build these projects, and then instead of having some construction-related disruption today we will have nothing but disruption and congestion into the future because the system will simply not be able to cope. These will be difficult to shut but critical to delivering our record agenda.

#### CORKMAN HOTEL SITE

**Mr T SMITH** (Kew) (11:06): My question is to the Minister for Planning. Why has the minister cut a deal with the dodgy and rogue developers who unlawfully wrecked the Corkman hotel—a deal

that will enable them to develop the site and make millions in profits by breaking the law despite misleading this house that the Corkman would be rebuilt?

**Mr WYNNE** (Richmond—Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Planning) (11:06): I thank the member for Kew for his question because it does give me the opportunity to outline what in fact was the settlement that was reached in relation to the Corkman hotel development.

On 28 May VCAT issued an enforcement order agreed to by all parties—me, the City of Melbourne, the students of the university and the developers. The agreed enforcement requires the developers to, no later than 30 November of this year, clear the site of all demolition material and provide evidence to the council that the site is suitable for environmental conditions for short-term informal parkland until future redevelopment occurs.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for South-West Coast—

**Mr T Smith** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** and the member for Kew are warned.

**Mr WYNNE:** I will have a bit more to say about that in a moment for you.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair!

**Mr WYNNE:** So that is the initial proposition, but it is important that I actually read in parts of the enforcement notice:

Unless on or before 30 June 2022 ... a planning permit has been obtained for the redevelopment of the site ... there has been substantial commencement of the development ... the Respondent must—

tune in here, get this—

by 30 June 2023 rebuild—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Kew is warned.

**Mr WYNNE:** Sorry, what was that again?

... rebuild (using new materials) the external parts of the hotel located within—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister will resume his seat. The member for Kew has been warned. I understand he may have a supplementary question and may wish to remain in the chamber.

**Mr WYNNE:** It says rebuild within the heritage overlay the:

... external parts of the hotel located within the heritage overlay (being the roofs, chimneys and external facades of the building) as nearly as practicable to the condition they were immediately before their unlawful demolition.

We have not seen that reported. Can I say also I noticed a very interesting opinion piece by the shadow Minister for Planning. God forbid that you would ever become the Minister for Planning, my goodness, because your proposition that the site can be compulsorily acquired actually is completely wrong. It has to be acquired at its highest and best use—

**Mr T Smith** interjected.

**Mr WYNNE:** Not true? Well, he is a QC. Here he is; here is the QC here. You have got the best advice in town. Well, you are wrong.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister's time has concluded.

**Mr WYNNE:** You are wrong. Highest and best value. That is the law.

**Mr Walsh:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Minister for Planning has been very unparliamentary in his language and has shown disrespect to you as the Chair in how he has talked directly to the member for Kew across the table. I ask you to enforce the rules on the Minister for Planning that you expect others to uphold in this house as well please.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I uphold the point of order and I do remind members to address their remarks through the Chair. At the same time I remind members to cease shouting interjections across the chamber so that it does not draw direct comment from people, particularly ministers answering questions. I have warned members already that they will be removed from the house without warning if they continue to shout across the chamber.

**Mr T SMITH (Kew) (11:10):** In 2016 lobbyist turned member for Burwood said about his clients, the Corkman cowboys:

... they made a mistake, they are sorry, and they are going to make it right.

Heritage consultants will be engaged in the next few weeks to commence the process of rebuilding.

Why have these developers received a sweetheart deal from this minister—developers who are represented by the now member for Burwood, who is a close personal friend, factional ally and fundraising chair to the Minister for Planning?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Warrandyte and the member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour. I have warned members to cease shouting across the chamber.

**Members for Warrandyte and Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.**

**Mr WYNNE (Richmond—Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Planning) (11:12):** So the member for Kew, in his op-ed piece that was submitted to the *Age* yesterday, actually made these allegations, which of course were not published by the *Age* for all the appropriate reasons—because frankly they are defamatory. They are clearly defamatory. And for the record, my good friend the member for Burwood was not, in any way, my campaign chairperson at all, or my fundraising chairperson at all.

**Mr Andrews:** He was running his own campaign.

**Mr WYNNE:** He was running his own campaign, exactly right. So can I just say that in relation to the valuation of this land we are bound by the valuation legislation which requires that the land, if it is going to be compulsorily acquired, is at highest and best use. That is simply what the law says. So this nonsense that the member for Kew is peddling around is simply that, and I completely reject it.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

**Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure) (11:13):** Yesterday morning, I was very pleased to meet Bella, the first tunnel boring machine (TBM) that will start digging out the West Gate Tunnel. This morning the Premier and I were very pleased to meet Joan, the first tunnel boring machine that is going to start digging the Metro Tunnel. Now, Joan is coloured red and of course named after our wonderful Joan Kirner, and she is the first of four massive tunnel boring machines that are going to dig out the twin 9 kilometre tunnels that will create the five underground stations to unlock the city loop bottleneck and allow more trains to run more often across Melbourne.

And indeed right now across Melbourne, indeed particularly at the North Melbourne worksite, crews are working around the clock to prepare the remaining TBMs—they are in 16 different pieces—for lifting and lowering. In the past week three pieces have already been lowered into the station box, and once they are put together and launched this mega machine will excavate around 100 000 cubic metres of rock and soil.

Why are we doing this? Joan's work will mean that we are creating room for an additional grand-final-day-packed MCG crowd on our train network every single day during the peak hour. Each day these 100 000 people will get where they need to go quicker as well, because of course the Metro Tunnel is not just about more trains more often, it is getting people there more quickly as well.

As I said, there is a monstrous amount of work going on at sites right across the city. The Premier has spoken of some of the disruption to our normal train network that is needed to facilitate this massive construction effort as we create more space on our network, so we can buy the new trains to run on the network, so we can overhaul the Sunbury line to run more trains on the Sunbury line and get on and deliver the Metro Tunnel project.

### CORKMAN HOTEL SITE

**Mr T SMITH** (Kew) (11:15): My question is to the Minister for Planning. Why won't the Minister for Planning use section 172 of the Planning and Environment Act, as suggested by Dr Kate Shaw of the University of Melbourne, to compulsorily acquire the site at 156–160 Leicester Street, Carlton, at its present undeveloped value and develop the site into public housing, ensuring the developers who broke the law do not profit from their unlawful activity?

**Mr WYNNE** (Richmond—Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Planning) (11:15): Dr Shaw is a very fine academic, and I know her very well, but in this circumstance the proposal that she has suggested, that this site be compulsorily acquired by the government, would ensure that there would be a windfall gain to the developers. That is not in—

**Mr Walsh:** They have already got it.

**Mr WYNNE:** Well, they have just—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Without the assistance of the Leader of The Nationals. Through the Chair.

**Mr WYNNE:** The Leader of The Nationals, can I just remind him that the developers have copped more than \$2 million in fines so far—more than \$2 million in fines. So the simple reality is—and I respect Dr Shaw absolutely, she is a very fine academic—that we act on the advice of the most eminent QCs, the most eminent planning QCs, me and the City of Melbourne. And I remind the member for Kew that this enforcement order was signed off by me, by the City of Melbourne and indeed the University of Melbourne students as well, who were also a party to this matter.

Can I say in relation to the valuations, the process is very clear. The legislation is very clear. If there is any attempt by the state to compulsorily acquire a property, it has to be acquired at highest and best use, which would of course ensure, given the zoning, that it would be a very significant windfall to the developers of that site.

**Mr T SMITH** (Kew) (11:17): The Minister for Planning has wideranging powers to ensure these dodgy developers cannot profit from their outrageous behaviour. At the very least, why didn't the minister place mandatory controls over the site to ensure the developers cannot build more than one storey?

**Mr WYNNE** (Richmond—Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Planning) (11:18): Can I thank the member for Kew for his supplementary question. The reality of this is that there are planning controls over the site now. These were incorporated into the South Carlton

planning controls for the area. In effect what the member for Kew is seeking to do is basically back-zone—to back-zone this land. And that would—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr WYNNE:** Yes, that's right. To basically—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Without the interjections.

**Mr WYNNE:** To back-zone the land, which would in effect ensure that the state was open to a massive compensation claim by the owners of the site.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr WYNNE:** Well, that is—

**The SPEAKER:** Through the Chair!

**Mr WYNNE:** Well, I will take the advice of the most eminent planning QCs in the state and not the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Kew.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SALE OF LAND ACT

**Ms KAIROUZ** (Kororoit—Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Suburban Development) (11:19): I am thrilled to rise today to update the house that the days of disgraceful and dodgy developers are over, thanks to the Andrews Labor government's commitment to make things fairer when it comes to buying a home. Last week laws were passed—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister can resume her seat. When the house is in order.

**Ms KAIROUZ:** I am really glad to finally see some passion coming from the other side.

Last week laws were passed that will change the rules when it comes to buying off the plan. These new laws will give Victorians stronger protection and crack down on dodgy developers and dishonest parts of the financial sector, whose modus operandi is to simply make a quick buck and leave.

Many members here, and especially those who represent the outer western, northern and south-eastern suburbs, will be aware of sunset clause exploitation by deceitful developers, and I thank the many members who have made some very strong representations to me on behalf of their constituents. Time and time again we have seen certain sections of the property sector deliberately delay the completion of developments in order to exploit a clause allowing them to terminate a contract and resell a property at a higher price. Too many Victorians have fallen victim to these dodgy operators, investing honestly with the expectation that their homes will be delivered on time for the price they agreed to pay.

We have also heard the shameful practice of developers threatening to use a sunset clause termination unless the buyer pays an additional amount, but not anymore. The Andrews Labor government has ensured that an off-the-plan contract cannot be terminated without the agreement of the buyer or the express permission of the Supreme Court of Victoria. These new laws will also crack down on the unethical and dodgy practice of rent-to-buy schemes. Vulnerable low-income Victorians who are unable to access mainstream finance have been exploited by these unscrupulous developers and property spruikers, leaving them without any legal rights.

We have made renting fairer, we have cut stamp duty for first home buyers and we have increased public housing, but there is more to do. These important reforms will give hardworking Victorians greater confidence and security when entering the property market.

**SHEPPARTON EDUCATION PLAN**

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (11:21): My question is for the Premier. The Shepparton education plan is underway and was allocated funding of \$20.5 million in last year's budget. A further \$100 million will be required to build a regional college, merging four secondary schools into one campus comprising nine schools of 300 students each. It is a transformational plan, and it will see all young people in the state education system leave school with a pathway and a vision for the future. But some constituents in my region are concerned that there was no further funding in this year's budget and they are anxious to know that the progress of the plan will continue. So, Premier, will you commit to funding the Shepparton education plan, and when can my constituents expect to see this commitment fulfilled?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:22): I thank the member for Shepparton for her question and for her advocacy, and indeed for the work that she has done in the coordination of this, from concept to the initial investment of, I think around \$21.5 million—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr ANDREWS**: I will not respond to interjections; that would be disorderly. But I will simply say again for the benefit of the member for Hastings that the member for Shepparton should be very proud of her advocacy, which she has been doing for quite some time with me directly—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: The member for Hastings will cease interjecting across the chamber. The Premier, to continue.

**Mr ANDREWS**: I do not know that the member for Hastings has ever raised any matters in relation to schools with me; I am not sure. Maybe he has; I am not sure. But I can say to the member for Hastings, to every member of this house and indeed to every member of the Shepparton community and the Goulburn Valley more broadly that the member for Shepparton has raised these matters with me consistently. The Deputy Premier is well aware of these matters as well. There has been an investment of some \$21.5 million. Whilst we did not necessarily make a specific election commitment to provide further funding, I would cite, I suppose, the works at the Goulburn Valley hospital, the Shepparton hospital, as a clear example that once we start a project we get on and we finish the work that we have started. I look forward to making future announcements in relation to delivering that education plan.

It is fair to say that not only has the member for Shepparton been a champion for better education through better facilities, and that critical mass that comes from merging those schools together, but indeed also educators in the Shepparton community, the parent community. It is a pretty bold plan, and it has not been universally supported all the way along, so to take that vision to the community is very, very important, and the community support for the project has been no small thing.

So whilst there is not further funding allocated in this year's budget, I do look forward to being able to make further announcements in future budgets. Every budget that we have delivered so far and every budget that we do have the privilege to deliver will always be a good budget for public education in every corner of our state. The member would understand, as I am sure her community would understand, that the first and foremost priority for the government in its first budget after the election was to make a start and deliver on all of our election commitments. Just like last term, we will go beyond those election commitments, and that will include standing with students and families and the broader community of the Shepparton electorate. I again take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge the member for Shepparton for her passionate and effective advocacy on behalf of her community.

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (11:25): Thank you, Premier. As you know, the Shepparton district has received substantial investment over the last four budgets and many of the major projects are now

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underway. I ask: will you come to Shepparton to see for yourself the transformation that is taking place, but also to meet with students, teachers and other constituents in my electorate who really want to see the Shepparton education plan reach its fruition by the due date of 2021?

**Mr ANDREWS** (Mulgrave—Premier) (11:26): I thank the member for Shepparton for her supplementary question. I think I will be in Shepparton quite soon in relation to—

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr ANDREWS:** I am looking forward to it. None of you will be there, so it should be fantastic. It should be absolutely fantastic. I would not be groaning if I were you. You might not like visiting Shepparton. I love visiting Shepparton—the mighty Goulburn Valley. It will be great to be there, and do you know what I will be doing? I will be there, I think, for the topping out of the hospital—\$169 million invested by Labor in that hospital. I will be delighted, if time permits, to meet with the member for Shepparton, to meet with students and anyone else in the community who is interested in these education matters, as she has asked. That would be a useful thing for us to do. It will be a great day, that day, not just for those who are in Shepparton, but clearly those who are not.

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: RENEWABLE ENERGY

**Ms D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (11:27): On World Environment Day I am absolutely pleased to update the house on our government's record investment in growing new, clean energy going into our environment and our record funding and planning around improving our biodiversity. Taking action on climate change is good for our environment, it is good for our investment and it is good for jobs, and let nobody say otherwise—absolutely.

Victorians are looking to our government to show leadership—to actually take the actions necessary for us to take full advantage of the opportunities that are with us when it comes to looking after our environment. Our Victorian renewable energy target by 2025, our 40 per cent renewable energy target will create 11 000 jobs in Victoria, most of which will be across regional Victoria. Lifting that target, based on our election commitment, to 50 per cent by 2030 will create even more jobs, more clean energy and drive great investment right across our state.

Since 2014, since we were elected, we have seen 17 new renewable energy projects built in our state because of our policies, and a further 15 new renewable energy projects are now under construction—hundreds of jobs, thousands of jobs, right across Victoria. And let us not forget our Solar Homes program, which will create 5500 jobs, putting clean energy into our system and of course cheaper power prices for Victorians. Reducing our carbon emissions by millions of tonnes is good for our jobs, our environment and investment opportunities for our state. Our biodiversity strategy—record investment of \$86 million over four years, with an ongoing \$20 million each and every year to make sure that we can do more to improve our biodiversity. While others speak, we act and make sure that we actually deliver on all of our commitments— (*Time expired*)

### MINISTERIAL VEHICLES

**Mr M O'BRIEN** (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:29): My question is to the Treasurer. Why did the Treasurer receive an exemption from normal government purchasing policy in order to furnish himself with a new Lexus IS350 as his chauffeur-driven ministerial vehicle?

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (11:30): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I suppose the obvious point is the review of appropriate vehicles is currently occurring largely because we have had to take some vehicles off the list because they are no longer Australian-made vehicles necessarily. I wonder why that is. Well, because those opposite did nothing to save our domestic manufacturing industry, nor did

their friends in Canberra. So the fact that we are in the process of looking at what vehicles appropriately fit the safety and the efficiency guidelines that we set as a government is really a demonstration of their failure to do their job in government.

**Mr M O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer is now debating the question. The question was: why did he receive an exemption from the normal government purchasing policy so he could get himself a nice little luxury Lexus to tool around in?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer had been relevant to the question and had started to stray. The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

**Mr M O'Brien** (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (11:31): Why did the Treasurer tell Victorians worried about his new taxes on a Toyota LandCruiser to 'get a life' when he is living the high life in a taxpayer-funded new Lexus limo?

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (11:32): Well, I suppose the only value in the question that has come from the Leader of the Opposition is really for me to restate the fact that we have to review the appropriate purchasing guidelines largely because there are no domestically manufactured vehicles in this state. This government has therefore demonstrated that we will continue to review and to improve the list so that Victorians get value for money in the vehicles that not only this government drives but also are available to the community at large.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat. The member for South-West Coast will leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour. I need to be able to hear ministers, in this case the Treasurer, answer questions. The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

**Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.**

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: REGIONAL PAYROLL TAX

**Mr PALLAS** (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (11:33): I rise to update the house about the great news of the Andrews Labor government continuing to cut regional payroll tax and to provide work opportunities for regional Victorians. Last Monday's budget delivered yet another cut to our regional payroll tax. This rate will be reduced by 50 per cent to a record low of around about 1.2 per cent, the lowest in Australia. This is the fourth budget cut in a row that delivers payroll tax relief for Victorian businesses. Regional businesses in Geelong will save a projected \$30.5 million in 2019–20 because of this reduction in payroll tax.

Let us not forget that the Leader of the Opposition described these reductions in payroll tax as 'tiny snips'. Tell that to the businesses in the Ballarat region who will save \$20.4 million. Tell that to the Latrobe-Gippsland businesses that will save \$27.8 million. The member for Ripon has called these tax changes 'too little, too late'. Well, we have delivered over \$1 billion in cuts to business taxes since the Andrews government was elected. That is more than four times the level of cuts to business that those opposite delivered in their time in office. There is this longstanding fallacy that the opposition are in some way the friends of business. They certainly did not demonstrate it through the way that they governed.

Make no mistake: this government has delivered for our regions, and you can see the results. The latest unemployment rate in regional Victoria is 4.2 per cent, the lowest unemployment rate since records were kept and the lowest unemployment rate for regional areas in the nation. Now, a tax cut is no doubt a foreign concept to those opposite. When they think of a cut they think of school funding cuts and hospital funding cuts— *(Time expired)*

**Ms Ryan:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have a number of questions on notice which are overdue—questions 467, 468, 469 and 470—coincidentally all of which relate to the Shepparton super-

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school and which have not been responded to by the Minister for Education, and nor has question 503, which was an adjournment matter about Euroa Secondary College and the situation they face with buses. I would be grateful if you could ask the minister to respond, given they are now overdue.

**The SPEAKER:** I thank the member for raising that. We will follow that matter through.

### Constituency questions

#### EUROA ELECTORATE

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (11:36): (728) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development in the other place. How can community groups such as the Goorambat action group obtain funding to upgrade projects like their toilet facilities now that the government has axed the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund? More than 60 000 people visited Goorambat last year as they looked at the north-east silo art trail, but the community does not have any public toilets. The Goorambat hall is an old mechanics institute hall on Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) land. The community would like to upgrade the hall toilets to include disability access and to make them accessible from the outside. Because the hall is on DELWP land, council is reluctant to fund the project. It was for this reason that The Nationals established the Putting Locals First funding stream under the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund. Now that Labor has abolished the Regional Growth Fund and is sacking regional development staff, I fear communities like Goorambat will struggle to find the funding they need.

#### WENDOUREE ELECTORATE

**Ms ADDISON** (Wendouree) (11:37): (729) My question is for the Minister for Education about funding for Mount Rowan Secondary College in my electorate of Wendouree. Over the last four years the Andrews Labor government has already invested \$12 million in Mount Rowan Secondary College redeveloping the school. Minister, how will the additional \$3.5 million investment for Mount Rowan Secondary College announced in last week's state budget further benefit the students, teachers and broader school community? As a former teacher myself, I know that you have a very strong commitment to teaching and learning as well as student outcomes at Mount Rowan Secondary College. On behalf of my community I thank you for your ongoing support.

#### RIPON ELECTORATE

**Ms STALEY** (Ripon) (11:37): (730) My question is to the Attorney-General. I have a number of constituents who have come to see me about outstanding death certificates. The question I ask her is: could she please investigate why people are having to wait over five weeks to get a death certificate issued and receive repeated answers from the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages that the certificate is in the mail? As people would be aware, there are a number of legal processes that are reliant upon a death certificate being issued, not the least of which is probate but also things like finalising electricity accounts and others. I now have up to half a dozen constituents who are having trouble through their funeral directors getting these death certificates, and I ask for some action, please.

#### CARRUM ELECTORATE

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (11:38): (731) My question is for the Minister for Education. This week I attended Skye Primary School's full school assembly to let students and staff know the great news. With \$7.8 million allocated in this year's state budget, Skye Primary School will be getting a brand-new indoor gym with a competition-grade basketball and netball court as well as a major refurbishment of their learning and administration areas. You should have heard the cheers; they nearly lifted the roof off. Needless to say, the school community is absolutely thrilled with the announcement. Minister, now that the funding is locked in, the school community at Skye Primary School would like to know: what are the next steps in delivering this massive upgrade at this wonderful local school?

**FERNTREE GULLY ELECTORATE**

**Mr WAKELING** (Ferntree Gully) (11:39): (732) My constituency question is to the Minister for Housing. A constituent, Mr Willchams, has requested urgent assistance in seeking compensation for damage to his property in Ferntree Gully, which I am advised he had sublet to Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) via community housing. When Mr Willchams purchased his property in 2015 it was in good condition. After purchasing the property he sublet it to DHHS and noted soon after that the condition of the property had declined rapidly. He raised his concerns about the condition of the property with DHHS on several occasions, and he was assured that the property would be returned in good and reasonable condition. Mr Willchams's lease with DHHS expired on 31 October 2018. He gave four months notice advising that he would not be renewing the lease as he was still concerned about the condition of the property. I am advised that Mr Willchams has raised concerns with the department and I have raised these concerns with minister as well, so my question for the minister is: when will the minister provide a response to Mr Willchams about his request for compensation?

**ST ALBANS ELECTORATE**

**Ms SULEYMAN** (St Albans) (11:40): (733) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads. Can the minister provide information on funding opportunities for safety measures along Ballarat Road in Sunshine, in particular at the intersections of Perth Avenue, Adelaide Street, Chatsworth Avenue and Reid Street. I have received many letters and met with many locals, who have expressed their concerns about this ongoing issue. There is no pedestrian access or traffic signalling at these particular intersections on Ballarat Road for locals to cross safely. This part of Ballarat Road is very busy, with a local school, a shopping precinct on Perth Avenue, the Federation retirement village and a mosque. In recent weeks we have unfortunately seen a fatality at this location. Safety upgrades and the installation of traffic signalling is long overdue and needs to be implemented. So therefore I ask the minister to look at the opportunities of funding safety measures along Ballarat Road in Sunshine.

**MORWELL ELECTORATE**

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (11:41): (734) My question is directed to the Minister for Regional Development in the other place. Minister, what is the latest information regarding the government's stance on the future of Hazelwood Pondage in my electorate? Hazelwood Pondage has been closed to the general public for months, and many members of my local community are in the gallery today to plead with the state government to do all it can to have this iconic and much-loved asset reopened. This morning with the help and assistance of so many people from different local groups and organisations I was able to lodge a petition in Parliament that contained 3228 signatures and which calls for government assistance in reopening Hazelwood Pondage. Nearly 5000 people have signed online and hard-copy petitions, yet the government remains silent whilst the pondage slowly dies. All parts of our community are being negatively impacted by this closure, including yacht club members, Sailability participants, onsite residents, campers and tourists, local businesses, CFA brigades, scouts and guides, local residents and recreational water enthusiasts. Minister, our community has only one request for you and that is: save Hazelwood Pondage.

**BAYSWATER ELECTORATE**

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (11:42): (735) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I rise to ask the minister: what benefit does the North East Link bring to the Bayswater electorate and the eastern suburbs more broadly? It is the missing link that we know Victoria has needed for decades. The ring-road ending at the Greensborough Highway just does not cut it anymore—it never has. We have needed this link for as long as there has been a *Melway*. On day one after the election last November I was very happy to see the tender for Victoria's biggest roads project go out to market. When we said we would get on with it, we really meant it, and of course the surplus budget just handed down saw the North East Link fully funded: \$15.8 billion. I would be very

interested to know detail as to the kinds of benefits this project will bring not only once completed but also during its construction. There will no doubt be many thousands of good construction jobs created thanks to this project, and I would like to know just how many will be created as a result. I thank the minister for her commitment to getting the big projects underway to ensure that Victoria is kept moving, and I would like to thank her for her consideration of my question.

#### EVELYN ELECTORATE

**Ms VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (11:43): (736) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, the Coldstream CFA Fire Brigade, which has been fighting fires and keeping our community safe since 1898, is in urgent need of a new fire station to protect the growing community in Coldstream, Yering and surrounds. For years now the brigade has been told by CFA management that a new station will be built on Crown land on Killara Road which has been specifically set aside for the station, but several fire seasons have come and gone. The government has failed the volunteer firefighters of Coldstream who put their lives on the line for fire and road trauma and has failed the community that directly benefits from being protected by these dedicated volunteers. In a budget that cuts \$40 million from the CFA's capital budget it appear there is not one cent for this new station to be built. This is just another example of how this government puts volunteer firefighters last. The Coldstream community and volunteer firefighters deserve an answer from the minister.

#### NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE

**Mr MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (11:44): (737) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health and concerns the parenting centre in the City of Casey. Minister, what is the latest information you can provide on the proposed parenting centre in Casey? I have been contacted by constituents who are excited by the prospect of having a local service dedicated to supporting new parents, but are curious as to what services it will provide and when and where it will be constructed. The City of Casey is the fastest growing municipality in Victoria. A parenting centre in Casey is a welcome prospect, with a great number of local residents being new mothers and fathers. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with the Narre Warren South community.

**Mr Fregon:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Ripon asked a constituency question which seemed to be asking the minister to investigate something. Maybe that would be better suited to the adjournment. Could you please review it.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence):** I did also hear the member ask that the minister please investigate. I will ask the Speaker to review that question by the member for Ripon and provide a ruling.

#### Bills

### FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2019

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Mr EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (11:46): We will continue on our myth-busting journey. I want to put on record that CFA volunteers will continue to have the right and the responsibility to fundraise. This legislation protects that right, even if they are in a Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) district. I have recently met with many volunteers and career firefighters who wanted to discuss these reforms, and the message is very, very clear from them: 'We know these reforms are coming, we want to work with you and we want you to get on with the job so we can get on with our job'. Or, as Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria board appointee Michael Tudball, AFSM, stated: 'Move on; let's get behind this'. I might say that is the message the Victorian community sent us when they voted us back in so comprehensively last year.

Now, my views on presumptive rights are well known to this Parliament, and I know many of my colleagues will speak on these issues. But what I would say is those opposite were dragged kicking and screaming to support our firefighters on this, and I can quote the former coalition Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who stated:

We are not convinced that there is a direct link between cancer and the firefighters.

Shame! Well, we are convinced, and it is time to act, and maybe those opposite should take the opportunity to actually vote for the first time for presumptive rights legislation.

I want to conclude by summing up the intention of this bill. We are wholeheartedly as a government committed to ensuring our fire services remain the best in the world and are committed to giving our firefighters the tools, the certainty and the structure that will empower them to do their jobs. There were nine reviews of the fire services in less than 10 years. There was a royal commission into Black Saturday, and we debated these reforms last year. We have been out consulting with all the stakeholders, and the message we have got from those stakeholders is across the board that Victoria's fire services must be modernised. We went to the 2018 election promising the Victorian people to reintroduce these reforms, and that is what we are doing—we are fulfilling that promise.

We can never repay the debt that we owe our firefighters for the sacrifices they have made in protecting our communities, but we can recognise that their service is important and crucial by doing anything in our power to look after them. I know this has been a difficult process for volunteers and staff firefighters. They are sick of the uncertainty. I strongly commend this bill to the house.

**Mr WALSH** (Murray Plains) (11:48): In starting out can I remind the member for Frankston that the only party that has actually voted against presumptive rights legislation in the 59th Parliament is the Labor Party. It is the Labor Party. The member for Gembrook actually introduced a private members bill in this house when we came back after the election. If you were as good as your word, you would have actually crossed the floor—

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence)**: I remind the Leader of The Nationals to speak through the Chair.

**Mr WALSH**: Thank you, Acting Speaker. If the member for Frankston was as good as his word, he would have actually crossed the floor and voted with the member for Gembrook. If he was serious about presumptive rights legislation for firefighters in Victoria, and particularly for volunteers in Victoria, and making sure it was equal for volunteers and for firefighters, he would have actually crossed the floor and voted with the member for Gembrook. He is obviously not very, very serious about these particular issues.

It is important to look at the history as to why we are here debating this legislation at the moment, and it goes back to the 2014 election. It actually goes back to when Peter Marshall and the United Firefighters Union were out there doorknocking. They allegedly doorknocked 47 000 homes and claim to have had 700 volunteers actually out there helping man pre-polls, helping man polling booths and making sure that those UFU members that were manning those pre-polls and manning those polling booths were abusive and intimidatory towards people going in to vote if they wanted to take a card that was not a Labor Party card. That is what we are here now for. We are here now for the Premier's payback to Peter Marshall and the UFU. That is what this is all about with the CFA bill. It is about payback for what Peter Marshall and the UFU did manning booths, manning pre-poll, doorknocking, making phone calls, bullying and intimidating people during the 2014 election. It is all about payback; that is all it is about.

What I want to start off with is the volunteer charter, a very, very important document that was actually signed by then Premier Ted Baillieu, then minister Peter Ryan, the president of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) and the chair of the Country Fire Authority. It is an important document in

which government, in agreement with volunteers and the CFA, set out the rights of volunteers in this particular state. It talks about ensuring that:

... the State of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with Volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect Volunteers ...

That is a core part of this charter, which is a government document. There has not been consultation with volunteers about the legislation we are debating today. This legislation was only introduced yesterday, so how can there have been consultation with volunteers around this legislation?

It also goes on to talk about the principles that will be in this charter and that will be discussed with volunteers. It asks: is it fair? This legislation is not fair for volunteers because it actually tears apart the CFA and does not show them just respect, and it does not necessarily treat them equally when it comes to presumptive rights. Is it just? The same argument again that I have just put forward. Is it reasonable? No, it is not reasonable with what has been put forward. Does it discriminate against volunteers? Yes, it does. If you look at the clauses in this bill it does discriminate against volunteers compared to what they have now. Is the outcome practicable and sustainable? No, it is not.

We are going to have this whole confusion about integrated stations, about the rights of volunteers at integrated stations. I am sure that volunteers are going to be bullied out of those integrated stations. You only have to go to Mildura and see what has happened where there is a paid station and there are lines on the concrete where the volunteers can walk and where the volunteers cannot walk, where there is a door for the volunteers to go in and a door for the paid firefighters to go in. That is the sort of thing that can be expected in the future. You only have to look at the Bendigo station during the 2009 fires. The Rochester fire brigade was in Bendigo. They wanted to use the conveniences at the fire station when they had their break, and they were told, 'You're not allowed to use the paid firefighters' conveniences. You have to go out the back to the old toilets. You can't use the toilets that the paid firefighters use'.

So is the outcome practicable? Is it sustainable? No, it is not. Is it in the best interest of the safety of the Victorian community? No, it is not. The charter is there to talk about the best interest of the Victorian community. Having the surge capacity that comes out of those suburban brigades is absolutely critical in a major fire campaign. I do not believe what is being proposed is in the best interests of the safety of the Victorian community. So on all those measures this legislation fails the volunteer charter. The charter says it needs to:

Recognise, value, respect and promote CFA Volunteers, their families and employers for their contributions to the well-being and safety of the people of Victoria ...

This legislation does not show that respect to the volunteers, to their families or to their employers for what they give up to fight fires.

Ensure that CFA legislation appropriately recognises the needs and interests of Volunteers in the delivery of services and protects Volunteers who provide their services in good faith and their dependants from financial losses and other liabilities ...

Again, this legislation that is before the house does not meet that term that is in the charter of volunteers.

Consult with the elected representatives of Volunteers on all matters which may impact upon Volunteers including proposed legislation and the adequacy of resources to enable Volunteers in CFA to deliver the agreed services.

This legislation fails that test as well. There was not the consultation with the VFBV. There most definitely has not been consultation with the volunteers, because we only saw this yesterday. There has been no opportunity for consultation with the volunteers, so it fails on that particular measure.

Finally, the commitment:

The parties commit themselves to use and apply the Charter in the spirit of mutual respect and goodwill and to work together in that spirit to resolve any disputes which may arise between CFA, the State of Victoria and the Volunteers by reference to the key principles set down in this Volunteer Charter.

The last four years I think have absolutely demonstrated that the government has no goodwill towards that particular clause in the charter. I go right back to where I started, the 2014 election, and the issues that arose with the enterprise bargaining agreement and what came out of the EBA where the UFU effectively took over the rights to veto management decisions by the management of the CFA. The fact is that Lucinda Nolan, Peter Rau and Joe Buffone—the long list—all got bullied out of the CFA. The board got sacked. The then minister, the Deputy Premier, went out and absolutely trashed Joe Buffone's reputation on the nightly news. I just think the way that a senior elected official of a government of Victoria could be so disparaging, so nasty and so destructive of that man's reputation on the nightly news is an absolute disgrace and shows that the Deputy Premier is not fit to be a senior leader in this state.

I think the whole litany of history associated with this particular legislation is wrong. I support the member for Gembrook's reasoned amendment. We do want to see presumptive rights for firefighters. We do want to see presumptive rights that treat paid firefighters and volunteers equally. The fact is that there are clauses in the bill that are going to be done by regulation post this legislation passing that will actually set out the conditions as to how volunteers will be able to access presumptive rights. I do not trust the government to get it right. The volunteers that I have talked to do not trust the government to get it right. They believe they will be disadvantaged when it comes to this particular legislation and when it comes to presumptive rights.

The last thing, which I want to finish off on, is Good Friday and the issues about Good Friday, and no doubt we will hear a lot about this. On Good Friday the Echuca fire brigade always do the fundraising for the Royal Children's Hospital. They have their fire trucks out. They have all their volunteers out in their uniforms fundraising. I actually went down to the station that day after the legislation was defeated in this place, and they were absolutely over the moon that we actually stood up for them—stood up for them when it really counted—and actually had that legislation defeated. The other side can go on and on again about pairs and all the stuff they want to go on about, but all the volunteers that I speak to say, 'Well done. You actually stood up for us, and you stood up for us on something that is so important to us. You stood up for us about something that is so important to the community and the safety of our community'. All those volunteers that were having their sausage sizzle after they had been out raising money for the Royal Children's Hospital were elated about what had happened in the upper house, and I make no apology for what we did. We stuck up for the volunteers and we stuck up for our community, and if I had the opportunity I would do it again.

**Ms SETTLE** (Buninyong) (11:58): I rise to speak in favour of the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. As a representative of a large rural seat, with over 17 CFA brigades in my electorate, this is a bill that is very important to me. I have spent a large part of my life living in regional Victoria, and I understand the absolutely vital service that the CFA provide. My father has served the CFA for over 40 years, and I myself am a member of the Ballarat city brigade.

My first memories of the CFA came as a teenager living in Castlemaine, when large fires swept through Barkers Creek in the late 1970s. I have a strong memory of making sandwiches with my mother and taking them to the staging area in town for the firefighters. That memory symbolises for me the absolute bond between community and the CFA brigades. That bond remains today, and I see it when all of the Ballarat brigades come out together to raise funds for the Royal Children's Hospital. This bill restores the CFA to its roots as a community-based, locally responsive organisation made up of dedicated firefighters, and it ensures that these volunteer firefighters are supported to do their job, with clear organisational objectives and paid support staff.

But some things have changed since the 1970s. Those sleepy country towns of my childhood are now burgeoning cities. As I mentioned, my dad has been a CFA firefighter for over 40 years. Many of those years—

**Ms Britnell** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Spence):** Order! Member for South-West Coast! Cease interjecting across the chamber.

**Ms SETTLE:** As I mentioned, my dad has been a CFA firefighter for over 40 years. Many of those years were spent defending our farm and our neighbours' farms as part of the Langi Logan brigade, but in recent years he has been a volunteer at the Anglesea brigade. I visit my parents every year during the summer season, and I watch as Anglesea changes from the sleepy town of my youth to a large population of holiday-makers. Watching my dad stay vigilant by the pager, I am minded that we need to update our boundaries, and this reform will do that. We are already addressing the issue in Anglesea, with a new station at Armstrong. The establishment of a new Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) fire district will replace the metropolitan fire district and redraw the boundaries of the district to include growth areas in Melbourne as well as major regional centres.

On Friday I went to a fundraiser for those that were affected by the Bunkers Hill fire. The Bunkers Hill fire devastated an area outside Ballarat near Haddon on 29 March. As a farmer, for me that is just weeks away from what should have been the autumn break. We can see the effects of climate change regionally. Our climate is changing rapidly. Nine of the 10 warmest years on record have occurred since 2005, and 2018 was Victoria's third warmest on record, with rainfall about 25 per cent below average—the lowest since 2006. Heatwaves are lengthening fire seasons, and bushfires will likely increase in frequency and intensity and affect more densely populated areas. Our firefighters currently operate under systems and structures that have not changed since the 1950s, and it is clear that these services need to be modernised. Most importantly, this bill legislates presumptive rights. We need systems that honour the hard work and commitment of our firefighters, acknowledging the significant risk and dangers they face daily. The bill delivers to our career and volunteer firefighters a presumptive right to compensation for cancer claims arising from their service.

My dad attended the Hazelwood fires for five days. He describes the incredibly difficult conditions under which they worked. The walls were literally on fire. They had to be tested for carbon monoxide, and many of the brigade had to be sent home with breathing issues. The report on the inquiry into the Hazelwood mine fire made recommendations on improving health and safety management for firefighters and other emergency services. This bill means that extraordinary events like the Hazelwood mine fire will be considered when it comes to compensation. We ask so much of our firefighters, and we owe them at the very least this presumptive rights legislation.

Like all of us, my dad is getting older, and we need to keep building our volunteer ranks. In Ballarat the local Ballarat fire brigade has a junior brigade, and I applaud that brigade for training our next generation of firefighters. But we need to do more than that. An additional responsibility will be placed on the CFA board to support the effective and sustainable recruitment, development and retention of volunteer officers and members to deliver capability in the provision of CFA services. We have created a \$56.2 million CFA Support Fund to strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention, increase training options, expand brigade support and develop brigade leadership.

I belong to an integrated brigade, Ballarat City. The number of incidents that the 37 integrated brigades have responded to has increased significantly, from 12 214 incidents in 2006 to 18 539 incidents in 2016. Volunteers in the CFA's 38 career integrated station areas will be encouraged to remain and co-locate with Fire Rescue Victoria services. As is already the case, there will be different arrangements depending on local circumstances and the requirements of both FRV and the CFA. At all times the most important factor will be community safety. Integrated stations will transition to FRV, but CFA volunteers will be able to retain their equipment and vehicles.

I do not profess to speak for my brigade, but I can make a personal observation. I was trained by career firefighters and we worked well as an integrated group. The walls of our training room are lined with the long history of the brigade and I am confident that that legacy will continue. On Sunday I had the honour of handing over the keys of a new rescue vehicle to Ballarat fire brigade, which is a 100 per cent volunteer fire brigade in my electorate and, I am very proud to say, the oldest operating fire brigade in the Southern Hemisphere. This brigade has specialised in rescue vehicles since the 1970s. It was the foresight of this brigade in the 1970s that saw them specialise in rescue equipment, and in those days they had to fundraise themselves. They raised the money for their first rescue vehicle and on Sunday I handed over their fifth rescue vehicle.

Ballarat City is well known for its staging unit. We are supporting them to specialise in their chosen area. The government has already committed to a \$100 million support package to strengthen and enhance the CFA. We will continue to work with volunteers, with their expertise, about what they need on the ground to determine the best way to spend these funds to help make CFA an even stronger firefighting force. At the same time the Victorian government will reaffirm its commitment to the CFA volunteer charter. Volunteers want certainty. If we do not pass this bill, we will be left in doubt for another fire season. This would already be law but for the treachery of those on the other side of the house.

I remember a particularly scary day in the 1980s when a grassfire started by the railway tracks near my farm. I stood with my mother, plugging the downpipes with tennis balls, locking the pets in the bathroom and finally watering the garden. It was strange to do such a mundane thing as watering the garden as a wall of fire rose over the hill and came towards us. In that moment I knew that the best hands were on deck. The firefighters of Langi Logan all knew our land. They would not stumble on the stony rise or struggle to find our sheds or houses.

This bill will give certainty to our volunteers, give them presumptive rights and strengthen their capacity. We are committed to strengthening the CFA, not gutting it like the Liberals did when they were in government. On Sunday, Snowy, the captain of Smythesdale brigade, looked me in the eye and asked me to stand by the volunteers. I made that commitment to Snowy, and I will stand by it.

**Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:08):** I rise to speak on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. I follow the member for Buninyong, who I note is a new member to this place and despite not having had the benefit of seeing the previous bill, seemed to be able to believe that she could support this bill even though it has only been seen for 12 hours. Clearly consultation with her brigades and people does not require actually seeing the bill, which does have some differences to the previous bill, which I will come to. I note that one of the brigades that the member for Buninyong has just talked about, the Langi Logan brigade, is a Ripon brigade. It is one of more than 90 brigades in Ripon that are all-volunteer and do the great service of keeping the people of Ripon safe from fire.

Ripon is also serviced by the Ballarat City CFA, which of course is an integrated brigade, and the Lucas CFA, which despite not actually being in Ripon—although Lucas itself is in Ripon—is an all-career CFA brigade. It is not what was envisaged when it was first created, but now we have one of the two all-career CFAs, part of the future that this government sees for the CFA, an all-career service wherever they can do so.

The CFA in Ripon has a very, very long history, as do fire brigades, prior in fact to the CFA. I have been to a number of celebrations within my brigades of well over 100 years of service to what is a very fire-prone area. What is in this bill is therefore of great interest to the people of these brigades. Of course they have not been able to see a lot of this bill because the government has chosen to bring it in and second-read it in the same week. Why would they do that? Why would they deny the bill the traditional two weeks of sitting on the notice paper? In fact if the bill was as ready as the minister might suggest, why did they not bring it in perhaps in March, prior to the federal election? That might give us some indication as to why we are seeing the bill now, because of course during the previous

federal election, which Labor did not win either, one of the turning points was when thousands of CFA volunteers—in fact it was on this day years ago—came to protest against the proposed changes to the fire services. That was one of the things that was credited as winning the coalition that election.

Of all the things that this government could do to help Bill Shorten, not to bring in this bill just before a federal election would be one of them. It worked so well for them last time. This time they actually had quite a narrow window. They had a narrow window for the budget. The budget was delayed so they could help Bill Shorten, and then they delayed the introduction of this bill into the Parliament precisely to help Bill Shorten on his way to the Lodge. That did not work out so well for them. It did not go so well last time and it did not go so well this time. It would have gone even worse had they introduced this bill, can I say, because Victorians do not like this. They do not like the takeover of fire services by one man, Peter Marshall. They just do not like it.

One of the issues that Victorians really do not like with this bill, and it is a technical issue for those people in country brigades, in CFA volunteer brigades, is lateral transfer. There are numbers of people in country brigades who join their brigades and their teams and by the time they get to their early 40s they have had 20-plus years of firefighting experience and are deputy group officers or even group officers. Sometimes they do not want to farm any more or they would like a career change, so they think, 'That is something that I have really enjoyed, something that I have really done', and they seek to go into the fire services at management level. That is something the minister at the table, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, is telling me is exactly what happens now. That is true; it does happen now. However, under the bill that we are now debating the Fire Services Registration Board is created. The Fire Services Registration Board will have four people on it who will decide who is fit to hold the office of firefighter and who is fit to be in management within Fire Services Victoria. Who is on this board? Well, we have a nominee of the minister. Now I am going to assume that the minister will nominate someone who has had volunteer experience; let us guess that. We then have a nominee of an industrial body that is responsible for an enterprise agreement.

That would be the United Firefighters Union, so the UFU has got one out of the four at this rate. Then they have got a former senior firefighter who is to be nominated by current firefighters in accordance with an election process prescribed by the regulations. So that would be voted by the current firefighters—the paid, UFU members. Now we are at two out of the three. Then we get to the fourth one, and that is: an academic with relevant experience is to be nominated by current firefighters in accordance with an election process prescribed by the regulations. The election process is of course the firefighters, and therefore three of the four people deciding on whether you can have lateral entry from someone who is not a UFU member are UFU members or appointed by the UFU. That is not a model that allows for the current people who have the experience that I have just explained as volunteer firefighters at senior levels to be accorded lateral entry into this organisation.

If we look to the other things this bill does or does not do, this bill puts everybody into Fire Services Victoria, and therefore they will be subject to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade's enterprise bargaining agreement. The CFA will not have paid staff anymore; therefore there will not be paid staff subject to the CFA EBA. If we look at the MFB EBA, we know that there are absolute restrictions on part-time work and roster flexibility. It has been shown in review after review that the fire services and the MFB have got an appalling rate of having women come back to be firefighters after they have had children and allowing flexibility. The whole thing is designed so that the current Peter Marshall-led UFU can have the model that he wants, which is male firefighters. This is not a model that is any good in itself and it is not one that is a modern firefighting service, yet this is what this bill is signing us up to.

I now move to presumptive rights. This is a disgrace within this bill, and it is why I support the reasoned amendment. These presumptive rights are not equal. The bill does not give equivalent presumptive rights to volunteers. Volunteers can turn out as many times as others, and they will be limited in whether they can access presumptive rights. Again this is just not good enough. It is certainly not what the now Minister for Education and Deputy Premier promised. He promised we would see

decent presumptive rights legislation within 100 days of an election. We are well after the 100 days. This is not decent and this is not fair, and this is why I oppose this bill.

**Mr HALSE** (Ringwood) (12:18): I rise to speak to the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019, and I am delighted to be doing so. This bill is long overdue. We made a commitment to reform our fire services at the last election. It was a clear promise and one made to ensure that our career and volunteer firefighters are supported in keeping our communities safe. Now we are delivering on this promise. Let us be clear: our firefighters are the best in the world, and every Victorian deserves a modern, 21st-century fire service that is best equipped to keep our communities safe.

To start, let me first thank the brave firefighters in my local fire station in the district of Ringwood. I thank them for the work that they do on a daily basis. The reality is, however, that our state's fire services are operating under a system that has remained largely unchanged since the 1950s, as many of my colleagues have noted. As our state grows and changes, it is our duty as parliamentarians to make sure that our legislative framework changes to best reflect our state and our society.

We all know that this legislation should have been enacted some time ago. The tactics used by those opposite in this chamber on Good Friday will never be forgotten. I say that not simply as a member but as an individual who has been a Victorian political historian. I will remember that day as an observer and what a disgrace it was.

I am honoured to be supporting this bill following the words of the member for Frankston. He knows from experience the challenges that our courageous firefighters confront every single day. I thank him for his courage and service and commend him on the excellent speech he delivered here a few moments ago. I also note the contribution and service of the member for Buninyong.

I would like to acknowledge my brother-in-law, a leading firefighter at Bundoora station. I also speak in memory of my brother-in-law's father, Damien Burke, a former senior station officer with both the MFB and the CFA who tragically passed away just a few years ago while still serving.

This bill does a range of important things: it legislates a presumption of occupational cancer for all firefighters, it modernises Victoria's fire service, it establishes a body to review fire standards and service delivery and it establishes a professional Firefighters Registration Board. All aspects of this bill are important, but I would like to touch upon a few key areas in the next few moments. The first is how this legislation will make it easier for career and volunteer firefighters to claim compensation when they are suffering, or will suffer, from specified forms of cancer. As far as I am concerned the health and safety of our firefighters is not up for negotiation. When someone's job is to run into burning buildings or to push back fires from properties across our state, then they deserve to know that their government has their back. They deserve to know that if they suffer injury or illness in the course of their duties they will be fairly compensated and will not face unnecessary burdens to prove that a lifetime of breathing in smoke or toxic fumes has caused their cancer.

We are making good on a promise to our firefighters. This reform means that eligible firefighters claiming compensation for specific cancers will not need to jump through unnecessary hoops to prove a direct link to their cancer. The default will be to presume that those cancers were caused by their firefighting and that they are entitled to compensation. We will accept the scientific evidence. This is the only right and responsible thing to do.

This bill is also about modernisation. It addresses the concerns of people living in the growing outer suburbs of Melbourne and in rapidly growing regional cities, who need and deserve a modern, 21st-century fire service that protects their homes and their loved ones in an emergency. Make no mistake: volunteer firefighters are brave, dedicated and hardworking. They volunteer their time to help others, and they deserve to be recognised and valued for their important contributions to our state, their communities and our society. This bill is about making sure that the way we utilise our career and

volunteer firefighters within our fire service is appropriate. It is about how we best look after firefighters like my brother-in-law, who is serving today.

Victorians need a fire service that reflects the times that we live in and that is able to respond effectively to growing demands in growing suburbs and towns. The new Fire Rescue Victoria model will have clear accountability structures that will meet this growing demand. Under this new model integrated stations will transition to FRV but volunteer firefighters will be able to retain their equipment and vehicles. In addition \$100 million is being invested into the CFA to ensure that those brigades have the support they need to keep us safe into the future. It also restores the CFA in stations in regional and rural areas to its roots as a community-based organisation made up of dedicated and brave volunteers. It ensures that these volunteers are supported in their activities, with clear organisational and operational objectives and paid support staff.

Finally, we need to talk about the elephant in the room, and that is climate change. Given the scale and scope of our recent bushfires we need to acknowledge the role that climate change will play in our state and its particular vulnerability to fire. We have seen that devastatingly in recent years. As previous members have pointed out, nine of the warmest 10 years on record here in Victoria have occurred since 2005. This greatly increases the risk of catastrophic fires, and it means that these reforms are imperative to ensure our ability to reduce damage at the most critical of moments. As any firefighter will tell you, any disruption, any deviation, any delay—even for a second—can mean the difference between restoration and ruin, between damage and destruction and, at worst, between life and death. We need to learn from their example. We need to learn from the experience of people like the member for Frankston. We need to stop wasting time in this place with this bill, and we need to pass it now. I commend the minister for her work on this bill, and I commend it to the house.

**Mr TILLEY** (Benambra) (12:27): I rise to speak on the government's rehashed and reintroduced Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. From the get-go I make absolutely no apologies that I oppose the bill. My opposition is not only for personal reasons and certainly along those opposition and coalition party lines; it is also backed by a strong collective of voices—the army of volunteers that are part of the 61 fire brigades in the CFA region within the Benambra district.

I just go back to just last week and one of the most senior ministers in this Labor government. I draw you to the Treasurer's speech. He said:

Speaker, politicians of all persuasions often talk about fairness.

Few back it up with anything of substance.

But for us—

I am talking about the current government, the Labor government—

fairness guides everything we do.

Well, you cannot try and hoodwink the vast majority of Victoria and try and pull this one over our eyes. There are 61 brigades in the Benambra district. These are the people that this government, the government that has brought this legislation to this Parliament, will need to answer to not only today but into the future.

Let me be very clear—we hear that ad nauseam from all sides of this house—that we are not opposed to change. Everybody needs to be an agent for change. But the change that is detailed in this bill and will no doubt become enshrined in legislation in the state of Victoria will be a significant and sad indictment. We can banter on all day—he said, she said—about transparency and about those issues, but the bottom line is confidence. The CFA and its volunteers—that army of volunteers—have given service for many years and decades. In fact some have been quite generational throughout the state of Victoria, certainly through many of the brigades that are within the Benambra region 24 district.

It is the same army of volunteers who put their lives on the line each and every fire season. It is the same army of volunteers who have kept people, homes, villages, towns and cities safe since the CFA was first formed in 1945. It is the same army of volunteers who turn out to do training each and every week, 52 weeks of the year. It is the same army of volunteers who maintain the brigade's tankers, pumpers, slip-ons, big fills, quick fills and other equipment the brigade may have on station. They fundraise to enhance and increase the capacity within their own brigades while keeping that stuff maintained. And if you drive around Victoria on Sunday mornings you will see those volunteers turn out—in all faith a large majority of them will turn out—for maintenance on those Sunday mornings. They are ready to be called to duty, and at the same time they continue to maintain that equipment with the aim of protecting life and property in the state of Victoria.

It is also that same army who battle away massive wildfires in the High Country. We cannot talk about the whole history of the CFA in the small time I have to make a contribution, but it did so most recently in 2003, 2006 and 2009. It is the same army of volunteers who battle grassfires on the plains and provide strike teams for fires on the outskirts of Melbourne—again in Gippsland just a few months ago and even locally in December in 2016. If it was not for the mobilisation of this army locally in the Benambra district, we may have lost the township of Yackandandah. We thank our brothers in arms across the border from New South Wales.

But the same army of volunteers are fearful about the CFA's future. These are people that love the CFA, love that organisation and are committed to giving their service. Their membership is passed down, as I said, generationally, from father to son, from mother to daughter regardless. Call it a tradition, call it a badge of honour, but for them and for me the CFA is an extended family.

Many see this bill as the end of an era. They fear their autonomy will now be subservient to the demands of a heavily unionised fire service, and the eleventh hour tabling of this legislation offers credibility to that fear. Now, what I am doing in this contribution is taking the opportunity to collectively put together a montage of direct quotes from quite a number. I will not be detailing their names, because they have been intimidated over the last couple of years by a number of people. As I said, we are not going into names and pack drills, but they were quite open and frank to be able to talk to me.

There are a couple of people that are happy to be identified. This is a quote from one such volunteer:

'Let's be totally honest ... the only reason we have this legislation is to get around an industrial dispute.

A CFA volunteer who has held down any number for senior roles said that to me last week.

Another quote:

How is this going to work with paid FRV staff seconded back to the CFA—who is their master, who do they answer to?

This is a volunteer of more than 30 years that said that.

In another quote:

No one is arguing that there needed to be change—

I agree with that sentiment—

but is this the best way forward?

He said that there was no evidence to support claims that the legislation will benefit urban growth areas.

Another quote:

But there is so many unknowns when it comes to how the services would work together and the role of volunteers in this model.

Now, these volunteers believe that firefighting resources will be channelled almost entirely through the newly established Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV), leaving the volunteer brigades to fight for the few measly crumbs that fall from the table.

I will name one of those people and get him into the history of this Parliament—in *Hansard*. He is Howard Smith, who is a Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria delegate with decades of CFA experience. He believes the real impact of this legislation will not be felt next week or even next year. And we know that this bill, before it becomes legislation, will not be introduced until next year anyway, after the next fire season. Howard—a great fellow, a great contributor—fears that five years down the track the CFA will be a shadow of its former self. He said:

I'm a firm believer that the integrated station model wasn't broken in the first place.

But what they are doing here is creating an 'us and them'.

What I fear will happen is that the volunteers at these stations will be reduced to minor roles and in time they will drift away.

I also fear for those brigades on the outskirts of the cities that have a paid firefighters station.

Those peri-urban stations will increasingly have little to do and in time will wither and die on the vine.

The fallout from the past upheaval has already seen 6000 volunteers lost to the CFA in the past 18 months—how many more have to leave before the government recognises how this is damaging our volunteer brigades.

Back in 2017 we had the Fire Services Bill Select Committee take evidence from then CFA chief officer Steve Warrington, and he said:

There are still people that are absolutely disappointed that there was not consultation.

We know this—that there has been no consultation—because this was only introduced last sitting week and second-read this week, with an intention to go to the guillotine by Thursday this week. It is just lucky that I have had the foresight and the connection with the CFA in my district and electorate that I have been able to get some more feedback, not knowing what the detail of this bill is. In a number of submissions—and I do not want to miss any of these in the small amount of time that I have left—my worry is that there has not been the transparency. We have got a history—a litany—where we have had a minister shown the door, we have had a CFA board sacked and we have had a number of incidents of intimidation and threats.

But all in all there is the other side of the argument. There are those volunteers in the electorate that look forward to a bright future, and I will put that on the record. They are not absolutely convinced, but they look forward to the future of the CFA. They do not look forward to having to kowtow to an industrialised firefighting organisation, but they do look forward to the future, and I thank those people in our district for stumping up and having the courage to give me their side, their version, as well.

And to the Country Fire Authority: thank you for your service that you have given us over those years. Let us hope for the future, but it is on your head. It is on all of your heads here today, those that have turned around and will force this bill through this place, into the other place and into the future. On that note I would like to ask for an extension of time, but I will not get it, so we will not waste any more time. Heaven help you for the future of the Country Fire Authority.

**Mr McGHIE** (Melton) (12:37): I rise to offer my support for the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. The Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019 will fulfil commitments made by the Victorian government in the 2018 election platform. It will legislate a presumption of occupational cancer for all firefighters, will continue to work towards the modernisation of Victoria's fire services and will establish a body to review fire standards and fire service delivery. It also establishes a professional Firefighters Registration Board.

The key reforms in the bill are the introduction of presumptive rights to compensation for firefighters who have one of 12 cancers, have served for the requisite number of years and meet the other

qualifying requirements; the establishment of Fire Services Victoria, which will replace the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, and the FRV will be headed by a fire rescue commissioner; the establishment of a strategic advisory panel, which will provide strategic advice to the fire rescue commissioner; the establishment of a new FRV fire district, which will replace the metropolitan fire district and redraw the boundaries of the district to include growth areas in Melbourne as well as major regional centres; the establishment of a new Fire District Review Panel, which will be responsible for reviewing and advising on future changes to the district; the transfer of CFA career firefighters, instructors and practical area drill operators to the FRV; the establishment of a process for secondment agreements, so that key operational staff can be seconded from the FRV to the CFA to meet the CFA's statutory and operational requirements—and secondments between agencies have gone on for years and have been successful, and those agencies that people have been seconded to have been the responsible power; the establishment of a Firefighters Registration Board to assess and register FRV employees who are seconded to the CFA; and the establishment of an implementation monitor responsible for monitoring the implementation of the reforms over a 10-year period.

The reasons for the proposed changes are simple. As Victoria changes and grows, the state's fire services also need to change and grow. We need to reform our fire services arrangements, which were conceived a very long time ago. We are in the midst of transformational societal change, with population growth in our cities and urban corridors. We are experiencing greater intensity and severity of extreme weather events due to changes in climate, which create exposures that place more people at risk. Firefighters are responding to more dynamic challenges than ever before. It is clear that as Victoria changes rapidly, so too must these arrangements that underpin our community safety and wellbeing. Our fire services need modernised governance and organisational arrangements that meet the demands of 21st-century Victoria.

As the former secretary of the Ambulance Employees Australia union, employees and employee conditions were first and foremost in any negotiation and consideration. If this bill is adopted, there will be no loss of jobs. In 2008, the ambulance services were merged to form Ambulance Victoria due to population growth, increased caseloads and response time performance, and over the last 11 years we have witnessed significant improvement in the delivery of our ambulance services. This is what this bill is all about for fire services—it is about delivering better fire services.

In regard to the volunteer firefighters in the new FRV areas, they will continue to play a central role in the day-to-day provision of fire prevention and suppression activities in the former 38 integrated fire station areas, which are now included in the FRV fire district. The bill provides a new section that acknowledges it is the intention of Parliament to recognise and value the contribution of volunteer brigades located in the FRV fire district. The bill also provides that FRV must, subject to operational requirements, request the assistance of all volunteer brigades located in the FRV fire district to protect life or property, or prevent or suppress a fire in the FRV fire district.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward):** Order! If the member for Rowville and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services would like to have a conversation, they are welcome to do so outside of the chamber, but I am—

**Mr Wells** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward):** Member for Rowville! I am trying to hear the member for Melton. If you would like to discuss this, please do so outside the chamber.

**Mr McGHIE:** Thank you, Acting Speaker. Some people may ask, 'How do these changes affect fire trucks attending an emergency on my property?'. Again, the answer is simple: the work of career and volunteer firefighters will continue on the ground to ensure community safety, as it always has done. Operationally, there will be no change to control agency arrangements under Victoria's

successful emergency management framework. FRV, CFA and all of Victoria's emergency services will work together to respond to emergencies, as they have already previously done. The changes in the fire services statement will ensure that Victorians receive a world-class fire service no matter where they live.

The bill amends the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 to insert an additional objective for the CFA to support the effective and sustainable recruitment, development and retention of volunteer officers and members to deliver capability in the provision of the authority's services; recognise the CFA as a fully volunteer firefighting and community-based service under the command and control of a paid chief officer and supported where necessary by other paid staff; support the co-location of CFA volunteer brigades in the new FRV fire district through provisions allowing certain functions to be performed and exercised by certain CFA officers within that district; and maintain operational and management support to CFA in the context of planned secondments of FRV officers to CFA, preserving the chief officer's chain of command.

Now I would like to focus on volunteers specifically. Volunteers at the CFA's 1220 volunteer brigades—

**Mr Wells:** With respect to the member for Melton, I do not believe there is a quorum.

**Quorum formed.**

**Mr McGHIE:** Volunteers at the CFA's 1220 volunteer brigades will continue to serve their local communities and provide vital day-to-day services and surge capacity in the same way as they do now. The legislation further enshrines the role of volunteers in the organisation through supporting co-location of CFA volunteer brigades in the new FRV fire district through provisions allowing certain functions to be performed and exercised by certain CFA officers within the district.

In the last term we invested heavily to support our volunteer firefighters by investing \$11.6 million for volunteer training and capability, such as ICT upgrades, including \$11 million for upgrades to CFA infrastructure across regional and rural Victoria; a \$10 million grants program—and my local Bacchus Marsh station has received some of this money for equipment and facilities upgrades; \$2 million for volunteer recruitment and retention, with an emphasis on diversity; and also \$2.5 million for diversity and culture change.

I would now like to turn my attention to the other proposed significant change in this bill, which is the presumptive rights compensation scheme. Under the presumptive rights compensation scheme a firefighter claiming compensation for certain cancers does not have to prove that firefighting is the cause of their cancer. Instead it will be presumed that they contracted cancer because of their firefighting service and that they therefore have an entitlement to compensation under the WorkSafe scheme. However, the authority administering the scheme—WorkSafe Victoria—will be able to challenge a presumptive entitlement claim where there is proof that the cancer was not caused by firefighting. The presumptive rights compensation scheme will cover all Victorian career firefighters employed by FRV or its predecessor organisation, the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board, or the Country Fire Authority. The scheme will also cover volunteer firefighters engaged in the CFA.

Again, as the past secretary of the ambulance union I know the difficulty for injured emergency workers in navigating the WorkCover system. In ambulance, it was trying to prove that your work contributed to your mental health injury. For firefighters, it is about cancer being caused by your work and the attendance at dangerous fire scenes. I have seen injured workers having to battle through 12 months of rejection of claims, conciliation processes, possible medical panels and maybe even court cases before their claims were accepted. While all this is happening they are still dealing with the injury or disease they have contracted.

Another aspect of the bill that is beneficial to our firefighters is that if a firefighter who had an injury on or after 1 June 2016 lodged a claim under the WorkSafe scheme or the volunteer compensation

scheme and that claim has been rejected, that firefighter may be able to re-lodge their claim and have it considered under the presumption. The presumptive rights scheme will reverse the onus of proof away from the career or volunteer firefighter if a firefighter meets the relevant qualifying requirements.

This bill is about better health and wellbeing for firefighters. The firefighters in my electorate in Melton and Bacchus Marsh do a fantastic job of keeping our community safe. I want to thank all our firefighters across the state for keeping us safe, and I offer the bill— (*Time expired*)

**Mr WELLS** (Rowville) (12:47): I rise to join the debate on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. This is a bill designed to stuff the CFA and stuff the CFA volunteers, and there is nothing more, nothing less that can be said about what is being designed. It is all about political payback for the United Firefighters Union (UFU).

Let me say at the outset that the member for Gembrook, who set out very clearly the reasons why this bill should not go ahead, has moved a reasoned amendment, which I support. What it does is to very clearly separate out the presumptive rights for the firefighters and the reforms, or so-called reforms, for the fire services. The presumptive rights is an important part, and we strongly support it; we strongly support the presumptive rights compensation.

I am fortunate to have grown up in Bairnsdale, in a country town where you had to rely on everyone else to be able to get things done, whether it was a drought, a flood or a fire. When the fire bell rang my dad was one of those guys who got on the back of that fire truck and went out for days and fought those fires. Today, we have a more modern system, and we rely on people to come up from the city to be able to backfill all the way along.

The member for Benambra is a prime example—a member of the Wodonga West fire station. When the fires at Bunyip took hold they needed as much backup as they possibly could get, and brave firefighters like the member for Benambra went up—for about a week, mind you—leaving behind family and everyone else to fight those fires. But not only that, not only did Wodonga West go and fight, the brave firefighters, the volunteers, from Scoresby, Bayswater, Boronia and Rowville went up to fight those fires in busloads. Day after day after day those brave firefighters—men and women—went up to fight in the Bunyip State Park, sleeping on the footy ground, waiting for the meals to come before going back out onto the fireground, and they did it. It is what is called surge capacity, and the Andrews government does not get it. They do not get the issue of surge capacity.

When Bunyip is alight, where are we going to get all these firefighters to go and fight the fires in Bunyip? They will not be around. We have had an exchange with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services because I have said that the fire stations at Scoresby and at Bayswater are going to be shafted and they will be shut. They will be shut. And the minister has given me some assurance to say that will not be the case, but let me tell you how the UFU works. The UFU does not work that way. What they will do is make sure that the firefighters, the volunteers at Bayswater and Scoresby, never get a call-out. They will never, ever get a call-out, and as a result the firefighters will leave in droves.

**Ms Neville** interjected.

**Mr WELLS:** The minister has said that I am wrong, and she is saying it is in the legislation. The UFU does not listen to the legislation. They never have. Look at the integrated station at Rowville. The member for Frankston will know this: at integrated stations, if it was a true integrated station the volunteer would travel in the same truck as the career firefighter—and that never happens. Do you know why? Because the UFU will not allow it. They will not even allow the volunteers to go into certain parts of the fire station. Can you believe it? So you are saying that it is an integrated model, where 'integrated' to me and to the member for Benambra means that you would share resources and that you would work as a team. It does not happen. The UFU will not allow it.

I am amused by the note that went out. Every UFU member got a text message from the UFU:

Important notice to UFU members: The Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation & Fire Services Legislation Amendment Bill will be introduced in the Lower House today. The UFU understands that this morning Lisa Neville, Minister for Police & Emergency Services, will hold a press conference. Link to livestream of the Lower House today ...

Do not worry about telling Parliament. Do not worry about briefing the opposition: 'Oh, no, we're not going to brief the opposition, but we're going to make sure that every UFU member gets a text message so they can be fully up-to-date'. And the audacity—the absolute audacity—of the minister and her office to say to our spokesman, the member for Gembrook, 'You can have a briefing on this at 3 o'clock on Tuesday'. So the opposition spokesman—

**Ms Neville** interjected.

**Mr WELLS:** Now, just a moment. I was standing next to the opposition spokesman when he said to me, 'They offered 3 o'clock'. So they said, 'Look, we're going to be busy'. And as it turned out, he was in a division here arguing about the government business program, so how could you have possibly offered him a briefing on the fire services bill at 3 o'clock? There were no other options. So the opposition spokesman said, 'Well, can we make it Friday?'; 'Oh, no, we can't make it Friday'; 'Well, can we make it next week?'; 'We're going to ram this through'. So what sort of consultation can happen? And let me tell you why consultation is happening. The member for Bayswater and the member for Ringwood are brand-new members. They have to go and face, eyeball, their CFA volunteers—go out to their CFA volunteers and face them.

**Mr Taylor** interjected.

**Mr WELLS:** And the member for Bayswater has got to say to them, 'I'm here to tell you that you're no longer wanted and you're going to be shafted by the Andrews government, so when there's a great big fire down at Bunyip or at Rosedale or a peat fire down at Camperdown, you're not going to be wanted'. And the member for Bayswater needs two weeks to be able to get down to his fire stations and tell them, 'Look, we've built a brand-new fire station, but we're going to shaft you because the UFU is going to take complete and utter control of the CFA'. It is an absolute disgrace.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr WELLS:** There are lots of things that we could say about the member for Burwood, about what happened at question time today, so I would not be going too far about that. No, no. There is more to come.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr WELLS:** And you are an expert at that, aren't you?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward):** Order! I would ask members to please not debate each other across the table, but I would ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Mr WELLS:** All CFA volunteers received a CO update from the acting chief officer, who is Gavin Freeman. He is working in that position at the moment. He said, as the minister would back up and say, with all these flowery, fluffy words:

statutory recognition of the role of volunteer brigades located in the Fire Rescue Victoria fire district and that FRV request the assistance of all volunteer brigades

And they expect us to believe it. 'It is going to be in legislation', we keep on being told. The UFU do not listen to legislation. They do not listen to regulations. No, not one little bit. And when we get to how all this started, remember the former Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Monbulk, went out to the hills, out to the Dandenongs, to talk to his local volunteers, and we thought, 'Well, this is a positive step'.

What he said was that we would have presumptive rights legislation within 100 days of an Andrews government. He also went and told every single one of those brave volunteers, 'There will be no

changes to the way the operations of the CFA volunteers work'. That is what he said. They brought in the legislation and of course what he did was he—I have to use this word—misled every one of those volunteers up in the hills. Can you imagine when the Dandenong's catch fire? We need every single firefighter in the outer east and the eastern suburbs to be able to get up there. And whether it be the brave volunteers or the MFB or the career CFA firefighters, they all need to be on deck. But to turn your back on the thousands of CFA volunteers who train every Tuesday night and every Sunday morning to make sure their skills are up-to-date and say to them, 'You are not wanted'—let me tell you, the Andrews government will rue the day that this has taken place. We need those brave volunteers for surge capacity, for the next Black Saturday or Ash Wednesday.

**Mr MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:57): In what remaining time we have before the lunch break it gives me great pleasure to speak in favour of the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. We made a commitment, a very strong commitment, at the last election to reform our fire services and ensure our career and volunteer firefighters are supported in keeping the community safe. Victoria's firefighters face dangers each day that many of us just cannot comprehend. As our population grows we are making sure that they and the Victorian community have the modern fire service they rightly deserve. Our firefighters currently operate under systems and structures that have not changed since the 1950s—they are so antiquated—and it is clear that these services need to be modernised.

This legislation, as we all know, should already be law but for dishonest tactics that were used by those on the other side of the house to block it in the 58th Parliament. This bill is being reintroduced with minor variations around operative provisions, and so now we are righting this wrong. There are of course four overall objectives of the bill. These will be fulfilled while upholding the commitments made by the Victorian government as part of its 2018 election platform. This bill will, firstly, legislate presumptive rights of occupational cancer for all firefighters. It will continue to work towards the modernisation of Victoria's fire services. It will establish a body to review fire standards and fire service delivery. It will establish a professional Firefighters Registration Board. About the board, can I just say it will be a registration board that will be all about compliance. It will not be about knocking out CFA firefighters and former CFA firefighters from being registered.

In terms of presumptive rights, the Andrews Labor government made this commitment before the 2014 election to introduce presumptive rights legislation for firefighters who have contracted cancer. It re-endorsed the commitment in 2018.

**Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.**

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### Matters of public importance

#### EDUCATION FUNDING

**The SPEAKER** (02:02): I have accepted a statement from the member for Carrum proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house notes Labor's strong investment and reform in Victoria's education sector and further notes:

- (1) the Andrews Labor government's 2019–20 budget provides \$321.9 million for free dental care for students at all Victorian public primary and secondary schools;
- (2) the Andrews Labor government is delivering the biggest reform in the history of our state's early childhood education with three-year-old kinder for every Victorian child; and
- (3) the Andrews Labor government's 2019–20 budget invests \$881.6 million to begin that rollout, giving children access to two years of subsidised kinder and ensuring our kids are ready for school and set for life.

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (14:02): Speaker, thank you for giving the house this opportunity to speak on this very important matter. This matter of public importance (MPI) in my name is all about

values and priorities, and it really is also about the contrast between this Labor government and governments of the National and Liberal parties. I think perhaps that nowhere else is the contrast more stark and more compelling than it is in the area of education and in the investments that we choose to make in our young people. Having just handed down our fifth budget, there would probably be very little doubt in the minds of most Victorians about what the priorities and values of this government are, and of course right up there is education. That is because it is Labor governments that invest in education and it is Labor governments that invest in our young people and in Victorian families, and that is because it is absolutely the right thing to do.

We saw the cuts the Liberal-Nationals made to education when they were given the opportunity to lead this great state. They only had one term, but those cuts hurt. Let us not forget that when we are talking about budgets, when we are talking about cuts, those are deliberate choices—those are choices that they made. They chose to cut school budgets, they chose to cut TAFEs, they chose to close TAFEs, they chose to scrap the education maintenance allowance, they chose not to build one new school in their term of government and they chose to let school buildings run right down into the ground. I have to say that they let down our youngest Victorians, they let down Victorian families and they certainly let down our teachers and educators. They made a conscious and very deliberate choice not to invest in education, and by making that choice they failed every single Victorian.

We will not do that. When it comes to education, we know that if we want to support this state to be the strongest and smartest state, if we want to grow our economy and create thousands of jobs and if we want to create opportunities and support Victorians to reach their full potential, we have to start with education. That is exactly what we are doing; we choose education, and I could not be prouder to be a part of the Andrews Labor government in our second term making absolutely historic investments in our education and now particularly in our education in the early childhood area.

As I said, budgets are about choices, and this government's fifth budget continues that record investment. But of course we know that it actually goes a whole lot further than that. This budget, this historic budget for education, is setting the bar even higher. We have this new norm about the kind of investment we are seeing in education, and our investment in education this year goes further than any other government's in this state's history, and that is something we should all be very, very proud of on this side of the house.

As the MPI notes, the Andrews Labor government's 2019–20 budget provides \$321.9 million for free dental care for students at all Victorian primary and secondary schools. This is such smart policy, and in fact very soon we are going to start to see those beautiful orange dental vans—and I have to say, orange is my second-favourite colour—hitting Victorian schools, kicking off in Cranbourne, in Wodonga, in Box Hill and in Barwon South, and it will be scaled up until it is statewide in 2022. This really is smart investment, and it will see services delivered directly to schools, so directly to the students, and that means parents and families will not have to arrange appointments, they will not have to take time off work and, importantly, they will not be out of pocket. Obviously we want to make sure that we are driving down dental conditions, tooth decay, tooth disease. We want to make sure that fewer kids are ending up in hospital. We promised to bring back the dental vans for kids, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

But of course our investment in education does not end here. It was the Andrews Labor government in our last term that brought in the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to make sure that kids do not miss out. It was this Labor government that provided further support for State Schools Relief, and that is supporting families with the cost of uniforms and school books. It was the Andrews Labor government that introduced the Glasses for Kids program. It was the Andrews Labor government that introduced breakfast clubs in our last term, and I have to say that that is something I am particularly proud of. We knew that one in seven children were coming to school on an empty tummy, and that is just unacceptable. Those kids cannot learn on an empty tummy and they cannot concentrate. So we have now rolled out this program which has served more than 7 million breakfasts, which is absolutely

extraordinary. We have now announced that we are going to extend that to a further 500 schools and we are going to ramp it up to include lunch also at participating schools.

We know that we have brought in the Doctors in Secondary Schools program and soon, in what I think is a really important initiative, we are going to have qualified mental health practitioners on campus. We have introduced Respectful Relationships into the school curriculum. It was the Royal Commission into Family Violence that described Respectful Relationships in our schools as an investment in future generations, and it certainly is that.

We have introduced funding, in an absolute Australian first, to make sure that girls at government schools will have access to free tampons and pads, and of course we are continuing to roll out our school building boom, with this year's budget containing a further \$1.82 billion for new schools and school upgrades.

These are our priorities. These are our Labor values. But of course there is another one which is very close to my heart, and this is the Andrews Labor government delivering the biggest reform ever in the history of this state to early childhood education with three-year-old subsidised kinder across Victoria. Even when I say that I get goosebumps, when I think about the opportunity, about the potential, about the possibilities. We all know it. In fact I was at a budget briefing for business last week and the Premier was up there talking about the budget and listing some of the highlights from this year's budget. When he got to three-year-old kinder the entire crowd just erupted into spontaneous applause—and that is because everyone gets it. They feel it. This is about equity, this is about access and it is about opportunity for all.

Just as we promised to the people of Victoria before the 2018 state election, we are going to deliver on our commitment to roll out kinder for every three-year-old Victorian. This will mean adding an extra year of play-based learning before school, and it is learning that will be led by a qualified teacher. I have to say that Victoria will become, very proudly I think, the envy of the nation. We will be the first state or territory to introduce a subsidised program for all three-year-olds. As I said, last week the Andrews Labor government handed down its budget for 2019–20. This budget includes a massive \$881.6 million to begin this historic rollout. A big chunk of that, \$473.2 million, will be for early childhood infrastructure alone. That is so crucial because we are going to need to work really closely and collaboratively with the sector to build nearly 1000 new and upgraded kinder facilities to meet the expected increase in demand for kinder places.

This year's budget also includes \$92.4 million for an additional workforce that we are going to need—that is, more teachers and educators. In fact we are looking at about 6000 in total, so it is 4000 teachers and 2000 educators in addition to what we have now. To encourage and support that workforce we will be promoting scholarships, professional development and training, mentoring programs and incentives. I really encourage all members in this place to get out there and to promote the opportunities that are available for school leavers and for people wanting to return to work, or to upskill, to think about early childhood education as a fantastic career. As part of this growth, \$28.5 million in this year's budget alone will go towards free TAFE for two early childhood qualifications starting next year—the diploma of early childhood education and care, and certificate III in early childhood education and care.

A further \$26.1 million will go towards extending our school readiness funding. This funding is an Australian first and again something we should be very proud of. This is needs-based funding for kindergarten and it is funding that will directly support children to get the very most out of their kindergarten experience. It is tremendous. I have seen it already operating in practice with kinders using it for things as varied as occupational speech pathologists, professional development and cultural inclusiveness; there are so many things that this can be used for to just enhance the kinder experience and to make it a more inclusive, welcoming and, importantly, valuable place for our kids.

We are going to work very hard to boost even further our already high rates of kinder participation in Victoria. Again, we want to make sure that all children can access the full benefits of two years of quality play-based learning before school. As I said, this is about equality, it is about opportunity and of course it is also about access. At the moment three-year-old kinder costs roughly \$5000 a year. That cost is out of reach for so many Victorians, so subsidised kinder will see about a quarter of Victorian families paying nothing at all for three-year-old kinder, with subsidies available for many, many other families.

Now, this is a long-term commitment. It is about setting up kids for life. Whatever their background, wherever they live, this is about giving our kids the best start in life. And we know that 90 per cent of a child's brain development occurs before they turn five, so the research tells us and the experts tell us that adding an extra year of learning is crucial and it can make the biggest difference to a child's educational outcomes. I think we all agree that if we can do that in this place we have achieved an awful lot for the future of this state. So there really is no smarter investment than this, and I think most of Victoria agrees with that.

So you certainly would expect then that the federal government would perhaps support us in this, but unfortunately that is not the case. In fact the federal coalition government, to my knowledge, has not even mentioned three-year-old kinder—not once. But it actually gets worse than that. We know that the federal Liberal-National government is putting four-year-old kinder at risk too.

Do you know what? I feel like it is *deja vu*. Every year I stand up in this place and I talk about the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, and that is the agreement under which the Andrews Labor government—the state government—provides 10 hours of funding and the federal government puts in 5 hours. Every year the federal Liberal government just puts in that one additional year—they refuse to commit to long-term funding—but this year it is even worse. We know that they have refused to commit beyond the 2020 calendar year for four-year-old kinder funding. I will repeat it: they have refused to commit beyond 2020. That is an absolute deliberate choice to cut funding to four-year-old kinder.

I implore those opposite, in particular the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in her role as shadow Minister for Education, to stand up for our littlest Victorians. Stand up for them. Support this, and get your colleagues in Canberra to support this, to support our littlest Victorians, to support Victorian families, to support our educators and to support our teachers. This is about the future of Victoria. The evidence is unequivocal. Governments must prioritise long-term investment in education and early childhood education. We need to make sure that every child in this state is given the best start in life. That starts with early childhood education, and that is exactly what the Andrews Labor government is choosing to provide.

**Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (14:17):** I am now going to paint perhaps a little bit of a different picture to the glowing references that the lead speaker did with her matter of public importance (MPI), because there are a number of areas where the government has really failed in this sector and we have seen a lot of game playing. We saw this mostly prior to the federal election and in fact even into last year, well prior to the federal election, when the government were relying on the wider community of Australia to throw out the coalition government at the federal level. That just did not happen. Wasn't it a glorious time, that Saturday night and Sunday, when we saw that the Liberal government was going to be returned? The games that the Labor government in Victoria had played had all come back to bite them, because they were the only state government who refused to sign up to the federal funding that was being offered.

**A member** interjected.

**Ms McLEISH:** It was not being underfunded or ripped off. All other states seem to have actually eventually joined up, realising that this was very important. So we had the Premier and the Minister for Education play hardball, so they thought, to sign up, because they thought they were going to get a

better deal from Bill Shorten. Now, we all know what has happened to Bill Shorten, and we know also that they wasted millions of taxpayer dollars on dodgy advertising campaigns in a failed attempt to put Bill Shorten in the lodge. All that time the Premier and the minister should have sat down with the commonwealth and provided funding certainty for the schools, and this funding certainty is all the more important because after that war on Scott Morrison by the Premier and the minister we found that independent schools in particular face the prospect of having to take out bank loans to cover a shortfall.

Now, what does this actually mean? There are two tranches of payment, one in January and one in July, and after the state election the Premier and the Minister for Education thought that they would play hardball and not sign up to this. A number of independent schools were quite alarmed at the gap that this might mean for them. We saw what happened—an interim agreement was entered into which allowed the payment in January to actually be made, but there were a number of schools who had newer campuses in growth suburbs, such as in Wyndham and Bacchus Marsh, who came on after this, and they were faced with the very real prospect of not actually having any money. I know that those opposite, whilst many of them have been to private schools and sent their children to private schools, really do not like the independent schools. But let me say: there are some 220 independent schools in Victoria, and most of them are at the very, very low-fee-paying end. Now, those opposite would typically think they are all the big \$30 000-a-years, but that is not the case. The median fee for these 220 schools is about \$5000. Many are way less than that if that is the median. But anyway, we saw that these schools were quite agitated. We also know that the federal government pay the lion's share of the funding for the independent schools.

I want to now mention the government advertising, because the government talks about investing and reforming the education sector, but what was it investing in? We had a shameless program of advertising, where precious taxpayer dollars were wasted on what was blatant political advertising, and this was actually revealed in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) last week: it was not just a \$1 million program, as when you looked at the tenders for advertising, it actually ended up being \$1.2 million, plus another \$500 000 in the creative. So that is people who sit around to come up with the ideas about how they can do this dodgy deal and spend \$1.7 million. We saw this, as I said, in PAEC. I think the minister really needs to come clean and say exactly what this is costing.

I recall being at the MCG where I saw the banners going around the MCG on Fair Share funding. I thought, 'You've got to be kidding'. In fact it was pointed out to the person sitting next to me that these were taxpayer funded. Spending taxpayers money on political campaigning is straight out of Labor's red shirts playbook. While we had children over summer sweltering in classrooms with no air conditioning—and there are a number of those; I visited some—this government thought it would be fine to go ahead and waste taxpayers money on political propaganda attacking the federal government. If they wanted to attack the Morrison government, they should have spent Labor's money doing this, not taxpayers money. As a result, this has been referred to IBAC.

**A member** interjected.

**Ms McLEISH:** I would not be so mouthy if I were the member, because IBAC is a fairly significant deal. We look forward to what is going to happen with that.

I want to now just touch on the asbestos program in schools.

**A member:** The abandoned asbestos in schools.

**Ms McLEISH:** The abandoned asbestos program. Hasn't that turned out to be a bit of an issue? The government announced in 2014 that all schools would be asbestos free by 2020. Now, that time frame has been pushed out in the budget; that is a commitment that the government has failed to meet. This is really indicative of Labor: a government that always manages projects over time and over budget. If we watched the nightly news, we would see that the parents at Essendon North Primary School were horrified to not just hear about but witness this deadly asbestos dust covering desks, bags

and the floor at the school. Parents were alarmed to see this because we know there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos and even a limited exposure can prove to have serious health impacts. One of the parents was actually asked, 'Can you whip in there and clean it up?'. She actually asked the question, 'What am I cleaning up?'. It was later revealed that this was asbestos, so the government have put a number of students and families in some danger, and they are not at all happy about this.

We could have had some greater funding here. One example is Seaspray Primary School in Chilwell, Geelong, where there has been a real battle to get funding to try and rectify some of their issues. We have also heard of instances where schools have been given much-wanted capital funding that they thought they were going to do some significant renovations with, build a hall perhaps, and they have found out now that that capital funding is to be used as part of the asbestos removal program. They feel absolutely duded on this—completely duded.

In 2014 the Premier promised:

Under Labor, the asbestos will be gone, the risks will be removed and the portables will be replaced, because our kids health and safety means everything.

Well, there is a still a fair bit of work to do here. He went on to say:

Classrooms have to be the safest places in the world for our kids, because they spend half their young lives inside of them.

This government is all talk when it comes to removing asbestos, but when it comes time to deliver, they fail in this area.

Labor's mismanagement is not just in the maintenance of these school buildings. We can see how it delivers services that affect the quality of teaching and training and the quality of education that students are receiving. This is not me talking, this is the Victorian Auditor-General's Office which released a report earlier this year entitled *Professional Learning for School Teachers*. The report looked into the effectiveness of ongoing training for teachers as a way of supporting better student outcomes. The report found that after four years under an Andrews Labor government the Department of Education and Training had a complete lack of oversight of the way teachers develop and maintain their skills. The report also found that the government has no thorough understanding of how \$107 million had been run up by schools sending their staff to conferences and seminars. I do note that in the budget questionnaire the government has identified savings, albeit cuts, in this area of teacher training. This means teachers might be undertaking professional training that has no benefit to them and will not have any impact on student outcomes such as literacy and numeracy. We know that that is particularly important.

I want to touch now on early learning and three-year-old programs. The benefits of early learning have been well documented. Young brains are agile, and this is the time when children do the majority of their learning and development; this is true of their physical, mental, emotional and social development. Children have a natural curiosity and they need to be provided with an environment where that curiosity can develop, where their brains can grow and where they can thrive and flourish. They need a safe environment in which to do so, and that safe environment includes the home, it includes making sure that they have adequate nutrition and it also includes having opportunities in areas where they are free from abuse and neglect, and can work on this. We know that this is extremely important.

We also know that too many children are not receiving any reading. There was something in my electorate a while ago about the number of people who read to their children, which is something that we think people do as a matter of course. We know that many families do not read to their children, and this is in the very early years. This needs to be encouraged. Children will learn by hearing, looking at pages in books and looking at words. We also know that phonics is an extremely effective way of teaching children to read. I would like to point out to the house that while the world is moving forward in this area Victoria has not really been ready to grasp phonics. I think it is changing a little bit, but we

know that this is a great way to help kids get on board early and to make sure that if kids are falling behind they can have the appropriate attention they need. We went to the election looking at phonics screening at year 1 so that kids do not get left behind and in year 6 find that they cannot read and write. We also know that kids with dyslexia benefit greatly from phonics training.

I notice that the government, with the rollout of three-year-old kinder, is first of all looking to do this in country Victoria in six local government areas (LGAs). Other than South Gippsland, many of them are actually very small municipalities with a handful of kindergartens each. I have noticed that accompanying this is a strategy that the government is putting in place to look at scholarships to get some additional training for teachers but also \$9000 as an incentive to try to get people to move to country Victoria.

I was on the autism inquiry, and one of the things that we found was that there is a huge shortage of these sorts of skills in country areas, not just teaching skills at that early level but speech pathologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. It was put to us time and time again that one of the best ways to develop a rural workforce is to train them in rural Victoria. We see time and time again that what happens is people move up there, they have got an incentive—it might be for two years—and then they move back. We have seen this with doctors. We have seen in a number of areas that people will go for the duration of that program or what is required of them. It is very important that what we do is make sure that those positions last, that people want to live in rural Victoria and that they want to move to rural Victoria, knowing that there are some great jobs. But this is likely to happen and these jobs are likely to be filled if they do their training there in the first place.

I would strongly encourage the government to make sure that there are training opportunities, because we see that country brain drain where people will move from the country to undertake training—whether it is tertiary training or maybe TAFE training—in the city, and often they do not go back. We need people certainly to head out into the country, because we know that not only are the first six LGAs coming on, which are in some of the more remote areas—Buloke, Hindmarsh, North Grampians, Strathbogie, Yarriambiack and South Gippsland, which perhaps is not as remote—but the second tranche is coming on by 2021, with another 15 LGAs also in country Victoria.

The strategy needs to be in place so that those people are not just on the ground for year 1 of that program but are also there for year 5 and year 10, because in all likelihood—not always, but in all likelihood—for people that move to the country the stats are against them staying there on a permanent basis.

I am also concerned that we are 1000 classrooms short and they need to be built. I would hope very much that these are not built on outdoor space and that we lose the outdoors environment, because we know that children spend way too much time indoors and too much time in front of screens, even at a very young age. So I would hate to see some of these buildings actually encroach on that outdoor space.

I see that in my electorate, and particularly in the Murrindindi shire, they are expanding the outdoor space by offering bush kinder. Marysville has a very strong bush kinder program. Alexandra has a great bush kinder program, as does the Kinglake Ranges. The kids love it. They get out, they get dirty, they get wet and they go home very, very messy, but it gets them out into the great outdoors. The physical and emotional skills that they develop from being outdoors cannot be underestimated. So I think the government has some work to do to make sure that some of their policies actually stick.

**Mr CARBINES** (Ivanhoe) (14:33): Well, that is unfortunate. I just wanted to in particular on the matter of public importance spend some time discussing the Andrews Labor government's 2019–20 budget that provides \$321.9 million for free dental care for students at all Victorian public primary and secondary schools. What a great initiative and one that of course touches directly on what families understand is a very significant cost to them, not only financially but there is the cost that comes from poor oral hygiene and poor oral health. A lot of that is driven in communities where perhaps diet and other pressures lead to poor dental health outcomes.

I will set the scene for why the Andrews government has had to step up to support families. In some cases with the family budget in making some hard decisions people put off their oral health. Of course the Australian Dental Association, in touching on the federal coalition's budget last year in relation to public dental services, said, and I quote:

In a pre-budget announcement, the Government indicated that the federal contribution to public dental health services would be cut by around \$45 million per annum, a disappointment development that will further impact the oral health of the most disadvantaged Australians.

That is \$45 million per annum cut from public dental services by the federal coalition government. What does that mean on the ground for families, particularly in vulnerable communities?

In particular I would like to draw attention to Banyule Community Health Service and, Speaker, you will be familiar with the campus in your electorate. It is in both West Heidelberg in my electorate and also in Greensborough. I just want to draw on their *Quality Account* community care report from 2018, where they outline their Smiles 4 Miles early childhood service—a service that I think should be highlighted in this house, and I quote:

Eleven early childhood services in Banyule took part in the Smiles 4 Miles program provided by—  
Banyule Community Health service and DHSV—

(Dental Health Services Victoria). A total of 629 children took part in the program—  
generating 124 referrals. Of those:

One hundred children from six pre-schools had an Oral Health check and 27 had evidence of decay or other anomaly. One service brought 19 students on an excursion to the clinic, where they met a dental nurse, had a ride in the dental chair and received a take home information pack.

What this all comes down to is explaining that in our communities some 10 primary schools took part in the program, nearly 700 children had an oral health check and 21 per cent had signs of decay or other anomalies. This is very significant, because if we do not pick up on these issues at an early age, this is something that comes back to—pardon the pun—bite these people in the longer term. These are really serious issues. If we do not get to them early and if we do not ensure that people take some responsibility as well and understand their oral health, then these problems progress into the future.

Something like 1700 children received classroom-based education on oral health and diet advice. Students are providing more services. Where students were on average two to three clients a day, they are now averaging four to six clients a day. This relates, of course, to the clinic at Banyule Community Health service and trying to meet a growing demand. Success was evident in the reduction of formal client complaints, and also the time of emergency appointments was extended to provide enough time for treatment to be completed.

I just wanted to touch on the work of the places that are closest to communities, particularly vulnerable communities—these community health services. The work that they are doing to nip problems in the bud and provide a platform for families and for young people in particular to understand their oral health at an early age is critical. That is why we then need to provide greater support in our community for families to understand that the Andrews government understands their need around oral health services and also understands that there is significant cost, particularly when you come across problems and oral health issues. How can we deal with some of those?

Of course just this year we are following up on a very significant election commitment that we made and which was affirmed at the ballot box in overwhelming numbers by the Victorian community. Those smile squads—Dan's vans—the three dental vans will hit schools soon. I would like to just pick up on some comments that the Premier made in relation to these matters when he said that:

We're making sure school students have a bright and healthy smile and we're helping hard-working families save on costly dental bills, as we promised we would.

Kids' oral health is so important, but busy families can often struggle to find the time to get to the dentist. We're fixing that.

The Minister for Health in the other place added her contribution on these matters when she stated in developing this policy that:

Our kids deserve the best start in life, and good oral health is important to lay the foundations for good lifelong health and wellbeing.

Tooth decay is preventable, but we all know dental bills hit the hip pocket hard. That's why our free dental care in public schools program is so important.

Can I say that I am old enough to remember the dental health vans at my old school, Bell Primary School in West Preston. I was fortunate that we were taken to the dentist, but the school dental service was effectively the only dental health services that many families growing up in West Preston, at my school, had an opportunity to interact with. It is really critical, I think, to give an understanding to people about how we can provide assistance to them but also so they can develop that understanding in their own lives about how they can manage their oral health, how these discussions then lead to discussions about their diet and how they lead to discussions about what can happen if you do not deal with these issues from an early age.

We have seen that in communities where we have people visiting the public dental health services at Banyule Community Health, more senior people in our community, who when we talk about trying to get a job, when we talk about their sense of self-worth and their own confidence—being able to have a positive outlook at a job interview, being able to smile, being able to show off your pearly whites in whatever state they might be—these are critical issues that people have a great lack of confidence around in terms of getting a job and in being able to contribute to the community. It is because they have had a setback or are held back in relation to their dental health.

These are lifelong issues for people. It always goes to the heart of the Premier's work, going back to his roles as Minister for Health and parliamentary secretary for health. Prevention and health prevention were key issues in a policy sense—trying to get to these issues early and not trying to deal with them when it is too late. There are certainly generations in our community who we are providing that support to at perhaps a time when we could not get to it earlier. So it is critical.

Another aspect, not to divert too much, is around fluoridation of water supplies and the work that the government has done over both the Bracks-Brumby government and our government to ensure across regional Victoria that water supplies and the opportunity to invest in fluoridated water supplies has seen the oral health of people in regional communities get the same opportunity in comparison to children in other places. I know my siblings who grew up in Geelong, where water was not fluoridated, have had different dental health issues to other members of my family. Very significant changes were done through the Bracks-Brumby government on those matters.

Can I say also that we opened Dental Health Service Victoria hospital, a new dental hospital in the Bracks government days, under Minister Pike. It was a very significant investment in our health services, and we also provided the TAFE and training opportunities across regional Victoria so that our dental health technicians, our dental health nurses and those who seek to do dentistry work can get the training that they need, develop their skills and provide opportunities to serve the community where they live.

There is some very significant work that the government is doing in relation to those dental health services, and I would say that it goes a long way to addressing the stresses and pressures on family budgets. When you are crook people get to the doctor and they use the Medicare services, but time and time again, until it is too late, many people put off being able to visit a dentist. And it is not because of a lack of care for their children or a lack of care for their family, it is driven financially—as a cost.

We need to understand that, and I think our government is attuned to those issues. It made sense. It was one of the issues that people talked about at the polling booths. It was an issue that people

understood clearly, and I think it is vitally important that our government continues to understand and affirm that we know what the pressures are that families are under and that we know where we can make a difference. This is a lifelong investment, and it is shameful that those in Canberra seek to take away funds—\$45 million per annum—from public dental health services when it is those people at the margins who have been cruelled at an early age by those in Canberra. I think the opportunities of the work we are doing here in delivering on Dan's vans for our school dental services are going to provide a great future for young people and their families.

**Mr ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (14:43): It is wonderful to rise in the chamber this afternoon to speak on this matter of public importance (MPI), and I do so acknowledging the presence in the gallery this afternoon of some young people, some young students. I am not entirely sure which school you are from or what electorate you are from, but you are very welcome amongst us because what we are doing today is we are talking about early childhood education and we are talking about the importance of education within the state of Victoria. You young people—through you, Speaker—who are gathered in this chamber today are at the heart of what we are talking about, so you are very welcome amongst us. As I said in my maiden speech in this place in December last year, young people in Victoria are not just the leaders of the future but the leaders that we need today, so my message to every one of those young students gathered in the chamber today is to say to you that for all those times that you have been referred to as the leaders of the future, please ignore that—your politicians need you to be the young leaders of our community today. That is our challenge to you, and thank you so much for visiting the Parliament of Victoria.

On this matter of public importance I wanted to firstly acknowledge a personal interest in this particular matter. I am the father of a 20-month-old daughter, Abigail, so the matter that we are discussing today, this matter of public importance that refers to early childhood education, is of significant importance to my wife and me. It is a matter that is important to us. What is clear—and many people have said this and much research is around this—is that the importance of the early years are now well-known throughout Australia and the rest of the world. These years are a time when the brain develops and much of its wiring is laid down. The experiences and relationships a child has, plus their nutrition and health, can actually affect this enormously, and positive experiences help the brain to develop in healthy ways.

I had the great pleasure of attending recently on behalf of the shadow Minister for Education the ELAA—Early Learning Association Australia—conference. Now ELAA, for those in the chamber who do not know, is the peak body which works in partnership with early learning providers and parents to deliver excellence for providers and parents for early learning for every child. They have a diverse membership of 1100 or so service providers, including early years management organisations, kindergartens, local governments, day care services, government and independent schools and out-of-school-hours care programs. It was a fascinating conference. I was there with the Minister for Education and his parliamentary secretary, and for part of my research for this MPI I went through some of their budget submissions. For the last three years ELAA have submitted in their budget submission a number of items that they think are critically important. One of those critically important things is in their view a skilled, supported and valued workforce. They said, and I quote, that they would like to:

Improve attraction, recruitment and retention of high quality staff in a rapidly growing sector that is of increasing strategic importance to Government, families and the community.

They went on and they said that they would like to:

develop and implement a workforce strategy:

plan the growth of the teacher and educator workforce over the next decade

value and support educational leadership and build the capacity for instructional support

fund early years management services to mentor provisionally registered teachers to support them to become fully-registered

fund professional development, ensuring a cost-effective focus on quality improvement and capability development

measure implementation and use iterative and creative problem solving to better attract and retain staff.

So they asked for that in their 2019–20 budget submission. In their 2018–19 budget submission they asked for the same thing. They said:

Central to the quality provision of early childhood education is a skilled, supported and valued workforce. A multi-pronged workforce development strategy would sustainably raise standards and enhance the sector's professional culture to deliver improved educational outcomes for children ...

And again in 2017–18 in their budget submission to this government they asked for exactly the same thing:

Highly-skilled, collaborative workforce.

ELAA said here, and I quote from their budget submission:

The quality of the early learning workforce is pivotal to the richness of the learning experiences of children and their long-term outcomes. Supporting practitioners to grow and develop professionally will enable children's needs to be met and better position the sector to meet future demands.

I could go on and quote other ELAA documents where they ask for the development of a workforce strategy. I will not, because the point that I simply wish to make is that the government may have delivered outcomes in this budget for this sector. However, they have not delivered upon the foundation for the expansion of this particular workforce, and that is the development of a workforce strategy. This is the peak body who is asking them to develop this workforce strategy so that the people who are charged with the education of young people are best skilled and best placed to educate young people, and that has simply not been delivered upon.

In the government's announcement 'Kindergarten for all three-year-old children' they identify—and I am referring here to the [education.vic.gov.au](http://education.vic.gov.au) website—a rollout schedule. They say that in 2020 three-year-olds in six council areas will be able to access up to 15 hours of kindergarten. Now, in the time that I have had to prepare for this MPI contribution I have done a bit of research. I have done a bit of research on these six local government areas (LGAs): Buloke, Hindmarsh, North Grampians, South Gippsland, Strathbogie and Yarriambiack. And I went to the most recent census data available, 2016, and I did some fairly basic research and I pulled up how many three-year-olds actually exist within these local government areas when the latest census data, authoritative data, was available. And I came up with a number of 705. So across these six LGAs where this program will be rolled out there are in fact 705 three-year-olds living within these LGA areas. I then did a little bit of further research, and I went to how many three-year-olds there are in the state of Victoria. And I pulled up the figure, courtesy of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the 2016 census data. And the total number of three-year-olds in Victoria is 76 016. Wow!

So if you would believe the government's posturing on this particular announcement, you would think that three-year-old kinder is being rolled out across the state tomorrow. But no, the reality is quite different. It has been rolled out in six local government areas, totalling 705 three-year-olds out of 76 016 three-year-olds in the state of Victoria. It is okay, member for Mordialloc, I will do the maths for you—no need for a calculator, my friend. It is 0.93 per cent of the three-year-old population of Victoria. That is where it is being rolled out to. Less than 1 per cent of the three-year-old population of the Victoria is where this government's policy is being rolled out to in the first place. If you believe the government's posturing on this particular matter, you would think that it was being rolled out statewide tomorrow.

In the 90 seconds that I have left, and I really do not like the clock because I am just getting warmed up, I did a little bit of additional research. I did a 10-year comparison. The 10-year comparison looked at the amount of funding that has been placed for Victorian schools, both now and 10 years ago, and the research that I found—and I commend the Parliamentary Library for their assistance in this

research as well—indicated to me that there has been a 200 per cent increase in output initiatives in the Victorian budget for the education sector in the last 10 years. Then you compare that to the outcomes that have been achieved in that time. In reading, year 9 has dropped from 94.7 per cent to 94.1 per cent. In year 7, reading has dropped from 95.8 to 95.1 per cent. In numeracy, year 7 has dropped from 96.5 to 95.9 per cent. In year 3, numeracy has dropped from 96.5 to 96.3 per cent. So for at least the last decade, at best, standards and outcomes in our schools have flatlined, whereas the funding infrastructure has increased by 200 per cent. This just simply does not add up, and Victoria's children deserve better.

**Mr RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (14:53): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on this very important matter of public importance (MPI) and, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Schools and a member of the Andrews Labor government, it is a great time to be in the state of Victoria when we are investing in education. When you put forward the notion of an Education State you are setting a high bar for your community, you are setting a high bar for our state, but we want to be known for transforming the lives of each and every child—and student—in our state to make sure they have every opportunity in life.

But we have had a late conversion. We have had the member for Sandringham finally get on board. He has got on board with early education, early childhood. It is a pity he did not read the budget papers, where \$5 billion has been invested in early childhood education. It is a pity he did not read the budget papers, where free TAFE has been rolled out to two early childhood education certifications. That is happening in our state. You have got to read the budget papers, and you have got to catch up.

The member for Eildon, in an extraordinary contribution, was talking about asbestos removal in our schools. Remember what the coalition did? They got a blue sticker, they got a yellow sticker and they went nuts. They went to every school with a bit of asbestos and slapped it straight on the window and said that was it. That was it. Well, we have got a record program of removing asbestos and making our schools safe from asbestos in Victoria. That is putting your money where your mouth is, because when you front up each year to do a budget it is about values. It is about what you stand for in your state and what you prioritise.

And let me take those opposite through some of these numbers, because they are worthy of looking through. The member for Sandringham said that standards over the last 10 years had been slipping in our state. Well, what happened during the first four years of that 10 years? What happened? We had unprecedented cuts to education, presided over by the Baillieu and Napthine governments. A combination of taking money out of schools, ripping the heart and soul out of schools, taking away the education maintenance allowance and punishing those that rely on that support so greatly will lead to worse outcomes.

But when the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Education fronted up and Labor's platform was put forward in 2014, we set ambitious targets. We set goals to change the landscape of education, not in a term of Parliament but for a generation. And by setting high standards and high targets that we were accountable to, in 2020 and 2025, we wanted to make sure that your postcode was not a determinant for your success, that your circumstances in growing up did not mean a second-rate education. Those were the values that we put forward. So the member for Sandringham can talk down our teachers and talk down our schools and early childhood educators, but right now we are investing in our schools and investing in our kinders, and we are transforming our state for the better. I am happy to say that with NAPLAN we have seen some of the best results ever in the state of Victoria.

**Mr Battin:** Speaker, I bring your attention to the state of the house.

**Quorum formed.**

**Mr RICHARDSON:** They get a bit touchy. They get a bit tetchy about talking about education in our state, because their record is an absolute shambles. But one of the most extraordinary things that

we had was the shadow Minister for Education, at a time when we are on the cusp of signing the bilateral agreement, come in and champion a poor deal for Victoria. We had the guts to stand up. It should have been a unity ticket. It should have been the Minister for Education and the shadow Minister for Education standing there in a joint doorstep saying, 'We're not going to cop a poor deal for Victorians'. But what did we have today? We had the shadow Minister for Education championing that deal; a deal that puts Victorians second and Liberals first.

In that context as well, around early years, when we think about four-year-old kinder, we think of the raw deal that has been done year in, year out, and the fact that the federal Morrison coalition government has not committed to any funding beyond 2021. You see, this is about values. Ninety per cent of a child's brain development happens in the first five years, and we know that the most transformational work that you can do is in the early years and transition into primary. That is changing.

When we think of intergenerational poverty and how we can enable students to be their very best and change the outcomes for all kids in our state, there is nothing more important than the best quality education. And whether it is the high achievers in excellence or whether it is those kids who need additional support with inclusive education in our kinders and our primary schools, our secondary schools and our specialist schools, that is how you change the outcomes, and that is how you do the best work you possibly can.

There is a lot of politics and conjecture in here on this MPI, but I would have thought that with a new beginning after the 58th Parliament we could have come forward and been on a unity ticket. Because when we talk about a fair share for Victoria, that campaign is still running now. It goes to the heart of where Victoria's investment is and how we deserve better in meeting those requirements.

I heard the shadow Minister for Education talking about independent and Catholic schools. I know there is an issue with adding and subtracting and there was a bit of a blunder. 'It's his first time as shadow Minister for Education. We'll let that slide—plus or minus'. Maybe with the NAPLAN results that the member for Sandringham referred to, maybe shadow cabinet could have a little crack at some of those questions—give it a bit of a crack. But those particular outcomes are so very important. When we look at those results and how important it is to set those milestones and those audits, that is what we are doing in our targets that we are setting and putting forward.

The biggest capital agenda in early education in our state's history is being undertaken. Over 1000 new and expanded kindergarten facilities, some that were delivered in the last term of Parliament, are greatly benefiting my community and transforming those outcomes for our students. But really critically, the workforce will expand. The Productivity Commission back in 2015 acknowledged the shortfall in early childhood educators as we expand this particular area. Well, our values in the Education State and the Andrews Labor government are putting free TAFE forward, with thousands of people not having a barrier to the cost of obtaining a TAFE qualification and going forward and getting a job. One of the best contributions you can make in our state is to educate our next generation. Our teachers, our early childhood educators, do an incredible job in this space, and I want to put on the record how thankful we are for the work and service they do.

If you are a young person coming out of high school, if you have done the Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL), VET or VCE, you can get a job educating and supporting the next generation and lifting the outcomes for our kids in kinders across our state, with the rollout of universal subsidised kinder. It is also reducing the cost, the barrier, for so many families. We know that landmark report in the United Kingdom did not make a differentiation between three-year-old and four-year-old kinder, and it was only the Andrews Labor government, the Labor Party, who fronted up to the 2018 campaign and committed to fund three-year-old kinder. They are very, very silent on that side about this space. We hear criticisms from those opposite about where it has been rolled out. Well, under them there was no rollout. That was no universal three-year-old kinder. There was no policy commitment in this space. They were, once again, looking after their mates in Canberra—and it is Liberals first and Victorians second, because this is the greatest outcome.

Now, they can champion the federal election result, but if you really drill down into that, and that is the partisanship of this, it was a 52-48 result in Victoria, so I would not be crowing too much. The Leader of the Opposition has a go at it, but why don't you see them front up on a unity ticket to ask the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, to commit to four-year-old kinder and properly fund four-year-old and to properly commit to the student resource package and not get a second-rate deal for Victorian government schools? Let us see them put their money where their mouths are. Let us see true bipartisanship and support for our education system, because this is what the Education State is all about—it is about generations. It is not about the four-year term or the eight-year term; it is about transforming lives over the coming years, and we know disadvantaged pockets of our communities are most supported by that intervention in early years education.

This is what we do. This is what Labor does. It invests in our schools, in our early childhood education system and our TAFEs to transform our state for the better. We have got the best NAPLAN results in the state right now that we have ever seen, and we will keep going on and on in delivering the Education State.

**Ms KEALY** (Lowan) (15:03): It is fantastic to be able to make a contribution to today's matter of public importance regarding investment in the education sector. I feel like there has been some duplicitous—

**A member** interjected.

**Ms KEALY**: It is a quick speech from me only because there are so few schools in the Lowan electorate that have been addressed in this budget. In fact this year's budget has been absolutely devastating for so many schools right across country Victoria. I would just like to firstly address the schools in the Lowan electorate—and I notice the minister has not even got the guts to listen to how he has failed the Warracknabeal community and completely stuffed up the Warracknabeal education precinct. What a gutless wonder, to be wandering out of the chamber after a swift little snide crack and then not have the guts to listen to how he has absolutely stuffed up that project in Warracknabeal. This was a project that The Nationals committed to delivering before the 2014 election. Labor was dragged kicking and screaming in 2016–17 to deliver a paltry amount of money for the special development school (SDS) and the secondary school.

**Mr Richardson** interjected.

**Ms KEALY**: I hear from the member for Mordialloc, 'How much?'. I can tell you what: it was enough to build one-third of the SDS and half of the secondary college. With another pre-election commitment, The Nationals would have developed full funding for that school and got it up properly opened. We are now in a situation where there have been two failed budgets from this Labor government to fix the mess of their own creation. We now have got a special development school which is one-third built—

**Mr Richardson** interjected.

**Ms KEALY**: What? You think that it is good? Because we are not in government they think the people in Warracknabeal should be penalised. That is completely disgraceful from the member for Mordialloc.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! Member for Lowan. Through the Chair, please.

**Ms KEALY**: It is absolutely disgraceful that the member for Mordialloc thinks that the people of Warracknabeal, the students of Warracknabeal, should be penalised because they have got Daniel Andrews as Premier. Well, do you know what? They are being penalised with Daniel Andrews as Premier.

**Mr Richardson**: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I ask the member for Lowan to withdraw. That is not what I was saying. I was saying that during the 57th Parliament they did nothing in

government for the Warracknabeal community. I take great offence at what the member for Lowan said, and I ask her to withdraw.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Lowan, you have been asked to withdraw, unconditionally.

**Ms KEALY:** I withdraw. But the truth hurts, doesn't it? Look at this SDS. The SDS has had to cut back the programs that are provided to the students. These are specific, specialised education programs for the students at the SDS. There was an agreement that these would be ceased for one year only until the Labor government provided additional funding to finish this project, and that was not delivered. So now these students have permanently lost these education programs, which were designed specifically to their needs.

Further, you have got students who are still up at the secondary college, where there are cracks in the walls you can fit a fist in, where there is possum urine leaking through the ceiling—and where there is an abundance of high-risk asbestos, which students are exposed to every day and you have not funded for removal, which you promised to remove by 2020 and have not delivered on. You have lied to the local people. So we have got the best laboratory—the best science lab with Bunsen burners and fume cupboards—all set up in the Warracknabeal Secondary College, which is half built, which they cannot use because they are stuck up at the old site and cannot relocate fully down to the new site. It is now being used as a site where they are educating SDS students, and they cannot actually use the space because it is not purpose-built. Our secondary students are missing out in Warracknabeal, our SDS students are missing out in Warracknabeal, and you have done nothing. Labor have done nothing but simply turn their back on this community. I want to give full credit to the Warracknabeal community because they have developed a fantastic social media presence through the Warracknabeal education precinct project page. You look at it on Twitter and you look at what they are doing on Facebook—you look at how they are infiltrating media, and yet Labor still will not listen to them. These are students who are missing out. These are the next generation of nurses, the next generation of agronomists and the next generation of doctors in the region, and Labor is letting them down.

It is complete and utter nonsense that Labor continue to talk about the values and priorities they have. We know what the priority is for the Labor government, and it is certainly not education for every single Victorian. They are certainly not delivering for all Victorians. They are missing out on delivering for the students who live in country Victoria, and it is an absolute disgrace and a shame and a blight on this government, and particularly the Premier and the Minister for Education, that they refuse to deliver on these key priority projects.

It is not just the Warracknabeal education precinct that has missed out in my electorate. I remember when Minister Pulford came to Baimbridge College in Hamilton, assembled the students and promised those students—‘We will give you \$8.4 million’—to redevelop their school. This was a project that The Nationals also committed to before the election. But what happened in the budget papers? It was not in there. It is not even in the forward estimates. It is not in the list of schools that they expect to be built before the end of this term of Parliament. This was a blatant lie directly to the face of students who go to Baimbridge College in Hamilton, and I absolutely am appalled to think that the Premier or the minister or any of the speakers on the Labor side would dare to say that they are holding the values and priorities of this state first and foremost and that education is their number one priority—because, jeez, you are letting down a lot of students.

There are so many other schools around our regions that you have completely missed out on. Swan Hill Specialist School—they do not have any private rooms. An allied health team is currently forced to set up in the hallways to see students who need support. This is completely unacceptable for SDS students. Wangaratta High School is looking for \$5 million to finish the final stage of the school's master plan, which includes a new basketball stadium to be used by the students and as a community facility—a high priority for that region, but again Labor have failed to deliver. Cohuna Secondary College: the classrooms at the school are more than 50 years old. The school community is currently

heavily involved in making sure the work that needs to be done is done. They are looking for funds to develop a master plan to upgrade the school, but are Labor listening? No, they are not, because they do not deliver good educational opportunities and outcomes for people who live in country Victoria.

Benalla P-12 College: the Benalla community agreed to merge the two high schools and three primary schools into a single school way back in 2007. Now that it is complete the schools have merged but the school's budget has been cut by \$1.6 million, and of course they want to see that restored. They have got students who require these funds to get the best possible educational opportunities that they can have. Why is Labor cutting funding to education? It makes you think that everything that Labor says is not actually true. In fact what they seem to say is not what happens in real life. It is like a total charade when it comes to Victoria being the Education State. It is fortunate we are sort of brainwashed—that it is on our numberplates—but we are going to have a next generation of kids who will not even be able to read the numberplates to think that we are in the Education State. It is an absolute disgrace, and it needs to be addressed.

Seymour College: the rebuild is underway, but the college is still waiting on the funds for the final stage of the project. Again, it has not been delivered. Kyabram P-12 College needs funding for a complete regeneration project that has stalled since—guess what—Daniel Andrews has been Premier. As I said, Baimbridge College and the Warracknabeal education precinct are a massive failure and a lie to these local people, letting down local students. Horsham Primary School is a really important school in the Horsham community. It looks after some amazing kids, and it has got a really high number of kids from Aboriginal backgrounds. There are chunks of wall falling off, and there is difficulty for students in wheelchairs to access the building—again, not funded by the Andrews Labor government. They turn a blind eye.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Hastings, member for Mordialloc, please stop yelling across the chamber.

**Ms KEALY:** Over in eastern Victoria the Latrobe Special Developmental School have had no work to upgrade. Traralgon College—no funding. Hazelwood North Primary School is an old school; it desperately needs upgrades to give these students the best possible start in life—again, not funded. Foster Primary School is looking for an additional \$2.5 million to complete the rebuild—not funded. Bairnsdale Secondary College needs \$15 million for stage 2 of its redevelopment—not funded.

So to Labor MPs who are making these contributions about how much Labor are looking after the educational opportunities of people who live in Victoria, have a good look at that data, because the evidence suggests that you are completely wrong. The evidence suggests that you are setting up a second-class group of citizens who are not going to have the best educational opportunities and start to life. And certainly we will not be able to look back and remember this time as a time when this government delivered to create the best possible educational opportunities for our region.

The one thing that I do agree with that has been mentioned by previous speakers from the other side is that this is all about Labor's values and priorities. Their values and priorities are completely out of order. *(Time expired)*

**Ms RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (15:13): It is with great joy that I stand to speak on this matter of public importance and highlight the impact it is going to have on the community that I serve. Of course there are several elements of this matter of public importance that relate specifically to Cranbourne, but I would like to start by emphasising the impact of the statewide school dental program on the community I represent. 'Dan's vans' is going to be a game changer. Oral disease is one of the costliest health conditions to treat, yet it is one of the most preventable. Not only that—it is the highest cause of avoidable hospitalisations for children under 10 in Victoria.

I am particularly committed to this program because I have seen firsthand the effect of poor oral health on people trying to get employment. Many years ago I worked in a recruitment role and spent so many heartbreaking hours interviewing people for jobs who had such damaged teeth and were so impacted by their appearance that they would not remove their hands from their faces. This affected their confidence and had a domino effect that had consequences for their employment; for some it even impacted on their opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. I particularly remember a woman who desperately wanted to get back into the workforce whose teeth were so damaged she had lost her two front teeth. As a child she could not afford dental care and she certainly could not afford it for her own children.

When this commitment was first announced I thought back to those countless people I had met who had effectively been locked out of the job market because of their inability to access the care they needed. I have known many families who have made appointments for their children to see a dentist, conscious that there was pain or there had been an oral health condition that had been brought to their attention, and they cancelled the appointment at the dentist because either they could not take the time off work or they could not afford the cost. As you would be aware, Deputy Speaker, it is precisely those who are unable to take time off work for their children to see dentists that this program will impact the most. Of course our children who access this program will have better oral health into their adulthood. What a terrific legacy, a legacy of values—well children with access to the best care at their school. This will make a huge difference to the future wellbeing of Victoria's children.

I was delighted when we made this extraordinary commitment back in November last year before the election. To see that this program has been funded in this the first year will have a profound impact on many families. It will deliver free dental care to schoolchildren through a fleet of 250 dental vans with an investment of \$321.9 million. The Smile Squad arrived in my neighbourhood one Sunday a couple of weeks ago, and together with the Premier, the Minister for Health in the other place and my good friend the member for Bass, we could not smiling, because this was an initiative of which we were just so proud. Bringing dental vans back to schools means that kids can get the care they need while at school, saving parents time and money—an investment in our kid's health, further freeing up existing public dental programs so that more adults can get faster dental care. This is starting in term 3 this year, and I am particularly delighted that Cranbourne, together with Box Hill, Wodonga and South Barwon, will be the first areas to benefit. This program will be rolling out across the state and progressively scaled up.

A couple of Sundays ago I was fortunate to distribute dental packs consisting of toothbrushes, toothpaste and a brochure to help families understand how to make the most of this important opportunity to prevent oral ill health. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Jinny Varghese for bringing his family—his children ended up being the stars of the show—and Dinesh and Gayani Weerakkody as well for being there as we announced that this program was going to start this year. Bringing back school dental vans: this \$321.9 million commitment and delivering free dental care to all Victorian children will be an absolutely incredible change to the way we operate in this state. We will be saving parents time and money, delivering a check-up followed by the follow-up care required to school kids every year.

We know that dental treatment costs around \$400 per child per year, and the evidence is that families are often skipping appointments, whether because of cost or because of time pressures. Under the Andrews Labor government and this flagship school dental program, all treatments will be covered free of charge, except cosmetic procedures such as orthodontics. No financial cap to the treatment will be provided, and the program will be demand-driven. That means Victorian mums and dads can rest assured that while the Andrews Labor government is in office the state of the family budget will no longer dictate the state of their kids' teeth because this is what the Andrew's Labor government's values are about—ensuring high quality, equitable access irrespective of your means—and that is what our school dental vans will deliver.

This extraordinary reform comes at a time when the contrast to the federal Liberal government could not be greater. Our dental system has been hit hard by the federal government's savage 30 per cent cuts to funding. They pulled the plug on the dental funding partnership with the states and replaced it with a new cost-cutting scheme. This means tens of thousands of people are being added to the waiting list each year. In contrast, Victorian funding has increased over this time.

But we cannot wait for the feds. We will be providing free dental care to all kids by bringing these vans back to school, employing 500 dentists, oral health therapists and dental assistants to staff the 250 vans which will roll out across the state. This program has been heralded as an 'excellent step forward' by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association and welcomed wholeheartedly by the Victorian Healthcare Association. This delivery of vans will save parents time. Rolling out during term 3 of this year will mean an incredibly exciting time for Victorian children and Victorian schools. Dental treatment will make massive savings for the family budget. It is the kind of reform that Labor is proud of.

Of course I am proud that this program is rolling out ahead of schedule. We said we would get it done by 2020, but we will actually be treating kids in vans during 2019. Those vibrant, bright-orange Smile Squad bands are hard to miss, as the kids at Clyde Primary learned at the public unveiling of the vans on 26 May. They will start out small and will absolutely progressively scale up. More vans will visit schools every year until the Smile Squad pays a visit to all Victorian public schools. And the service of course is not just for primary school kids; all schoolchildren—teenagers, prep to year 12—will receive free dental treatment and health information every year.

Each year public schools will be visited by the Smile Squad: 500 oral health therapists, dental assistants and dentists will be employed by Dental Health Services Victoria, and I would like to give them a shout-out for bringing this program together. First, the screening van, about the size of a combi van, will visit to provide each child with a check-up as well as a preventative health pack. For those children identified as requiring treatment a separate treatment van about the size of a truck will return shortly after. The treatment van will include a dental chair and specialist dental treatment equipment. For the small number of procedures that cannot be done in a dental van, such as major dental surgery, students will be offered a referral to a public dental service where they can receive their treatment free of charge. Examples of the kinds of treatments covered include radiographs, teeth cleaning, application of fluoride, dental sealants, fillings, root canals and impressions for mouthguards. Parents of course will be required to provide consent for the treatment and will be welcome to attend the appointment in the van with their child if they wish.

Make no mistake: this is a massive undertaking. Victorians will soon become familiar with these 250 bright orange Smile Squad vans, which will hit the road and reach all government schools by 2022. And we are excited to be getting on with it. Dental Health Services Victoria is working closely with the Department of Education and Training as well as the Department of Health and Human Services on the logistics to ensure our children throughout the state are ready to welcome dental vans. This is a massive expansion of public dental services and public health care. Of course it will have a positive impact on public dental waiting lists.

Finally, it is important to recognise the impact the school dental van program will have on public dental services more broadly. This program will free up around 100 000 places in the public dental system every year. This is because children who were previously seen in the public system will now be seen at school through additional investment in school dental vans. This is estimated to save the average family around \$400 per child per year, because we know private dental costs can range from \$185 for a tooth extraction to \$280 for a root canal and up to \$1600 for a full crown. These procedures will all be free in Victoria for all public school children through this dental school program, and of course all treatments will be covered free of charge, and any financial gap will also be supported. All non-cosmetic dental treatments required in all public schools will be free of charge every year. These are the values that speak to the way the Andrews Labor government supports families, supports

children in schools, makes a lifelong change, reduces poverty and changes the way that children in this community operate.

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (15:23): I am very pleased to make a contribution on this debate today, and I think if there is one thing we have all learned over the last 30 years, it is that investment in early childhood is the most important thing of all that we can do to ensure that our children have a pathway in life. All studies point in that direction. All studies for so long have shown that it is those first five years that are the most important time of all. But now we are seeing studies looking at the first 1000 days, so up to three years old. That time is also particularly important. But as you go forward and as children move into the education system they will continue to need the supports and the best level of developmental support that they can get to make their years in the education system worthwhile.

In terms of this budget I would like to just make some comment on the free dental care. If there is another thing we all know, it is that what happens in your mouth is really important in terms of your health. It is just so much of an indicator of a person's health to know what the state of their dental health is. I have to say that I have a brother who has worked in regional Victoria, in Maryborough, for probably 40 years, and he has been on national councils to Canberra, rural alliances and all sorts of things to try to get a better deal for the rollout of dental services, particularly for those groups of people who are so often deprived of the opportunity. That of course includes young children.

The rollout of these dental vans will provide, I think, some amazing services in many places. I just wanted to highlight one of the unintended consequences that could arise in regional areas, and that relates to the fact that dentists are relatively few and far between in regional areas, and often in smaller towns there might only be one or two dentists for the whole community. At this point in time most of the children who are being seen by a dentist are being seen by the dentists in their local community. To be viable they also need to have a continuity of patients running through, so I would ask the government to really carefully look at some of the communities they are going into and how this rollout of the vans might impact on local dentists in smaller towns, because the rest of the community do not want to see a situation where their dentist is in a situation where it is not a viable proposition for them to continue their business in a small town. We all rely on the dental services that are provided by the dental profession.

In 2016 I did my first grievance debate on education in this place, and I referred to the fact that there had been numerous reports, Auditor-General's reports and the like, that pointed out the discrepancy in the outcomes in education for those young people who live in rural areas as compared to metropolitan areas. Something like 30 per cent of children underperform on those sorts of indicators in rural areas. Their aspirations are low, their opportunities to go on to further education or indeed even complete their secondary education are much poorer and their attendance at university later on or even to achieve a certificate IV at a TAFE college is significantly reduced compared with the opportunities that young people in metropolitan areas have. This has been studied, written about and known about for a very long time.

How do we address that? Well, I just want to tell you that in the Shepparton district I have really decided to take this up as an issue because we have seen four secondary schools in the Shepparton and Mooroopna area underperforming and undervalued. We have seen a significant reduction in enrolments over a period of years. A school like Mooroopna Secondary College back in the mid-1980s had over a thousand students enrolled in it; now it has 300. There are real issues around that. The community has abandoned that school and moved onto another place and into other schools. In the Shepparton district our private schools, our Catholic schools and the Christian school are all bursting at the seams because people have chosen to abandon the secondary state education system.

So something needed to be done about it, and something is being done about it. Over the course of the past two years' work has been done on developing a Shepparton education plan. That is a zero to 18 plan, and it is designed to look at the whole level of state education from very early childhood through to the end of secondary education, but factoring in what might happen to young people once

they leave school. The Shepparton education plan is truly a transformative plan in that what it is choosing to do—and this has been done through consultation over a couple of years and as a result of a strategic advisory committee with community members on it advising the government—is to bring together those four secondary schools onto one campus. It is a model that has not appeared in many places. There will be nine schools of 300 students all on one campus and three neighbourhoods each with three schools, so it is a very innovative and transformative plan. There is no doubt that there are people in my community who are struggling with the notion of what that will look like.

I was very disappointed, I have to say, during the 2018 state election to see the National Party take up this issue as a negative. To preside over regional areas for so long as the incumbent members across many regional areas and not to have advocated for better investment and change in our region and other areas in regional Victoria is an indictment of that party. To have used the last election campaign to put up posters around election booths talking about the super-school as if it was the grim reaper of education in our region was a disgrace. In our region for many, many years there have been various attempts to try and improve the education opportunities and what the education system should look like: how will young people get better opportunities in regional areas such as ours? So I do not have a lot of faith in the National Party as being the provider of educational opportunities, because I have seen what has happened in our area where for years the schools languished with lack of investment. Now you might say that for a lot of that time there was a Labor government, but it is up to the local member of any electorate to advocate for their community, to take it to the government, to take it to the ministers involved and to try and get a better outcome for the students in that area.

As part of the Shepparton education plan, we have the Mooroopna early childhood centre, which is an integrated children's centre being attached to what is one of our most disadvantaged primary schools in Mooroopna. It is a centre that is going to be based on the Doveton College model, with one point of entry into this school. Parents will be able to be identified as to who may be in need of services, and there will be maternal and child welfare services there, playgroups for mothers, three-year-old kindergarten when it comes—and I will be lobbying the government and I put them on notice that we will be wanting our three-year-old kindergarten rolling out in the Shepparton district much earlier than it is presently slated for—and four-year-old kindergarten and transition into school. So that seamless hub that will develop at that school will really be something extraordinary to have in my electorate and will provide that ability to identify those children who are so vulnerable.

Just in the last few minutes I have left, the Australian early development census figures have just been released. They show that across all indicators the vulnerable group in the Shepparton district in my region is becoming more vulnerable. Across Australia that is not the case; there is improvement happening. So if ever there was an area that needed access to government funding to provide the sorts of services that are being foreshadowed in the budget by the Shepparton education plan and by other early childhood investments, it is my region. I will continue to advocate to ensure that we get our share of the money so that we can educate young people in our community and give them the ability to go on to trades, universities and TAFEs.

**Ms THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (15:33): It gives me great pleasure to speak on this matter of public importance. All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain but there in the sandpit at Yarralea kinder in Alphington. These are the things that I learned:

- Share everything.
- Play fair.
- Don't hit people.
- Put things back where you found them.
- Clean up your own mess.
- Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

...

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life—learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

These are just some of the wise words of poet Robert Fulghum from his *Credo*. The kindergarten credo is not simple; it is elemental. Everything in life as adults can be drawn back to these words. While it seems somewhat far-fetched, think about this: a child's brain grows to 90 per cent of its adult size by the age of five. Kindergarten is not the same as school. Kinder is about being emotionally and socially ready for school. Indeed the research shows that young children learn best through play rather than through structured activities. This allows teachers and educators to incorporate children's interests, responses and needs as they develop to adapt new ways for them to learn and explore. Fundamentally kinder is about teaching our kids to be learners. At kindergarten children learn to work with others and develop social skills, express their creativity, build their communication skills and develop the foundational skills that they need for reading, writing and problem solving. The earlier these vital life skills are developed, the more transformational they are throughout life. That is why last week's budget delivered by the Andrews Labor government is investing \$881.6 million to begin the rollout of the biggest reform in this state's history when it comes to early childhood education.

I am going to pause there for a moment because I want to reflect on just one word of that last statement—one word—'invest', because that is the fundamental difference between those that sit on the other side of the house and those on this side. Those on the other side see this program as a cost, not an investment. This program is of course the rollout of universal subsidised three-year-old kinder for every Victorian child—a program that will give Victorian children every possible opportunity to succeed no matter their background or postcode. The importance of investing in our collective futures is clearly something that escapes those opposite, just as it escapes their friends in Canberra. To their shame this year's federal Liberal budget includes no funding for three-year-old kinder and has even failed to guarantee funding for four-year-old kinder. Add to this that the Morrison government last year pulled the pin on safety and quality checks for all Victorian childcare centres and dumped occasional childcare funding. What a disgrace—preschool for 80 000 of our littlest Victorians at risk. Surely we can do better than that. We must do better than that, and in Victoria we are doing better than that. Universal kinder is not just about helping young minds grow and starting them on their education journey. Universal three-year-old kinder is a matter of public importance in a way that many of those sitting opposite fail to realise.

Deputy Speaker, as you know, there is no greater happiness than becoming a parent. I have been blessed with being a mum to two lively little girls: Ariana is almost two and Cleo is just three months old. I can scarcely describe the immense joy they bring to my husband and I. But as you know, with parenthood also come immense challenges, and there is perhaps no other role that tests us as parenting does.

No doubt many would agree that going back to work after having children is a balancing act even under the best of circumstances. I know from my own experience that balancing the cost of care with the family budget and the time spent away from the kids is no easy feat. On this front, providing universal access to three-year-old kinder will be a game changer for many families, as it also supports parents, and women in particular, to go back to work. This is a program that could just as easily fall under the Treasurer's responsibility as it could under the Minister for Education, because three-year-old kinder is also economic policy—it is employment policy. Policy which breaks down barriers to women's participation in the economy is an issue that is very close to me. In fact there are many members on this side of the chamber whom this policy will directly affect, now or in the very near future. And there is a reason that so many on this side of the chamber are affected by this policy: because this side of the chamber actually supports young women into our ranks, and indeed 50 per cent of our cabinet are women.

But as I said, this policy is economic policy. We know that when women are a productive part of the economy, the economy is stronger. Our economy is stronger and our living standards are higher. According to the Grattan Institute, improving women's participation in the nation's economy will add 1 per cent to our gross domestic product, or \$25 billion. And like many young mums in my community, access to affordable child care and early childhood education are some of the most significant barriers to participation. It takes a village to raise a child, and I am fortunate to have a very supportive village. Part of that village is the local child care that my older daughter attends, and I look forward to her moving into their kinder program very soon.

These reforms are also an investment when you take into account the longer term effects of children starting kinder as early as possible. We know that the pathway for our young people, especially those at risk, is a very different one if they have access to early education. Learning how to learn at kinder is vital. The dividend of investing in our young people early is savings that we make later in life, whether that is the improved health outcomes or even a reduction in interactions with the justice system.

The health outcomes element brings me to the other part of today's matter: the \$321.9 million for free dental care at all Victorian primary and secondary schools. I know that I have spent a lot of my allotted time today speaking on the kinder element of the member for Carrum's motion and I know that my colleagues have spoken at length on the Smile Squad, but this is Labor policy at its best, because we know that only Labor governments will do this—only Labor governments can do this.

There were pretenders around, but luckily for the people of my electorate they were short-lived, because there is no finer example of how only Labor actually governs for Victoria than this school dental program. The implications and complications that come from poor dental health are rarely recognised to their full extent. This initiative will have a profound positive impact on the lives of young people and older people from Ouyen to Alphington.

We have heard some of these facts today already, but I want to reflect on them. Dental conditions are the highest single cause of preventable hospitalisations for kids under 10. Think about that for a moment; think about the cost to our hospitals right there and the heartache and angst for our families. To be sure, this is a massive expansion of public health care, but the cost of not doing this program far outweighs the benefits that this investment will bring. And there it is again: investment. This program will free up around 100 000 places in the public dental system each year. That is effectively 100 000 more places that can be used by those on the waiting list now.

The dental habits that we learn when we are young continue through life. Teaching young people good habits and having them develop healthily right from the start reduces complications in later years and takes pressure off the system down the track. But once again, that is what separates us from those on the other side of the house. They would say, 'You're on your own'. As with many public health matters, their prevention policy is to park the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Again, we can do better than that and we must do better than that. And in Victoria the Andrews Labor government is doing better.

**Mr BURGESS** (Hastings) (15:42): It is a pleasure to speak on this matter of public importance (MPI). At the start I would like to put on the record that I have no doubt that the member for Northcote was being sincere, truly believed what she was saying and holds those values—that education and dental health and all of those things are really critically important to our communities and to our schools—so I have no argument with that at all. However, what the member for Northcote probably does not know is the extent of the hypocrisy and dishonesty of this government. Really, it only takes an objective view to take a look around the state and see what is really going on and to understand that what you are talking about from your experience in Northcote is entirely different to the experiences that electorates like mine have and schools like mine have. I will give you some detail on that as we go through.

There is a course of conduct that this government involves itself in—and I think anybody within this room would understand that—but to this stage Victorians are still coming to terms with it, although the last budget is certainly going to be a shock to them as they understand what it really means. Some of the statements, like the statement that we are debating today in the MPI or statements such as ‘We are doing this to help the CFA’, are so disingenuous when you consider what is really going on with the CFA and what this government is trying to achieve. With—

**Mr Richardson** interjected.

**Mr BURGESS:** I have already had this approved by the Speaker, so that is fine. ‘We are doing this for the CFA’, but then they are bullying volunteers and boards out of existence and destroying groups of local heroes.

**Mr Richardson:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a matter of public importance on education, dental and early childhood. While the CFA matter is really important and will be up for debate very soon, I am not sure where the member for Hastings is in this realm or on this planet.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I actually do uphold the point of order. I do ask the member for Hastings to come back to the MPI.

**Mr BURGESS:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the sincerity of the statement is also able to be brought into question here, and that is exactly what I am bringing into question in this debate.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I would like you to come back to the MPI.

**Mr BURGESS:** I will. There have been other statements, including about education but not limited to education, made by this government that are disingenuous, and this statement today is disingenuous. It talks about the importance of education. It talks about what is happening in education in schools—but not all schools. It talks about schools in electorates that have Labor members and not coalition members, and it is really clear when you look at my electorate and electorates around me and electorates across the state where there are coalition members that the communities in those areas really are doing it tough. Labor’s MPI today is just the latest in those disingenuous propagandist spiels that this government goes on with.

I can take the house to many of the smaller communities in my electorate and the schools within those communities just to point out the stark difference between the experience that the member for Northcote and other members on the government side of the house are having compared to the experience that we are having on this side of the house. I tried to ask the member for Mordialloc how much investment had gone into his electorate and into his schools. He had no clue. In fact he looked across at me and said, ‘I don’t know’. But I would be able to bring him to the point where—

**Mr Richardson:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would like the member for Hastings to withdraw. I take great offence at that. What I was saying was that he would have no clue what equity funding went into his schools in 2015–16. I ask him to withdraw because it is an absolute fabrication and is misleading the house.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is a point for debate, member for Mordialloc. The member for Hastings to continue.

**Mr BURGESS:** People do get sensitive in this house when they are called out on the things they say, whether they are true or incorrect. Certainly the member for Mordialloc is very sensitive about that, but he continues to do it.

Schools in my electorate such as Cranbourne South Primary School have literally gone on for years without the things they need. Certainly they have had petitions, Facebook pages, numerous meetings with the current member for Cranbourne and the previous member for Cranbourne and letters to the minister, both from me and from the school council, all of which have just fallen on deaf ears. They

are not being heard at all. While there has been some money spent just recently on it—but mostly on asbestos removal, which the government was required to do anyway—the school had no heating and cooling in block A. It certainly had no emergency maintenance. They asked for that on several occasions and were rejected by this government—that is the government that is so hell-bent on education in this state. They do not have a kiss-and-go area and are unable to have that. Staff have to park on the netball court, so there is no netball for the kids and this reduces outdoor areas. The space ratio is far below most schools as far as kids play is concerned.

Parents have to park in all sorts of different spaces, including in the next-door service station, so that they can actually get to the school. The drainage for the septic system was unsafe. There were telecommunication issues. They have an antiquated phone system, and there is no security system in the school. They have to replace the rotted foundations under the admin building. There are rotted gutters, eaves and fascias, and the roof is extremely poor. They have had to quarantine classrooms because of mould. They have limited meeting spaces, and only half the staff can fit into the staffroom. There are plumbing issues, with unstable plumbing under block A. There is spider web electrical circuitry across block A as well. As I say, some has been done, but is that a surprise? Because when you look at the school, the school actually has more parents out of the Cranbourne electorate than it does out of my electorate now—but that has only just happened because it is a Labor area. You have got more families coming out of a Labor electorate.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr BURGESS:** You are making the same point that I am making, so I am glad we are in agreement on that. If it is a Labor electorate, the money goes in. If it is a coalition electorate, you do not want to know about it. That is exactly what is happening here, and that is just the first of the schools.

If we go further into the schools, at Langwarrin Primary School there is no air conditioning in new block A. I wrote to the minister. What did the minister say? ‘You have got to get it yourself. We do not care if the kids are too hot. We do not care if it is stiflingly hot on those days. You have got to raise that money yourself just for the cooling and that air conditioning’. I brought it up with the minister. Of course the critical need is for kids to be able to get out of those classrooms on those boiling hot days, and \$140 000 is a lot of money for a school to raise by itself. But then again, this government is so committed to education that it is out there helping these schools.

Langwarrin Park Primary School has no playground. What do you say to that? There is no playground in this school. I have written to the minister, and the minister’s response was again, ‘You’re going to have to find the money yourself’. Is that the experience of the Labor members? Because if that is the experience of the Labor members, why are you not in here saying that? Why are you not in here saying that this government is short-changing education instead of coming in here and saying exactly the opposite? The reason is that money goes into your electorates. Nothing goes into the coalition electorates because this government is not committed at all to education. It is committed to politics, and that is exactly what you show every time you open your mouth.

At Somerville Rise Primary School the years 3 to 4 middle playground is taped off. You cannot get to the playground, and there is no shade. There is not even any shade for these kids to play under in this school. That is the kind of existence that these kids have to put up with because they have a government that does not care about them or their education. It only cares about the circumstances in Labor electorates. Christine was one of the parents who came to me and brought this to my attention. The response we got back from the minister, believe it or not, was that schools are required to ensure there is sufficient shelter and trees to adequately shade school grounds. That is the school’s responsibility. So the kids do not have somewhere to go to play, the kids do not have somewhere to go to get into the shade, and the minister’s response is, ‘That’s your problem’.

I am sure that is not the experience you are having over in Cranbourne or in Mordialloc, but that is the experience the coalition electorates are having under this government. What this MPI should be saying

is that this government is good on education in your electorates and terrible on education in other electorates. You have got a Premier who is an admitted socialist—he is an admitted Socialist Left Premier—who thinks that socialism is the redistribution of wealth from all electorates into Labor electorates. That is what he thinks. He is raising taxes from the state to put into your electorates so that my community gets no benefit from any of them—except they get the debt to be paid by your government— (*Time expired*)

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:52): What a great privilege it is to rise in this house, to follow that great contribution and to speak on this matter of public importance. We are proudly the Education State in Victoria, and it is not just a phrase. It is not just something that we put on a numberplate, like the Coalition will proudly say that their time in government was the Education State. When a Labor government is in power, we live it and we breathe it. It would be remiss of me not to mention that I seriously question whether those opposite are as committed to building an Education State as this government is.

**Mr Halse** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR**: Absolutely not, the member for Ringwood says. Absolutely not; they are not committed. We say budgets are about choices, and they are. We compare budgets and look at the staggering differences in recent times when we have been in government and when those opposite have been. The difference is \$4.4 billion—

**Mr Battin**: Deputy Speaker, I direct your attention to the state of the house.

**Quorum formed.**

**Mr TAYLOR**: Not only are budgets a choice but we saw that last November each party had a choice. This government has done absolutely everything to properly fund education, and those opposite have gone absolutely missing. I did not hear much from the member for Eildon about reforms to early years, to our TAFE system, on the roll-out of dental vans or to guaranteed funding for four-year-old preschool, and once again it was crickets on three-year-old preschool.

This government's choice was a positive one. We do not rip money out from schools. We do not close TAFEs. We choose to back in education because we know about the difference that it makes. Personally I know the difference that a quality education makes. I did it pretty tough in my childhood, like so many others, and education for me was truly a beacon of hope. It was a place where I could go to be safe, learn and build relationships, and that is exactly why investment in education across all spectrums—whether it be three and four-year-old preschool, dental vans or our TAFE system—is so absolutely important.

We have come a long way from my time in the 1990s and early 2000s. I remember it like it was yesterday. It reminds me of when I went to school. We had Harold the Giraffe. Do you all remember Harold the Giraffe? Good old Harold! We loved him. But now we have got Dan's vans and the Smile Squad. The nicknames will no doubt continue. While the affectionate names will continue to move about—there is always a bit of movability in these things—the government's commitment to the dental health of young people in this state does not. It does not move, because we are bringing the vans back. We are investing \$322 million in our commitment to deliver free dental care to all children in Victorian government schools by 2022. Normally I would not quote the Prime Minister, but how good are Dan's vans? Surely even ScoMo would love Dan's vans. These are game changers. We said we would get them out by 2020, but during last year's campaign, often like we do, we went one better. These bad boys are hitting the streets already. They are hitting the streets in Barwon South, in Cranbourne and in Wodonga. They will be out there by term 3 this year. Our dental vans are not just for primary students; they are for all students in all of our state schools. They will cover things like teeth cleaning, fillings, root canals and impressions of mouth guards.

This program has no financial cap, meaning it is demand-driven. It will save families up to \$400 per child per year on average because that is what we are about: we are about reducing the cost of living and supporting families who are doing it tough right across this state. This will do exactly that.

Why are we doing this? Well, because, as the member for Northcote pointed out recently, a quarter of Australia's children have untreated tooth decay and in Victoria dental conditions are the highest single cause of preventable hospitalisations under 10. Something has got to change, and Dan's vans will go to addressing exactly that. Oral disease absolutely is preventable, so it is our job to do something about it.

We know that dental care is available for kids up to 12, but only 20 per cent of people use it. This will make it convenient and ensure parents are not having to run around from appointment to appointment. That will now be a thing of the past, and this will be across every single state school. This is good policy, it is smart policy and it will prevent significant outlays in our health system when it is too late, because this will stop it at the root cause.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr TAYLOR:** Oh yes, oh yes! And another added benefit: it will free up our public dental health waiting lists for adults and those who need it most even more now. Approximately 100 000 places will free up, helping us to save resources and money down the track.

Once again this government proudly does the heavy lifting on health and education whilst we hear very little from the member for Eildon on this, as per usual, and even less from the federal government, who have cut adult dental services by 30 per cent. The Liberals are just shameful on this.

This government is proudly delivering on its promise to deliver the biggest reform in the history of our state, with three-year-old kinder for every Victorian child. There is \$881 million in the budget, signed, sealed and delivered by the honourable Treasurer himself, to begin the rollout, guaranteeing as well subsidised kinder three and four-year-olds.

As a former councillor I spent two years bickering and advocating. I cannot overstate how hard it was to get the federal government on board from year to year to guarantee funding for four-year-olds. They are not interested in three-year-old kinder. Getting them to the table on four-year-olds always happened in the depths of the night, always keeping us waiting and keeping parents and the community in angst. Once again our four-year-olds and their parents and families are being held to ransom. The 80 000 Victorian young people who access these preschool services are being held to ransom, with the federal government not promising federal funding for four-year-old preschool beyond 2021. Regardless of any factor, they are not at all interested in three-year-old preschool.

We are guaranteeing four-year-old preschool and we are also guaranteeing 15 hours of preschool for all three-year-old children, with a guarantee of 5 hours of subsidised three-year-old kinder by 2022. As part of this reform we have already begun conducting site assessments of the facilities across the state. There will be 1000 new or expanded facilities across the state over the next decade. That is big news. My community understands this need. We understand the research that shows the profound difference that three-year-old preschool makes in the lives of all young children, as young Paisley does, the young daughter of the member for Mordialloc. She is looking forward to three-year-old preschool; she is absolutely looking forward to three-year-old preschool, as the member's Instagram account does so record.

This commitment will allow our children to learn through play earlier, learn to work with others and build the communication and cognitive skills they so need. It will also create jobs—4000 extra teachers and 2000 educators, so it is about local jobs as well.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr TAYLOR:** Absolutely—jobs, jobs, jobs. We know that education is where it all starts. We know that giving a child the best start in life through a properly funded system, reforming early years

and providing free TAFE will change education in this great state forever. We on this side of the house know this. My community in Bayswater knows this. This Labor tradition runs deep within me. That is why when I was elected I visited by the end of December nearly every single one of the 17 schools in my electorate. I visited absolutely all of them—some four, five or six times. I visited lots of our preschools, and I further understand their needs. I am getting on with delivering for our community, as this government delivers for all schools across this great state. It is about building relationships. It is so important to do that with our local schools. Those opposite would not quite get that. I dare hazard a guess that many on that side would not be able to name every single school in their electorate. I would hazard a guess, and I would be happy to put \$20 on it. It is one of the best things that I do. In this budget—

**Mr Riordan:** How many have you got? Five?

**Mr TAYLOR:** Seventeen. In this budget I was proud to announce with the Deputy Premier \$1.39 million going to Bayswater Primary School to revolutionise the learning spaces. As he said to the young people, ‘We’re knocking the building down and we’re building a new one’. There will also be new toilet and administration facilities worth \$1.32 million at Boronia Heights Primary School. I am also proud that in the last four years we invested \$7.2 million more into local school infrastructure funding in my electorate than when those opposite were in power. And 80 per cent of their investment was into one school, with many missing out, which was an absolute disgrace.

It has been wonderful to get out and work with these local schools, and not only to invest in local schools in my electorate, like we have done recently, but also to put \$1.6 million into the Bayswater children and family learning centre, which will be opening very soon. The good member for Carrum over there is looking forward to coming out. We are going to be opening it. It is a beautiful place. And I tell you what: that is what we are about. We will not back down from education reform. We will not give up on our schools like those opposite. We will always properly fund them. We will deliver Dan’s vans, we will deliver free TAFE and we will guarantee three and four-year-old preschool and create the jobs of the future while doing so because we are Labor. It is the decent and human thing to do. We will always invest more and above in education than those opposite.

### Bills

#### **FIREFIGHTERS’ PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION AND FIRE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REFORM) BILL 2019**

*Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Mr MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (16:02): As I was saying in relation to presumptive rights, it is a commitment which the Victorian government made, and this commitment was the right commitment to make. Firefighters who get cancer currently have to go to great lengths to prove that firefighting was the cause of their cancer, despite the scientific evidence showing that a number of cancers are caused by firefighting activities under the current laws.

Reforms under this bill provide long-awaited presumptive rights to cancer compensation to all firefighters, whether they are career firefighters or volunteer firefighters, and it does so on an equal basis. This right created by this legislation will mean that eligible firefighters claiming compensation for these cancers will not have to prove that firefighting is the cause of their cancer. Instead it will be presumed that their cancer was caused by their firefighting and that they have an entitlement to compensation. This reform will help overcome the challenges that firefighters have faced in accessing compensation for cancer which has arisen from their service. As I said, the scheme will deliver equal access to compensation for career and volunteer firefighters. It will apply to firefighters who have developed cancer because of their service and have been diagnosed since 1 June 2016. Rules that require volunteer firefighters to have attended a specific number of fires are problematic, so the

presumptive rights scheme will instead mirror the approach taken in Queensland, which has no specific incident requirements.

WorkSafe will be the body that administers the scheme, with all presumptive rights payments being administered by the workers compensation scheme. The scheme will be reimbursed for volunteer claims as well as legal and other administrative costs from those claims by special appropriation from the Consolidated Fund. This scheme will also support volunteer firefighters by taking into account exceptional exposure events, enabling firefighters who have attended such an event to qualify for the presumption even if they do not meet the minimum years of service—additional benefits that no other scheme has. An expert committee will be established to advise WorkSafe on these matters. The government will also create a dedicated assistance fund to support the very small number of people who may not fit the criteria of this scheme.

The bill also works towards the modernisation of Victoria's fire services. No-one likes change, especially those opposite, but reform for our firefighters is needed to maintain a purpose fit for the state, and there are many drivers that show the need for this bill, population growth being one such driver. No-one would deny that our population is growing, and the environment in which our fire services operate in is changing rapidly too. Victoria's population has grown from 3.2 million in 1966 to 6.5 million in 2018. The population is projected to reach 10 million by 2051, an increase of 4.6 million, with growth concentrated in major regional centres and Melbourne's outer suburbs.

Our climate is changing rapidly. Nine of the 10 warmest years on record have occurred since 2005, and 2018 was Victoria's third warmest on record, with rainfall about 25 per cent below the average, the lowest since 2006. Heatwaves are also lengthening fire seasons, and bushfires will likely increase in frequency and intensity and affect more densely populated areas.

Operational changes are also placing greater demands on the state's fire services. In 2006 CFA brigades attended 22 294 emergency incidents. Over 10 years to 2016 this increased by 25 per cent to 27 859. The number of incidents that the 37 integrated brigades responded to has increased significantly from 12 214 incidents in 2006 to 18 539 in 2016, which represents an increase of 51.7 per cent.

In terms of governance, this bill will establish a new fire services agency, Fire Rescue Victoria, which will replace the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. FRV will be constituted by a new fire rescue commissioner, who will replace the MFB board and assume all of the existing functions, powers and duties of the board, the CEO and the chief officer too. These changes will ensure clear lines of responsibility within FRV both in the day-to-day management of the organisation and in the critical time of responding to emergencies. It needs to do this as outdated governance structures have resulted in a lack of direction, and confusion regarding overall responsibilities in some areas. This change will result in the CFA's existing 38 career and integrated stations being located within the FRV fire district. These stations will therefore become the responsibility of FRV, effectively bringing together all of the state's career firefighters into the one organisation. Differences in CFA and MFB practices and equipment affect the ability of firefighters from each service to work together in responding to emergencies.

The bill will enshrine the important role of volunteers in the CFA by inserting an additional responsibility for the CFA board to support the effective and sustainable recruitment, development and retention of volunteer officers and members to deliver capability in the provision of the CFA services. It is for these reasons that our firefighting services need to be modernised in the way that I have so described. It needs to take into account the health and wellbeing of all firefighters, whether they are career firefighters or whether they are volunteers. It needs to ensure that all communities are safe as the population grows and as the operative and physical environments change around us. I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr M O'BRIEN** (Malvern—Leader of the Opposition) (16:09): One of the primary tasks of any government is to keep its citizens safe, and when it comes to natural disasters, when it comes to bushfires, nobody does that better than our volunteer-based CFA. Yet despite the very proud traditions

and proud history of our volunteer firefighters, this government is hell-bent on destroying the CFA as we know it, and for that this government stands condemned—absolutely condemned. We have seen in numbers, in raw numbers, the effect of this government’s war on CFA volunteers.

**A member** interjected.

**Mr M O’BRIEN:** It is a war on volunteers, Minister, and I am about to tell you and the Parliament what the casualties are. In the 2013–14 annual report CFA operational volunteer numbers were 38 335. By the 2017–18 annual report those numbers had dropped to 34 586—3749 fewer volunteers. They are volunteers who walked away; volunteers who were driven away by this government’s constant attacks on them, their integrity and their professionalism. That is a 9.8 per cent fall. This is having real ramifications for community safety. We saw significant fires earlier this year, and a lot of people in those areas, the community who understands those areas, said it was due to a lack of planned burning. The planned burning was not happening. Why was the planned burning not happening? Maybe we should look at a letter from the project manager of the planned burn task force pilot program, Mr Tony Brady, on a CFA letterhead dated 29 January 2019. In that letter he says, and I quote:

CFA’s capacity to undertake planned burning has been restricted by a lack of volunteer numbers ...

So as this government attacks CFA volunteers and undermines them, those volunteers are walking away, and the CFA itself says the lack of volunteer numbers is what is leading to a lack of planned burning, and that is putting our state at risk. That is putting us at risk. Those numbers are being felt desperately, and I would like to read into the record—

**Ms Neville** interjected.

**Mr M O’BRIEN:** You have had your chance, Minister. You have had your chance. This is my chance. I would like to read into the record part of an article from the *Weekly Times* of 14 November 2018, entitled ‘CFA sick of being treated like second-class firefighters’:

The CFA has lost 3534 of its operational volunteers since the end of 2014, a whopping 9 per cent slump in its active firefighting force.

Many of these volunteers led the battles against the massive fires that engulfed the state in 2003, 2006 and Black Saturday in 2009.

...

This comes despite Andrews Government attempts to stop volunteer numbers being released publicly.

Well, why would that be the case? We wonder. The article goes on:

The ‘CFA at a Glance’ quarterly update on volunteer numbers has not been published since October last year and the Government refused to release the authority’s 2017–18 annual report, despite it being signed off by the Victorian Auditor General in late August.

Again, the government did not want it to come out before the state election, because then the full scale of their attack on CFA volunteers would have become apparent. The article continues:

However, *The Weekly Times* has seen CFA data that shows it is bleeding firefighters.

Volunteers say they’re being treated as second-class firefighters by the Government’s determination to split the CFA and strip it of responsibility for at least 35 integrated stations in regional cities and outer Melbourne.

‘Splitting the CFA takes us on a highway to hell,’ said former Frankston volunteer Charles Dennis, who left his brigade early last year.

Frankston! And good to see the member for Frankston come in here. Perhaps he can listen to more of what former Frankston CFA volunteer Charles Dennis said:

‘The more volunteers we lose from outer metro stations the less surge capacity we’re going to have.’

Bealiba CFA volunteer Nifty Gordon said there was a ‘massive swell of people pissed off with that man Dan (Andrews)’.

'I'm worried if he gets this through (legislation to split the CFA) we're going to see more people walk away from it,' he said.

Other volunteers who have left the CFA say they are sick of being portrayed by the Government and United Firefighters Union as 'second-class' fire fighters and 'country hicks'.

A brigade captain in one of outer Melbourne's highest bushfire-risk areas said he had lost members who were sick of being vilified.

'A big part of being in the CFA is community pride,' he said.

'(But) people now question our response times and validity of our training.'

This is a government that has taken the stick to the most precious people in our community; volunteers who keep us safe, who save property and who save lives. And why? Why is this government so keen to marginalise the CFA volunteers? Why are they so keen to drive CFA volunteers out from emergency services? Well, whether you want to call them Peter's puppets or Marshall's marionettes, the answer is the same: these people here are dancing to the tune of Peter Marshall, the secretary of the United Firefighters Union (UFU). Like Voldemort, the Premier cannot even bring himself to mention his name in this place. He will not say the words 'Peter Marshall', but we know that Peter Marshall is imprinted on his brain and we know that he controls every single policy decision. Not only has he been prepared to see board members sacked, CEOs sacked and chief fire officers sacked, he lost one of his own ministers—one of his own ministers who was prepared to stand up for the CFA, stand up for the community's safety and stand up for volunteers and say, 'This is wrong'. But when push came to shove—push literally came to shove—that minister, Jane Garrett, was thrown under a bus by this Premier, by this government, in order to continue their war on the CFA to appease Peter Marshall. I do not know what is on that videotape, but it must be a cracker. It must be an absolute cracker to see this government sell out the CFA.

Now, I make this point. The government says, 'Oh, there won't be that much change'. Well, that is absolute nonsense. This government will make sure that integrated stations are not integrated; they will have a Berlin wall put down the middle of them, and the volunteers will be locked out. They will not be able to have the run of their stations. They will not truly be integrated. For the minister's information, integrated means bringing together, not separated. This sounds like the same sort of weird theory that was used in apartheid South Africa: that they can grow separately but together. No, integrated means integrated. This treating CFA volunteers like second-class citizens is disgraceful. It is immoral. It is absolutely immoral.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission said that the surge capacity of our CFA was absolutely essential to keeping this community safe—absolutely vital. Yet this government, through this bill, through its actions in attacking the CFA and undermining CFA volunteers, is diminishing that surge capacity. Because what happens when, God forbid, the next Black Saturday occurs? What happens when it occurs? And we know sadly, from history, that one day this will occur. What happens when there are no CFA volunteers because this government has driven them away? Who is going to fight those fires? Well, Peter Marshall's answer is, 'We'll just employ thousands of extra UFU members and everything will be fine'. Well, no. Community safety does not work like that. Communities do not work like that. The bushfires royal commission knows it does not work like that, and that is why this is a bad bill.

Now, in the last minute let me make completely clear that this side of the house completely supports presumptive rights for cancer. We tried to introduce legislation in the last Parliament, but Labor voted against it. We tried to introduce legislation in this Parliament; Labor voted against it. We want to get that legislation through to give all firefighters, career and volunteer, equal presumptive rights, and we will vote to support equal presumptive rights, but what we will not support is an attack on our CFA, an attack on our CFA volunteers or an attack on our regional, rural and outer suburban communities. And we will not support something which makes Victoria less safe, which is what this bill does.

**Mr CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (16:19): I rise to speak on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019, and I do so in the full knowledge that we as a Labor government took this to the 2018 state election. Not only did we take it to the election, but we were very clear about what we would do to prosecute the need for reform with our fire services across this state.

The CFA was established back in the 1950s, and over that period of time the firefighting complexity and the challenges that firefighters face in this state have dramatically changed. They have changed because we have had massive population growth. Through that period our population has doubled, and in the next decade or so it will double again. Not only that, but of course the challenges of fighting fires in modern multistorey developments are much more complicated than they were in the 1950s. As a consequence I think we need to put in place comprehensive reform that recognises these particular challenges.

But further, and one of my colleagues mentioned this earlier, we have the challenges that come from climate change. Those challenges mean that we have longer fire seasons and we have longer periods of intense drought, and we need to recognise those challenges and put in place the resources that are required to meet those challenges.

I can remember when I was a federal MP for the federal seat of Corangamite the bushfires that took place through that period of time. In fact I can recall the bushfires royal commission that investigated the way in which we as a government and the way in which we as a society and a community responded to those tragic events that took place.

Like many others in this place I have many friends that are career firefighters and I have many friends that are volunteer firefighters, and I want to acknowledge each and every one of them for keeping our communities safe and putting themselves in harm's way to protect the communities in which they reside. To my way of thinking they are fantastic people.

As I said earlier, our state has grown dramatically. The challenges to firefighting are more complicated and complex now, and this necessary reform I think will set our fire services up for many years to come. I certainly look forward to working with the minister and the government on this.

On Sunday I had the pleasure, with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, to meet with the integrated stations in and around the Geelong area. We had at that forum both career firefighters—senior management from the CFA region—and also volunteer fire services, and in a very detailed way the minister went through and explained the reforms and took questions and gave answers as to what it meant for them. My observation of that meeting and from the conversations I had with career firefighters and volunteer firefighters was that Geelong firefighters want to get on with this reform. They want to participate, and they want to be engaged in the reform process. They acknowledge that this is a big reform. Of course if we accept the proposition that is being put forward by the Liberal Party that we need further consultation, then I think we run the great risk of delaying these necessary reforms for a further fire season. I think these reforms are necessary, I think they are critical and I think we very much need to get on with implementation.

I was also reflecting on what others did when they were given that great gift of government and reflecting on the bushfires royal commission on the Black Saturday fires that took place in 2009. If my memory serves me correctly, when the Liberal Party was given that opportunity to be in government they actually cut the CFA budget to the tune of \$66 million. That was the Liberal Party's commitment to the CFA. It was to take the back of an axe to the CFA and to cut not only the resources that career and volunteer firefighters need but of course the resources that their support staff need. That has been the approach of the Liberal Party in terms of this reform. I can remember through that period having many conversations with members in the community where I lived about the consequences of these cuts and what it meant to the delivery of fire services.

I have also been listening intently to a number of contributions from a number of MPs through the course of the proceedings over the last day or so, and I particularly want to dispel some of the myths that I have heard in this place. I want to make it clear that the fire registration board only registers firefighters who are career firefighters. It does not play any role in registering volunteer firefighters. I have heard that claim made on a number of occasions. It is wrong; it is false. In fact it is simply scaremongering, and it should really be condemned for what it is.

These reforms are of course important. This bill builds on the commitments that we have made to firefighters across this state. Whether they be career firefighters or volunteer firefighters, by the type of activity they are undertaking we acknowledge and recognise that they are exposed to a number of carcinogens that other members of the community are not, and as a consequence of that we acknowledge that there is an increased probability that they will pick up certain cancers. We have seen presumptive rights legislation passed in other jurisdictions across this country. We have made this commitment that we will implement these necessary reforms.

I know from talking to many firefighters, whether they be career or volunteer, that they know people amongst their ranks that have suffered cancer, and the likelihood is that some of those cancers were contracted as a consequence of the service that they provided to their communities and to their state, whether that be as a career firefighter or a volunteer firefighter. We very much want to see this legislation passed as quickly as possible so that we can get on with implementing this reform in a timely way that delivers fire services for this state.

**Mr MORRIS** (Mornington) (16:29): Normally I would say it is a pleasure to rise to join a debate, but I have got to say it is not a pleasure to join this debate, because the bill before the house has very, very few redeeming features. Some elements of the bill certainly are welcome, but they are very, very few and far between, and of course I am referring to sections that relate to presumptive rights. If the government had followed the lead of the coalition parties for now a very long time, presumptive rights would have been in place and operating—all done. Indeed that aspect of the bill certainly still has our support, as was affirmed by the Leader of the Opposition in this chamber just a few minutes ago.

The rest of the bill is a disgraceful attack on one of the pre-eminent volunteer organisations not just in this state, not just in this nation but around the world. It is a disgraceful attack. It is in fact I think as close to corrupt behaviour as I have ever seen in public life in Victoria because it is a blatant payback to the United Firefighters Union (UFU) for the support they provided—the aggressive support they provided—for the now Premier of Victoria and his colleagues in 2014. I say ‘aggressive’ very deliberately, because it was aggression in a physical sense. It was not just enthusiastic support; it was aggression in a physical sense.

Victoria has a world-class fire service. This is a bill that sets out to systematically dismantle that world-class fire service, and the consequences are potentially catastrophic. At a minimum this bill will compromise the capacity of the state to respond to major fires. I want to make it clear that I have genuine enormous respect for both the courage and the competence of our firefighters, be they career firefighters or volunteer firefighters—absolute respect for their courage and for their competence. But it seems to me that too many career firefighters are being used by their union and being used by the government for a series of goals that have really nothing to do with running a world-class service, because the end goal is to destroy an organisation that the union and the government see as being a barrier to a unionised fire service—because they see here an opportunity to expand the public sector, to expand the power base of a relatively small union and to boost union membership at the expense of the Victorian community.

Right from the start this has been a campaign of lies and a campaign of intimidation. The first we saw of this campaign really was way back in 2014, and that was the intent of the leadership of the union through dint of numbers to intimidate the Parliament during the estimates hearings in 2014. We had then Minister Wells at the estimates hearings, and we had the gallery absolutely jam-packed. We had the area outside the hearing chamber at the top of the stairs on the Legislative Council side absolutely

jam-packed and what appeared to be a deliberate attempt to corral the minister in the hearing room. It was absolutely disgraceful. Of course we know about, and we have heard about frequently, the intimidation of coalition booth workers during the 2014 campaign, sometimes physical but certainly with no veil on the aggression—not at all. And then of course there was the lie of the fake fire uniforms.

And it did not improve when the government changed. Very, very early in the piece, early in the life of the government, we saw the draft enterprise agreement prepared by Peter Marshall. We know the drawbacks with that, and I certainly do not intend to go into them again this afternoon. The CFA board of course stood up to the union, and they were sacked. The minister stood up to the union and she was forced out. And that was just a few of the many, many people that have tried to stand up to this union, tried to stand up to this government, and they have been forced out of the fire services. They are lost to the fire services in this state.

When finally the bill arrived in the Legislative Assembly I do not think even at that point, had the government proceeded reasonably, the matter would have been capable of resolution. But the government of course continued this bullying, aggressive approach. They forced the bill through this chamber. In the other place the government refused to pair a known opponent of the bill. They then kept the house sitting through the night into Easter. They tried to bully the bill through the Parliament and of course they failed—as they should have, as they deserved to do.

Now we have a new bill, a bill that will not be implemented until next year at the earliest, a bill that is not in any way urgent, but again the government has not only set aside the accepted practices of this house but, far more importantly, set aside the opportunity for the community to have a say about this legislation before it is dealt with by this house by concealing the bill until the last possible moment. It could have been brought in last week, it could have been brought in in March, it could have been brought in in February, but it was not. It was concealed, and now the government are trying to ram it through with as little scrutiny as they can achieve. And I will tell you what, I will guarantee there will be no consideration in detail on this bill. I really would like to ask members opposite, though, ‘Why are you really so scared of allowing the public to scrutinise this bill? What are you trying to hide?’. It is absolutely disgraceful.

The minister suggested yesterday there had been consultation. The fact is the volunteers’ representatives were briefed this week. They have had no time to consider the views of the membership. They have had no time to allow proper input into discussion on the future of their organisation—and it is their organisation. It is an organisation for the volunteers.

We know that Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria issued a media release last week on the basis of the first-reading speech because, like everyone else in the state apart from the cabinet, they were not aware of what was in the bill. They indicated last week that they were continuing to caution the government that the proposed changes would weaken rather than strengthen service delivery capability for urban growth areas, that it would have the same problem for the surge capacity support for regional Victorian major statewide disasters—and goodness knows there have been enough of those in the last 12 years—and that it was also in direct contradiction to the learnings and findings from the 2009 Victorian bushfires royal commission. That is the view of the volunteers.

I have a couple of points on some of the detail in the bill. The government talked at length about response times, and the then minister was not above bagging the results in particular areas and, by inference, particular brigades. This bill is not at all about response times. The current CFA model allows the CFA to work with local volunteers and station career firefighters at any station. That opportunity is under threat. The current model allows for integration. In my own patch, Mornington is an integrated station, and it works well with those volunteers—well, it has up until recent times in any case. They have worked well with Mount Martha, with Mount Eliza and with Moorooduc. This bill is about separation; it is about undoing that integration. As one of my colleagues said earlier today, it has the risk of increasing division.

Finally of course, there are the issues with the Firefighters Registration Board, the four people who will decide who is fit to hold the office of firefighter—one appointed by the minister and the other three effectively appointed by the United Firefighters Union. This is a disgraceful, partisan attack on our volunteer firefighters and an attack on a proud organisation that has served this community incredibly well. It is a blatant abuse of the power of government to advance the interests of a tiny minority at the expense of a very large majority. It is as near a corrupt use of the tyranny of the majority as I have ever seen in this place. Should this legislation pass, and that unfortunately appears likely, this bill and the tactics that have been used to force it through will come back to haunt this government.

**Ms COUZENS** (Geelong) (16:39): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. Can I begin by firstly congratulating the minister for her work and her determination to keep the community safe and our firefighters, career and volunteer. The fact of the matter is that the minister is committed to making a stronger volunteer organisation. I thank her for that, and I know the people of Geelong thank her for that.

We made a commitment going into the last election to reform our fire services, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are determined to do that. The people of Victoria voted us in. They voted us in knowing that these reforms were on the table. We had a resounding win. I know the member for Frankston was attacked earlier by those opposite, but he increased his margin at the last election. It appears to me that those opposite are making up their own history. They are making up their own history about what happened last year at Easter time when these reforms should have gone through the upper house and did not because of the dirty tricks played by those on their side. In some ways you could look at that as a positive thing, because we then went to the election and had a resounding win.

So what does that say about those opposite? I know during the election period I was out on street stalls talking to firefighters and volunteers—both career and volunteer firefighters—and talking to Liberal voters, who said they would never vote Liberal again after what they did in the upper house. It was not just one or two; there were many people who made those comments, because they were so appalled at what those opposite did in relation to this major reform. Everybody knows that we need it. We know that it is about community safety. We know that it is about keeping our firefighters safe, whether they are career or volunteer. These reforms have to happen, and so I am delighted that this has come into the chamber. It is well overdue. It should have happened a long time ago. We are operating in a system that was built, I think, in the 1950s some time, and there has been this resistance to change. We now have this fantastic opportunity to see this change.

As my friend the member for South Barwon indicated earlier, when you talk to family and friends who are involved as volunteers in the CFA or are career firefighters, they tell you what is going on within their ranks. We know that people want this over and done with. Firefighters, volunteer or career, want to see an end to this. They want to see the reforms, they want to see improvements, they want this change to happen and they want it to happen now. People are getting tired of waiting. The fearmongering and misinformation that has come from those opposite has been absolutely appalling. They are making up their own stories. There is no truth in a lot of what they are saying over there. It is unbelievable the stories and misinformation they are putting out there, and they are again trying to build up that fear in our community right now that the bill is back in the chamber. Well, I do not think they will be very successful. I am moving around my community, as I do, and nobody has any concerns about this bill being tabled. I know the member for South Barwon feels the same. The member for Bellarine, who happens to be the minister, feels the same, as does the member for Lara, the other neighbouring electorate.

I think we have to see this bill passed. People are over it. The scaremongering has had a major impact on our volunteers and our career firefighters. They are devastated about a lot that has gone on over the last couple of years—things that never should have happened. We know the stories that they have put out there to try to gear up opposition to these major forms. They might have had some significance or

impact on those communities back in the earlier period, but when I talk to community now they do not believe them. I think it is clear, given some months ago we actually won the election with a resounding result. So those opposite might want to think about what they are doing and what they are saying to their community. This scaremongering has got to stop. My recollection is they won the 2010 election with the same sort of scaremongering, and the federal government has just won the election on scaremongering. This is what these people on the opposite side are doing continually, and they have cut \$66 million, as the member for South Barwon pointed out. So it is an absolute disgrace that they continue along this line of scaremongering, which is doing nothing for their community. You are certainly not supporting your community out there and acknowledging that we do need this major fire reform.

I know in my electorate the regional growth around Geelong has been astronomical, and I know the member for South Barwon sees the same thing—there are major developments going on in his electorate, as there are in mine. We need the firefighters—whether they are volunteer or career it does not matter—to be able to respond when there is a fire. People do not care who is driving the truck as long as they are a firefighter turning up to put the fire out, whether it is at their home, whether it is at an industrial estate or whether it is at a commercial building. They are not going to ask that person whether they are a volunteer or a career firefighter. They just want to see that truck turn up in plenty of time to put that fire out. So it is not an issue for many, many people who is driving that truck or who is on the truck to fight the fire; it is about getting them there and getting them there with the best possible resources that we can provide as a government.

Our firefighters currently operate under systems and structures that have not changed since the 1950s, and it is clear that these services need to be modernised to meet the growing demands of our community. This legislation should already be law, as we know.

The bill focuses on the introduction of the presumptive right to compensation for firefighters who have one of 12 cancers, have served for the requisite number of years and meet other qualifying requirements; the establishment of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) headed by a fire rescue commissioner; the establishment of a strategic advisory panel which will provide strategic advice to the fire rescue commissioner; the establishment of a new FRV fire district which will replace the metropolitan fire district and redraw the boundaries of the district to include growth areas in Melbourne as well as major regional centres; the establishment of a new fire district review panel which will be responsible for reviewing and advising future changes to the district; the transfer of CFA career firefighters, instructors and practical area drill operators to FRV; the establishment of a process for secondment agreement so that the key operational staff can be seconded from FRV to the CFA to meet the CFA's statutory and operational requirements; the establishment of a Firefighters Registration Board to assess and register FRV employees who are seconded to the CFA; and the establishment of an implementation monitor responsible for monitoring the implementation of the reforms over a 10-year period.

More than that we need systems that honour the hard work and commitment of our firefighters and acknowledge the significant risks and dangers that they face daily. This bill delivers to our career and volunteer firefighters a presumptive right to compensation for cancer claims arising from their service. This is an important reform that will make the process of applying for compensation less onerous for many Victorian firefighters. These laws recognise the invaluable service provided by firefighters and the dangerous work that they do, and I think it is just fantastic that this government is acknowledging that. The minister has worked hard on this bill, and I am very pleased that we are able to implement that. This bill will ensure that Victoria's career fire service is modernised with clear accountability structures to meet the needs of a growing and vibrant state. Of course that includes areas such as the Geelong region. It also restores the CFA to its roots as a community-based, locally responsive organisation made up of dedicated volunteer firefighters and makes it a stronger organisation, and it ensures that these volunteer firefighters— (*Time expired*)

**Dr READ** (Brunswick) (16:50): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. I would like to start by acknowledging the work done by Colleen Hartland, who was the Greens member for Western Metropolitan Region in the other place for over a decade. Colleen was a strong advocate for presumptive compensation rights for firefighters and championed this matter for many years. She brought a private members bill that proposed to establish such a scheme in 2011, which was rejected by the then Liberal government, and she has continued fighting for the introduction of presumptive compensation in Victoria since then.

When moving that her private members bill be referred to a committee in 2013, Colleen said, and I quote:

... this bill goes beyond party politics. This bill is about getting adequate WorkCover compensation for firefighters who contract cancer and follows precedents successfully set in other jurisdictions, including the commonwealth. It is about protecting those who protect us ...

So it is a pity that politics last year has resulted in us lagging behind the rest of the country in introducing a presumptive compensation scheme for our firefighters. These changes are long overdue, and I know that Colleen and many of her fellow campaigners will be very pleased to see this bill come before the Parliament today.

By now it is very clear that there is an established link between firefighting and certain types of cancer. By chance, really, an authoritative meta-analysis on the subject has literally just been published in the *International Journal of Cancer* this year, and it shows risks elevated to around, say, 12 per cent for colorectal cancer, 15 per cent for prostate cancer, 20-odd per cent for thyroid and melanoma cancers and up a third in testicular cancer; and also elevated risks in some but not other studies for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, pancreatic cancer and pleural mesothelioma. That is a lot of cancers. Many of those are virtually untreatable—for example, pancreatic and mesothelioma—or have high mortality rates. If you have read other mortality risk figures that are different to this, that is because this is a synthesis of about 27 studies and it has just averaged all of the results. A lot of those studies will have been in different countries with different types of people fighting different types of fires. You can imagine that the risks associated with fighting, say, a bushfire in a haystack might be different to the health risks involved in fighting a fire in a building made of all sorts of plastics and flammable cladding and chemicals we have never heard of. So that explains some differences in the risks between studies, but what is not in dispute is the increase in risk. If you want to work this out, the 34 per cent increase in the risk of testicular cancer—and let us assume that that figure is the truth—would mean that one quarter of testicular cancers in firefighters were due to their occupation. That is how you would interpret those figures.

But the difficulties in proving causation with this kind of epidemiological evidence means that firefighters' claims for workers compensation were in the past often rejected. So we are pleased that this bill is finally introducing presumptive compensation for firefighters who develop particular types of cancer. In a presumptive scheme, firefighters diagnosed with cancer will no longer have to prove that their cancer was caused by the firefighting. It will simply be presumed that the cancer was caused and that they are entitled to compensation. The scheme will also take into account exceptional exposure events—the September 11 event would be an obvious example—so that firefighters who have attended such an event will still be entitled to presumptive compensation if they do not otherwise meet the qualifying period. The qualifying periods are aligned with those in place in other states' schemes.

Our emergency services personnel play such an important role in looking after all of us. They are exposed to danger as part of their work when the rest of us just run away from it, so it is our role to look after them. Considering the delays brought about by the Good Friday affair and everything else, I support the measures to get presumptive compensation law as soon as possible. That explains why we are supporting this legislation this week. We are keen to see this adopted as soon as possible, and for that reason the Greens will be supporting this bill.

**Mr RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:54): It is a pleasure to again rise on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019, and it has been a journey to this point in time once again that has seen significant politics and significant heartache throughout Victoria in our fire services. This has been a testing and trying time for those people—professionals, volunteer and career firefighters, who do our state the utmost service each and every day keeping our communities safe.

There has been a lot of bloodshedding from this process of getting to this point in time. Sadly a lot of that has been based on mistruths, misinformation, fear and the lack of integrity from numerous participants who would rather choose political expediency over the interests of their community and the safety of their residents and their constituents. But in this place we always come in with the hope that when people put up their hand and they take the oath or affirmation they will always defend the interests of their communities. When you have overwhelming evidence that says that residents are put at risk based on the current structure of our fire services, the notion that you would embark on damaging and political campaigns that damage communities, split families and hurt firefighters more broadly is truly extraordinary.

But it is worth reflecting on how we have come to this point. People have mentioned Good Friday, but what is more telling is the categorisation of career firefighters, who are indeed United Firefighters Union (UFU) members as well. Something that I have noticed across discussions in this place and in speeches that have been made is the demonisation of these heroes—these people who risk their lives and suffer along the journey with post-traumatic stress disorder from what they see and the support that they provide to our communities. The shadow emergency services minister talking quite disparagingly about the separation of volunteer and career firefighters as if they are segregated or something to be feared or something that is poorer in our state is very disappointing.

But there is form in this place, because of course during debates on the last bill we saw some pretty horrible statements about career firefighters and Black Saturday. It required the then shadow minister and now shadow minister and member for Gembrook to publicly apologise. Then again we saw through that journey the Good Friday pairing debacle and the Leader of The Nationals again saying how proud he was to defeat presumptive rights legislation in this state. Once again we saw rank politics getting in the way of the protection of firefighters and communities. That is the real, sad, telling truth of where we find ourselves today.

There is one more kicker in this story. There is one more thing that we need to reflect on, and that is the 'Hands off the CFA' campaign. Now, anyone across this Parliament takes a political party at face value—the issue that they put forward and the debate that we have in our democracy and in this Parliament—but when we saw those opposite try to raise money to siphon funds into their pockets to line their next campaign on the back of fear and misinformation, then we knew really what the truth was in this debate. We knew that it was never about safety. It was never about 'saving the CFA'. It was about political expediency. It was about securing the election of a Liberal government in 2018. Well, the Victorian people made their decision. This was the most hypersensitive and most exposed campaign through the 58th Parliament. The result of the election was the affirmation that safety rather than fear, protection of community rather than rank politics, was going to be the way forward in our state.

We did not want to debate this bill during the fire season because our dedicated firefighters were serving our communities. I reflect on Bunyip. The Bunyip State Park fire, for the affected communities throughout Baw Baw shire and Cardinia shire, was a significantly challenging time. My wife's family live in Gembrook, and consistently we were tracking the mapping, which you do when you are on a fire risk. It is the screenshot every half-hour to see the expansion of the fire front. What we saw—and this is telling across the board—was an incident controller put in place and every available resource, be it career, volunteer or community, all fronting up in the name of community safety and protection. And they are the best elements of our firefighters. Because whether you are a career firefighter or a

volunteer, the professionalism that they put forward each and every day in the protection of our communities is truly inspiring.

I think the member for Rowville might have mentioned this and reflected before on how members will go back to their communities and front up to them about changes that might occur. Well, I put this to the member for Rowville, who I have served on a committee with: come out for a cuppa at Edithvale. Take the politics out of this. Come with me to Edithvale fire station. Come with me, anytime, any day. I will get the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee out of the way. I will even shout the coffee. Come and talk to my crew, a full volunteer brigade in Edithvale—a full volunteer brigade with over 130 members, wonderful female participation and excellent leadership. And guess what? They are nestled around career firefighters and an integrated brigade. Mentone and Highett are MFB stations and they are in an ecosystem of fire protection in our community and they link in with crews at Patterson River, Springvale and Dandenong for any form of critical incident. That is what the ecosystem of fire safety is reflected in.

We have had senior people in Volunteer Fire Brigade Victoria (VFBV) leadership who are members of the Edithvale brigade, and that should not be lost on anyone. During this whole campaign—during the whole fear campaign and the fundraising—senior VFBV members, in the executive, who then presented evidence at Fiskville on behalf of volunteer brigades, were senior members of the Edithvale brigade, yet we saw past the politics and we saw opportunity because they have all existed already in that ecosystem. And despite our communities growing, they continue to protect and support others around them. And they are professionals; at Edithvale, in every sense of the word, they are professionals.

They have an emergency medical response vehicle as well out of there. Now, for anyone who does not know what that is: there was a piloted trial and Edithvale volunteer brigade was a part of that trial. They could be first to an incident and keep people ticking along before a mobile intensive care ambulance or our paramedics get there, and on occasions they are the first there. Volunteers who are stationed at Edithvale are ready to go, and this is the kind of professionalism in our ecosystem of emergency services.

So the challenge is that when this bill steps forward past this house maybe those opposite can reflect on a new era from the 1950s, from when the Country Fire Authority evolved—from the numerous reports and the numerous warnings that the Victorian Parliament has had about safety. We have had coronial inquests, we have had royal commissions, we have seen the fall overs, and when you do not have the proper standards and delivery times, lives are put at risk. And that is the real key here. Of course we need to be focused on surge capacity, and if Bunyip was any example of that—with all the agencies coming together to support those communities and the absolute heroism that was shown by every agency there—that is how everyone sticks together. In the absence of leadership across the Parliament we have had leadership at the grassroots level when critical incidents come forward. It is a chance to turn the page and turn it to a new era of firefighting in our state. This is the challenge that we put forward: that we step away from the politics, we step away from fear campaigns in communities and we lead now in a positive fashion to bring everyone together.

The reality is that the election is done and dusted now, and it is time now for us to put aside the combative nature and then go, 'How can we empower our brigades?'. We will always be asking for more; we will always have a view of what we can do. But the notion that volunteerism will be destroyed in Victoria has not played out in any circumstance or in any of the reports and significant investigations in CFA over a number of years, and it will not play out now, because of the values and the ethos that are put forward by brigades like Edithvale, who work each and every day not just in our community to keep people safe and alive but throughout our state during critical incidents.

So that is the challenge: will we put forward rank politics into the 59th Parliament or can we rule a line under the deep divisions and bitterness that we saw, which even saw people trying to line the

pockets of political parties, and those opposite, the Liberal and National parties, trying to profit off the fear and misery of that CFA dispute? That is the challenge.

The final thing I would reflect on—and I have mentioned it briefly—is that now is the time also for the shadow minister to stop demonising UFU firefighters. Enough is enough. Career firefighters do an incredible job. They are heroes in our community. This notion to keep beating up on them consistently, even with the example that was shown at the Bunyip Ridge state fire during Black Saturday—enough is enough. Show some integrity, rule a line under this, let us get this bill on its way and let us reform the CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria.

**Ms McLEISH** (Eildon) (17:04): I guess it is with a heavy heart that I rise to join the debate on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019, and I have a bit of a feeling of *deja vu*, because it was quite some time ago—over 12 months ago—that we debated this bill. I find the circumstances that this bill has found itself to be in the house to be somewhat disturbing as well, with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services pushing this through for no apparent reason. We are not going to see this come into effect until August next year, so there is ample time for the department and the minister's office to work through this and make sure that, if they need to do these changes, they go through at that point.

But I, like everybody on this side, have very strong and passionate feelings for the role of the Country Fire Authority, and I am very concerned about what this bill is going to do to erode not just the confidence in the CFA but the ability for them to carry out their work as best they can. Their spirits at the moment are particularly low, and I am again disturbed to see the number of people that come and seek me out to talk about their fears for the future of volunteerism in the CFA as time progresses, and to see people who have been so actively engaged in an organisation for decades. I see my father, having been a 45-year veteran of the Limestone fire brigade. People who are still young and active but who still may have done 20, 30 or 40 years are feeling ripped apart by this government and this legislation for many, many reasons.

I am proud to have been part of a government, a Liberal-Nationals government, that actually introduced the volunteer charter, and the volunteers were particularly excited to see this. That charter says:

Ensures the State of Victoria and CFA will commit to consultation with Volunteers about all matters which might reasonably be expected to affect Volunteers ...

That simply has not been the case. We see a bill that is before us now that treats them differently in terms of presumptive rights legislation. The career firefighters will have access to particular legislation for certain diseases that the volunteer firefighters will not have. As has been said previously, we have the same fire, the same smoke and the same cancers in some instances, and I think it is extremely discriminatory not to include the volunteers in that. That was one of the reasons we sought in the last Parliament to split this bill so that we could deal with the presumptive rights legislation quite separately from the reorganisation of fire services in Victoria. Very disappointingly the government did not take that up.

We also went to the effort of introducing a private members bill to bring this presumptive rights legislation forward because, make no mistake, this is something that we support for career firefighters and certainly for volunteer firefighters. We see some types of fires—industrial fires, for example—where firefighters are going in and sometimes it is not exactly known what the nature of the fire is or what the cause of that fire is. I think this is reasonable, but I do not think that for other types of fires we should be discriminating against the volunteers.

We have seen a debacle, a sad situation actually, in how this has been managed over the last number of years, with the former Minister for Emergency Services, Jane Garrett, now in the other place, having the nerve to speak out and say that the bill that was going to be introduced was not a good thing for volunteer firefighters. We know what happened as a result of that: the axe came down on her. Peter

Marshall did not like it. We have seen people within the departments—we have seen Joe Buffone, Lucinda Nolan, Peter Rau, all these people—that have been moved on from their roles because they had the gall to speak out and to say that this legislation was not doing the right thing by volunteers.

I want to touch on the nature of integrated stations, because in some instances they can work and in others they do not. I find it quite distressing that volunteers in some stations are told, 'Here's the line. You don't cross the line. You're not allowed to use our kitchen; you can use that kitchen out there. You're not allowed to come through this door; you're allowed to come through that door'. Volunteers report these issues time and time again. People who are not even speaking to each other although in close proximity bring this up, so we know that it is actually true. With that sort of culture it makes it very difficult to actually move forward. We very much have to consider a culture in an organisation, and the culture in an organisation is very difficult to change. We have got this culture now that is being driven and being developed through the government's giving all to the firefighters union and taking all from the CFA volunteers.

I want to touch on the Fire Services Registration Board, which will comprise four people who can decide who is fit to hold the office of a firefighter. Now, our concerns are the nature of the people that are going to be filling these roles, be it as a nominee of the minister or of an industrial body, such as a senior firefighter from the United Firefighters Union. We have got all of these people who are going to have the UFU at the core of their being who will be making the decision about whether someone can be a firefighter or not. We will see, I am sure, that someone who has been a CFA volunteer for a long time—a group officer or someone who has worked in that group—who wants to make that move to being a career firefighter will be looked at negatively by that registration board because they have been a CFA volunteer. There is every likelihood of that occurring.

I draw on experience here. I had a role in government quite a number of years ago where there was a small panel who could determine which providers within their profession were able to do a particular lot of work. They would not let anyone else in. They thought they were the experts, they knew it all, and it was a very closed shop. I worry that this sort of thing will bring about a very closed shop. It was very difficult, because the culture within that group was that, 'We're the experts. We know it all. We know who we're going to keep out. No-one is as good as us, so we're going to make sure that no-one has that opportunity to come in'. I find that quite disturbing.

Another thing that I find disturbing about this bill before the house is that the minister has said it is the same bill that we have seen previously. We in the lower house know that once it passed through here it went to the upper house and a number of amendments were incorporated before it was voted on and voted down at that time. In the lower house we did not see those amendments. They may have been on the parliamentary website, but the fact remains that we did not know one way or another for certain whether what we were going to see this week was going to incorporate those changes or be the original bill. There are a number of people in this Parliament who were not here last time, and I think that they should have the opportunity to understand this legislation. The fact that we are debating this after having seen it almost 5 minutes ago, not a lot more than 5 minutes ago, I think is really appalling and a real blight on the government and their attempts to hide what is going on and not be transparent.

I support the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Gembrook in his shadow role and hope that this bill is not successful. I will say again that the coalition very much supports presumptive rights legislation. That is not part of the argument. But it is the review into the operations of the fire services and the implementation process that are our big concern.

**Mr EREN (Lara) (17:14):** I am also pleased to be speaking on this very important bill, the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. This bill replicates the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2017. Unfortunately, obviously, because of Bernie Finn and Craig Ondarchie this bill could not proceed through the upper house and it is a year wasted for all those firefighters who could have taken advantage of this very important bill that is before the house today.

The bill incorporates amendments that were agreed to at that time. Can I just put on the record that we as a government respect and thank all of those firefighters in our state, both career and volunteer. Obviously the bills that come before the house are all important, but this is of particular importance. We do not have many natural disasters, but one thing we do have is devastating bushfires. If we are not prepared as a community, if we are not prepared as a government and of course if we are not prepared, then devastating things occur, as we have seen with the devastating fires that have occurred in the history of our state, not to mention the devastating fires in my area of Lara and Little River. It is only 50 years ago that that fire occurred, and it nearly wiped Lara off the map. I want to thank my local CFA brigades out there in Lara, Corio, Anakie and Lovely Banks and of course Little River, whose boundary I share with the Treasurer, the member for Werribee.

In this state we are seeing a surge in our population. There is no question that the population has increased tremendously over the last 10 years in particular and is growing rapidly. Why wouldn't you want to live in a state where the economy is strong, where there are good meaningful jobs available and of course where it is a great place to live, work and raise your family. But what comes with that are some pressures, and I know that from my electorate particularly. My boundaries used to go to Wyndham Vale in Manor Lakes, but because of population growth I have now moved to Little River and come into Geelong. I know that growth corridor is growing at a faster rate than any other area in the nation—in Wyndham. So clearly some structures that were set in place in relation to our firefighting services were from the 1950s, and if the structures do not get changed, if we do not monitor them as a government, if we do not fine-tune how we provide that service and how we provide a service to our communities and if we are not careful, then we could have further devastation through bushfires going forward. That is why we see this important bill coming before the house, and we would have hoped that the opposition would have learned from the last election.

I know my good friend the member for Mordialloc has mentioned some of the politics that went on in relation to the opposition leading up to the last election. Indeed they tried to make the most of this situation, which is very sad for them. It did not work. I think people saw through the politics of this very important issue, and clearly we have come a long way in terms of reuniting some of those areas where they were deliberately divided by those opposite. Clearly this bill before the house will go a long way to making sure that we have the best fire services in the country, if not the world.

Our firefighters are the best in the world. There is no question of that. When expertise is required, whether it is during bushfires in California or indeed in other parts of the world where there are devastating bushfires, they seek some advice and want some help from our firefighters in Victoria. That is why it is imperative that we as a government provide the best resourcing that we can. Those opposite have shed crocodile tears for the CFA and the firefighters, both career and volunteer, but they are the party that cut the funding to the firefighters in their time in government. They have not learned much at all in relation to the politics of this. We had a resounding win at the last election—we are humble about that, there is no question—and that is an indicator of how the community supports us broadly. Of course one of the reasons that they voted for us is that they can trust us with their firefighting services. That is why we have been given another term in government.

The most important thing in relation to some of the areas that I look after in the electorate of Lara is not just the farmland, it is population growth, which has doubled over the last 15 years in terms of the growth that is occurring in Lara, particularly in the suburb of Lara. Lara also has some very important infrastructure, like Barwon Prison, Avalon Airport, Viva Energy and of course other very important assets that we need to be mindful of and protect. Of course we protect communities, but we also protect property in relation to some of that very important infrastructure that we have in my electorate particularly. That is why it is important that we provide a model of service to modernise our fire services going forward.

There is no question that some of the proposals before us today will modernise this. Some changes are occurring, and I will not go through them. I know that many of my colleagues on this side of the house

have gone through extensively some of the changes to Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). But I do want to particularly put on the record some of the presumptive rights. It is a situation where you are a volunteer out of the goodness of your heart—you are actually volunteering to protect your community. Of course time is the most important and precious commodity that any human being can have, yet you are volunteering your time and risking your life and limb, basically, to protect your community through being a volunteer CFA member. On top of that you are not given your rights if you contract some form of cancer which is directly related to the service that you provide to the community. That is extremely unfair. That is why, without mucking around, we want to stop the politics of all of this in this chamber—and indeed we will see it go on in the other chamber after the bill is passed through here—and get on with it. Let us protect these people that protect us. That is all we ask for. We have seen lots of politics being played out in terms of this important issue.

Prior to the 2014 election the Andrews government made a commitment to introduce presumptive rights legislation for firefighters who have contracted cancer. While evidence shows that a number of cancers can be caused by firefighting activities, under current laws firefighters have to go to great lengths to prove that firefighting was the cause of their cancer. The reforms in this bill will ensure presumptive rights to cancer compensation to all firefighters—career and volunteer—on an equal basis. This will mean that an eligible firefighter claiming compensation for these cancers will not have to prove that firefighting was the cause of their cancer. It will be presumed that their cancer was caused by their firefighting duties, and they will have an entitlement to compensation. This scheme will deliver equal access to both career and volunteer firefighters. It will apply to firefighters who have developed cancer because of their service and have been diagnosed since 1 June 2016.

We have looked at a number of models in Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland, and we think as a government we have come up with the best model going forward, which is the fairest for our firefighters, who deserve nothing but the best.

We have invested extensively in our services, as opposed to what the other side did when they were in government. The proof is in the pudding. We are proud of the investments we have made. We have invested literally tens of millions of dollars, and we will continue to invest a lot more. Our government has committed to a \$100 million support package to strengthen and enhance the CFA. We have created a \$56.2 million CFA support fund to strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention, increase training options, expand brigade support and develop brigade leadership.

We are also investing \$44 million in a station building and upgrade program for current integrated stations and volunteer stations. We will continue to provide as a government investments into these very important areas, because we understand the importance of these services that are being provided to protect our community, to protect our property and to protect lives. So many people depend on volunteers. Let us just stop the politicking that is going on around this, get together behind this legislation and get it through both houses so that the firefighters can benefit from this very important bill.

**Mr WAKELING** (Ferntree Gully) (17:24): This has certainly been a shameful week in the Victorian Parliament. I rise to debate the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. Certainly it saddens me to see the way in which this government has handled this piece of legislation and this entire issue. This week we have had two bills that have been second read and rammed through the Victorian Parliament in an unprecedented manner—one that I have never seen in the time that I have served in this house. The only occasion I have ever seen bills rammed through Parliament is when there has been an arrangement where both sides of politics understand that there is a pressing issue.

Can I say, before I deal with the merits of this case, that I attended the bill briefing afforded to the opposition this morning. Let us remember that the bill was given to the Parliament yesterday, we had a briefing this morning and we are debating the bill today. I asked the obvious question: what is so pressing that we need to ensure that this bill is implemented to ensure that there is delivery of Fire Rescue Victoria? The advice that was provided to the opposition was that there is nothing pressing in

the Victorian Parliament to ensure that this piece of legislation is implemented to ensure the establishment of FRV, because it is going to take at least 12 months to establish this new body.

One needs to ask the obvious question: if that is the case, why is this government ramming this piece of legislation through the Victorian Parliament? We know Bill Shorten told the Premier, ‘Whatever you do, don’t present a budget before the federal election’, and, ‘Whatever you do, don’t present Fire Rescue Victoria before the Parliament before the federal election, because it’s going to hurt my chances of being elected’. History will tell us that despite the actions of the Premier to deliver for Bill Shorten, Victorians and Australians saw through him and we saw the re-election of the Morrison coalition government at the past federal election.

This is a shameful piece of legislation. Those opposite talk about protecting workers with respect to cancer legislation. It was this side of politics, both in this Parliament and the previous Parliament, that sought to introduce legislation to the Parliament to provide for cancer protection. Those opposite lecture this side of the house on playing politics with the health of Victorians. If they put aside their politics for one moment, that legislation which was proposed by the opposition would be law; it would already be implemented. But, no, the government saw fit to link that piece of legislation with this bill so that they could play political games with Victorian firefighters. So when we talk about politics, when we are talking about playing politics with Victorians, the government needs to look at itself.

I am very proud of the work that is done by firefighters in my own community—those that work in Boronia, those that work in Scoresby and those that work in Ferntree Gully—who have served our community extremely well. I am proud of those that have served for many, many years. Many of us can talk about family members, and I can talk about my father-in-law, who has given 45 years service and is a life member of his brigade and of the CFA. I know what it means on a Christmas Day to see my father-in-law leave the house to go and fight a fire. I know what it means to be a volunteer, and I pay tribute to those people, but this government is treating our volunteers with contempt. Do not just take it from me. I get this from the volunteers in Knox. I get this from the volunteers who work at integrated stations. I get this from volunteers who work at volunteer stations. I had the experience of hearing a shameful story of a volunteer who had to take time off to recuperate from being bullied by a permanent firefighter who accused him of not putting in an appropriate level of service when he was out on a fire. This is a volunteer. This is somebody who works full-time and who at night went out to fight a fire and was bullied by a permanent member.

Can I just say to those opposite who talk about politics that I am proud to say that our volunteers do a fantastic job, and I for one will stand up for volunteers in Knox and their interests. When I receive emails from people in the community who attack the work of the volunteers of Ferntree Gully, that is shameful, because they—

**A member** interjected.

**Mr WAKELING:** Of course it is awful. I take up the interjection from the minister because I would be more than happy to read those people’s names into *Hansard*, because it is shameful that people would attack the work of our volunteers.

This government has not spelt out any argument to explain why the work of our volunteers needs to be ripped apart through the introduction of this piece of legislation. Our volunteers do a fantastic job in my community. This government is seeking through this bill to attack our volunteers without providing any argument to explain why they need to be attacked, and that is shameful. I will stand up in this house on behalf of Knox volunteers and say, ‘I will stand with you’. I only hope that the other members—the member for Rowville and the member for Bayswater—will stand up in this house and say that they will stand with their volunteers. I have heard the contribution from the member for Rowville and I know that he will support his volunteers within the Knox community. I will be interested to hear the contribution and views of the member for Bayswater.

I want to provide an opportunity to my other colleagues to speak on this important bill. This is shameful, and it is of grave concern that the government is seeking to ram this bill through the Parliament as it is doing on this occasion.

**Ms KILKENNY** (Carrum) (17:31): Frankly, I have to say enough is enough. This piece of legislation should already be law. We all know that laws which give all firefighters, career and volunteer, a presumptive right to compensation for specified cancers should already be in place. We all know that laws that are about modernising our fire services and affording better protection to our communities should have been passed last year, and we all know that the laws that support our firefighters and help them do the best job possible and make sure that they remain the best in the world should have been passed last year. But they were not, and we all know why. Everyone here can recall those pretty dreadful events which culminated on Good Friday 2018. Frankly it was quite an indictment on politics in this place, and I really hope that we never, ever have to relive something like that again.

But we are here. It is now 2019, and we have before us a fresh opportunity to show support for some of our most valued and respected members of the community—our career and volunteer firefighters. We have a unique opportunity now to actually show a unified commitment to modernising our fire services and to improving community safety for everyone—that is, for everyone across Melbourne and throughout our regions. So to those opposite, I implore you—and say that the time for division is over—to let us end the fighting and the scaremongering. Let us put community safety first, let us put the health of our firefighters first and let us get this bill through.

This bill is back before us. It is the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. I say 'back before us' because we debated this bill last year. It passed this house. It went to the upper house. House amendments were made. Those house amendments were passed. What did not pass was the final bill, and we have heard already about what happened with those two members from the opposition reneging on their commitment. It is now well and truly time for this bill to pass this house, and I would suggest to those opposite that it is well and truly time for them to support the progression of this bill.

I absolutely support, like all members on this side of the house, the reforms that are in this bill. It will provide a presumption for volunteer firefighters and career firefighters who are suffering from specified forms of cancers to claim compensation under the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 and it will reform our fire services in Victoria by promoting the role of the Country Fire Authority as a fully volunteer fire service and modernising Victoria's fire services framework, particularly in our metropolitan areas.

I would like to acknowledge all of the people who have contributed immensely to the development of this bill and the reforms more generally. Firstly, I want to thank Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria and the thousands and thousands of volunteer firefighters throughout Victoria. Our fire services could not and will not operate without them. All Victorians owe a great debt to the dedication and commitment that has been shown by our volunteer firefighters for years and years. We have heard here already people referring to family members and friends. My grandmother and grandfather were lifetime members of the Upwey brigade, which I note just celebrated its centenary last year. Victoria has a long and proud history of volunteer firefighting. It is part of our community spirit. It is part of our psyche here in Victoria. We do not want to give that up. We want to see that emboldened, we want to see that protected and we want to see that supported for future generations.

I would like to thank the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority for all their work, advice and contributions that have gone so far to helping shape these reforms. Thank you of course to the career firefighters. They have endured some really difficult times over the last couple of years, and I really hope for their sake, for their health and mental health as well, and for their families that the uncertainty will now be over and we can move forward to implement and modernise their fire service.

Thank you to the former Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Monbulk, and of course our current Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the member for Bellarine, neither of whom have wavered in their commitment to seeing through these important reforms, because they know that these reforms are absolutely necessary for our communities across Victoria.

I really see this as an historic piece of legislation. I think it is going to mark an important point in time for Victoria. We are going to modernise our fire services and do so in a way that really brings the best of what we have got with us. And of course it is absolutely well and truly time that this Parliament puts into law presumptive rights for career and volunteer firefighters to allow them to access the fair and equitable compensation that they deserve for putting themselves in danger, for putting themselves at risk and in harm's way every single day of their lives in order to keep the rest of us safe.

I will go into just some detail on some of the reforms. I think this is valuable because we have heard over time how these reforms are said by those opposite to prejudice volunteer firefighters. That is not the case; that is not the case at all. Let us start with presumptive rights. Now under the current scheme firefighters are entitled to compensation if they have an injury, which could include cancer, and they have to prove that the injury is due to their work as a firefighter. The presumptive rights scheme in this bill reverses that. Under the proposed scheme, if a firefighter meets the qualifying criteria, it will be presumed that she or he developed cancer as a result of their firefighting work. The cancer types in this bill—there are 12 cancer types—are consistent with the cancer types in other jurisdictions, and that includes New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Unlike the Queensland model, which this bill is partly reflective of, our Victorian model offers much more flexibility for volunteer firefighters, and I think that is a really important point. So, for example, in assessing the qualifying period consideration of a volunteer firefighter's attendance over the duration of his or her service will to be taken into account rather than on a year-by-year basis. But I think the most important significant difference comes down to this: our Victorian model includes a special consideration process that will apply for firefighters, career and volunteer, who do not meet the qualifying period requirement. So in other words, firefighters who have been diagnosed with a listed cancer who do not meet the qualifying period may still qualify for compensation under a special consideration process.

Obviously the second part of the reform, very much connected to the first, is the fire services reform. Presumptive rights and fire services reform are connected because they both address service and operation and ultimately community safety. We have 1220 volunteer brigades across Victoria and 38 integrated fire stations. The Patterson River Fire Brigade in my electorate is an integrated station with both career and volunteer firefighters. I have two volunteer brigades in my electorate, Carrum Downs and Skye, and I want to take the opportunity to thank those brigades for their ongoing work in my community, but also for the crucial role which they played in supporting major fire events, most notably the Bunyip State Park fires.

Most of the 1220 volunteer brigades will be unaffected by the changes in this bill, and I think that is important. They will be affected, though, in one very important way, and that is that the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 is actually going to be amended to specify that the CFA will be a fully volunteer firefighting service supported by paid staff when necessary. The bill enshrines the important role of CFA volunteers by inserting an additional responsibility for the CFA board to support the effective and sustainable recruitment, development and retention of volunteer officers and members to deliver capability in the CFA's services. The Andrews Labor government will continue to fully support the CFA and our volunteer firefighters with investment, recruitment, trucks and resources.

I commend this bill. I urge those opposite to put aside politics on this important issue and to show their support for our firefighters, all of them, career and volunteer. This is so important, immensely important, from a community safety perspective. We need to adapt and change, and I commend the bill.

**Ms CUPPER** (Mildura) (17:41): It is a pleasure to be speaking on this bill today in the house. I begin by acknowledging the incredible work that both career and volunteer firefighters do to protect our community. They are there in the worst of times when fire threatens our homes and when properties are lost, and they represent the very best of our communities. It is little wonder that a bill about an organisation which many of us feel so passionately about and which has been a proud cornerstone of our emergency services has elicited so much passion and concern. The CFA is an institution, and in many of the communities in regional and remote Victoria it is not just a fire brigade but a focal point for community cohesion.

This Sunday I will be attending the CFA's family day at Ouyen. I will be taking my little boy, who has been promised a ride in a fire truck. Our CFA volunteers are heroes and demonstrate that heroism in ways big and small every day, whether it is saving lives from raging bushfires or making a little boy's day by letting him be Fireman Sam in a big red fire truck.

This bill has merit. There is absolutely no doubt that presumptive rights compensation for firefighters is something that should be implemented. This important legislation will mean that a firefighter claiming compensation for certain cancers will not have to prove that firefighting is the cause of their cancer; instead it will be presumed that they contracted cancer because of their firefighting service and that therefore they have an entitlement to compensation under the WorkSafe scheme. No-one would deny this to our hardworking firefighters. It is a shame that the government has included the presumptive rights legislation in one package along with the other more contentious aspects of the bill, causing delay to this important scheme.

The other element of this bill focuses on a substantial rethink of the way fire services are structured and delivered across Victoria. This will see the creation of a new organisation known as Fire Rescue Victoria and the separation of career firefighters, who would become employees of Fire Rescue Victoria, from volunteer firefighters, who would remain as CFA members, making the CFA an entirely volunteer brigade.

I support the general intent of this bill. I think there is merit in restructuring our fire services to better meet the needs of the growing areas on the urban fringe that are currently underserved by CFA brigades that were established long before Melbourne's urban sprawl reached the area. I also support the notion that climate change is presenting us with more challenging fire situations that require a new level of response.

Unfortunately the public discourse and the political brawling around this bill have prevented the true intent and potential benefits of the bill from coming to the front. Instead, the bill has been politicised and has been used as a tool to create division between the country and the city, between volunteer and career firefighters and between unionists and non-unionists. The demonisation of union members, who are in fact hardworking men and women who are dedicating their careers to making our communities safe, which has been acknowledged by both sides, is a particularly unfortunate aspect of this debate.

Another unfortunate feature of the debate is that some of the most sensationalist fearmongering has come from political leaders in my own community. They have stoked the fires of division, promoting the false idea that the positions, influence and standing of the CFA within our community were about to be destroyed. They have suggested the bill would result in people in isolated parts of our community having to stand by while everything they care about burns. I have looked at the proposal, and I believe such hyperbole was false, misleading and highly counterproductive to our common goal, which is to make our fire services appropriate and adapted to modern circumstances and to keep our communities safe.

But regardless of how we got here, here we are. The amount of concern and fear among many CFA members in my community of Mildura and my lack of opportunity to build consensus on the ground means that I cannot in good conscience support this bill. Having only been elected in November and

having this bill presented to the house today has not given me enough time to adequately consult and create a consensus position among the communities I represent.

**A member** interjected.

**Ms CUPPER:** I am not supporting it.

**A member** interjected.

**Ms CUPPER:** Okay, thank you. If I had had a chance to sit down with our brigades and have a sober, sensible discussion about the pros and cons, the risks and benefits, and reach some level of common understanding, my position might well be different. I hope that in the future I will have adequate time to consult on matters of such critical importance to my community, especially those which relate to matters of life and death. To rush through legislation of this nature is not only counterproductive to important community goals but is fundamentally undemocratic too.

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (17:46): I rise to speak briefly on this bill because I have spoken at length on it before in a sense. Most people will remember that I voted in favour of this bill when it was last before the Parliament, in the previous Parliament. I set out my reasons for doing so at that time, and many of them remain the same.

I spoke yesterday about how disappointed I am at the way the bill is being handled this week in this house, the way it has been forced on and will be guillotined tomorrow night. The bill was really only made available to members yesterday, and I think it is a situation that is really disappointing in terms of giving members the chance to read through it, check and understand the incorporation of the amendments that were hard fought for and achieved in the upper house and which I believe now make the bill a better bill than it was previously. It does seem to incorporate all of those amendments. I have had a look through it, and I have to say that I think it is a better bill than the one that passed through the house last time.

But haven't we seen so much go on in this place and outside in our electorates in relation to this bill? I have seen politicians standing with CFA volunteers for a number of years now. It is all about 'Don't destroy the CFA'. I personally do not think this legislation will destroy the CFA, and if there is one thing I have heard out there loud and clear from volunteers, it is that they are over this. They want to move on. They want this dispute settled, and they want to be able to get some clarity about what their situation will be in the future. I can tell you that I will be one of the first people knocking on the minister's door if volunteers in my electorate are disadvantaged in some way, if they do not get the training they need, if they are not getting the resources they need or if they are being in some way marginalised or treated with disrespect. I think this whole thing comes down to a need to change the culture right across both organisations and to ensure that there is a lot more respect in the debate.

In the Shepparton district we have one integrated station, so for all of those other CFA units out there business will be as usual. But for the integrated station, there is no doubt that there are some challenges around the integration. But it has been coming for quite a long time now. I am pleased to say that at their most recent meeting the volunteers voted 17 to 1 to stay with the paid firefighters together in the new station, when it is built. They will be provided with the facilities they need to house their equipment and to make provision for female firefighters. There are a number of things that were raised with the minister, and we will continue to raise them to ensure that the new Shepparton fire station is a state-of-the-art building with all the resources it needs, but that it also incorporates the volunteers.

Shepparton is the size of city that needs volunteers as well. The paid firefighters in the Shepparton district are not able to do everything, so they will be called out when there is a fire. They are relied on constantly, and their trucks, their equipment and their volunteers will be used as needed. They have been able to work through that for quite a long time, and I have trust that they will continue to do so. As I say, if problems arise, then I will be the first to be knocking on the minister's door about it.

I have to also say that this Andrews Labor government won the election with a resounding victory, and this was an issue at the election. I cannot see that they have anything but a mandate to do what they are doing here, and that is what they are doing. In the upper house they have also got an increased majority, and they will be doing what they want to do. That is the reality of it. They have the mandate to do it. It is my position to take a much more collaborative approach and to try to achieve better outcomes than to try to whip up angst and anxiety in our CFA stations around the region, which has been happening now for years and which has served no good purpose, because here we are: the bill will be passed, it will become law and we will need to look after and protect our volunteers.

One of the other things I would really like to see in the Shepparton district is much more diversity introduced into the CFA to achieve opportunities for many in our multicultural community and other members of the community, because let us face it, it has been a long-term male-dominated volunteer force, and there is great opportunity for more diversity, for more women coming in, and of course to incorporate more of our multicultural community. I am sure there is an appetite for that, and indeed our volunteers would welcome recruiting any new volunteers. That is always something that is on the agenda.

We know that throughout regional Victoria, and probably in the cities as well, volunteerism is not growing. It is very difficult to achieve the number of volunteers you need across a whole range of areas, and the CFA will be no different. So for them to open their arms more broadly to embrace a bit more diversity may well lead to a situation where people feel that they will be welcome to act as volunteers and join in.

The presumptive rights aspect of this legislation is also a critical issue and one that has now been delayed for so long, and while it has been backdated—and that is terrific—there have been so many people who have waited with, I do not doubt, major health issues and again a lot of anxiety around where they might stand. So it will be a welcome passage of that aspect of the legislation.

I have spoken about the Shepparton district and its position. I say no more at this time other than that I am concerned about the way the bill is being handled in this house. I am concerned that people should have the ability to speak on it. This is a representative democracy. Everyone should have the right to have their say and, ideally, more time to take this back to their electorates.

**Ms RYAN** (Euroa) (17:53): I have to say that this is a terribly sad day for the volunteers of some 80 brigades across my electorate of Euroa. This bill is an absolute stain on the members opposite. It is a stain on those members who claim to represent country Victoria—the members for Macedon, Bendigo East and Bendigo West, the member for Yan Yean and the members for South Barwon and Geelong. This bill will be your shame, and you will have to live with the consequences of having voted for this legislation.

The Andrews government has trashed the volunteer charter, this charter which we legislated in this Parliament in the last term of government. It has trashed it by bringing this bill in with no opportunity to consult volunteers on what this legislation means for them. It has voted twice now against the introduction of presumptive rights legislation, legislation that would have given volunteers equal access to compensation—equal access to a scheme along with career and paid firefighters. And with this bill they risk community safety. On top of all of that, this year in order to pay for all of this they have cut the CFA capital budget by \$40 million, and they are hiking the fire services levy to pay for it. This is Labor's legacy, and this is how country Victoria will remember the Andrews government.

It is ironic that those opposite talk about parliamentary procedure when they have slammed this bill through in three days without adequate time to either consult or debate on it. This legislation is not about community safety, as they would have Victorians believe, nor is it about the safety of Victoria's firefighters. It is about control and it is about payback. It is about payback to the United Firefighters Union (UFU), to a union that doorknocked more than 40 000 homes and that turned out hundreds of volunteers to the polling booths at the last election to get Labor Party elected.

If anyone doubts that, you do not need to take our word for it; you can take the word of these very many people, these fine men and women who have served the fire services and who have been forced out by those opposite. If you want to talk about playing politics with the fire services, have a look at a list of names that includes their own minister, that includes an entire CFA board and that includes people like Joe Buffone, Lucinda Nolan and Jim Higgins—the list goes on. There are almost 20 people who have been forced out of the fire services by those opposite, and they dare to suggest that we are the ones who are playing politics with this issue. And if you do not even believe that, take Jack Rush's word for it, somebody who became synonymous with the CFA during his time as counsel assisting the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. When this bill was last introduced, this is what he had to say:

What this legislation does is cripple the morale of the CFA across the state. I see this as a political outcome, rather than an operational one.

From somebody who is not politically aligned, from someone who has stood his entire career alongside the CFA and for justice in this state, that is what he had to say. If the government truly believed differently, then they would not have delayed this legislation until after the federal election, nor would they have deemed it necessary to put it through in just three days without the usual time to consult. There are more than 3500 operational volunteers that have walked away from the CFA since those opposite started this war, and under this bill the thousands of volunteers who are members of those integrated stations in the suburban interface of Melbourne are now going to find themselves playing second fiddle to Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV). It also leaves questions over the chain of command. There is no clarity on who those volunteers will report to. They might report to the chief fire officer, but there is no clarity on the chain of command between FRV and the CFA in those integrated stations.

Part 8 of the bill establishes the Firefighters Registration Board. Three out of the four members of that board will be UFU appointments, and they are the ones who will have the ultimate sign-off on who is employed by Fire Rescue Victoria—not the chief officer, whose job it is to ensure community safety. The government says that this bill, that the creation of FRV, does not impact on volunteers and that the CFA is standalone, but then we have got clauses in the bill which clearly demonstrate that staff from FRV, who can only be employed if the UFU agrees to it, will then be seconded back to the CFA. So who gets control over who is employed to FRV? The UFU. The UFU is handed control yet again of the CFA by a slightly different mechanism.

One of the most insidious elements of this bill, I find, is the government's decision to link compensation for firefighters to the passage of their changes to the fire services, which are clearly so divisive. The former Minister for Emergency Services promised firefighters that he would introduce legislation within 100 days to provide compensation for those who had contracted cancer, and when that did not happen and when Labor had the opportunity to vote for presumptive rights legislation they voted it down twice. I signed a pledge in front of CFA brigades across my electorate—Broadford, Benalla, Heathcote and Seymour—that I would only accept this legislation if it provided a scheme that was equal for volunteers and paid firefighters.

And what we have before us is a scheme that is anything but. Volunteers are required to meet a different onus of proof to paid firefighters under this legislation. Again I quote Jack Rush:

I can't for the life of me understand why specific compensation legislation is part of the Bill to reform firefighting.

It's got no relevance to [the] real object of the Bill. I've never know a Bill to be introduced that involves compensation together with reform of such importance.

I think it should be split. It's crap.

I support the member for Gembrook's reasoned amendment. This presumptive rights legislation should not be tied to these very, very destructive reforms.

My electorate contains some of the most fire-prone areas of the state. Not only are there scars of Black Saturday still across the landscape but there are mental scars across the many CFA volunteers who turned out that day. I can tell you that they oppose this legislation. This bill jeopardises our safety so that the Premier can simply pay back a union—so that the Premier can deliver the wish list of a union who turned out to campaign for him and to get him elected. It spits in the face of those volunteers across my electorate who have turned out time after time after time, who have put their lives on the line to protect both life and property. It should be rejected for that very reason. Those opposite cannot claim a mandate for this bill. They have no mandate for this bill. They have taken on a war with 30 000 volunteers in this state who deserve so much better than what they are getting.

I would like to end with the words of a CFA volunteer in my electorate, who sent this to me this evening. He said:

Personally I am hugely proud of my CFA service over 25 years, and proud of my fellow volunteers and the selflessness and commitment shown by them day in and day out. This legislation though makes me feel devalued and makes me apprehensive about the future of CFA and whether we will still have the surge capacity in the campaign fires for which we heavily rely on those large volunteer numbers from metropolitan Melbourne brigades. The legislation also makes a mockery of the Volunteer Charter and any commitment by government to consult volunteers. It's a sad time. The UFU and Labor have pitted staff against volunteers in a dirty campaign of paybacks for the UFU.

They are not my words but the words of CFA volunteers out there who put their lives on the line to protect us, to protect life and property. This bill should be wholeheartedly rejected. Anyone who does not will have to live with that on their conscience.

**Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (18:03):** I take great pleasure in joining the debate on this bill because reform is long needed. I speak as someone who represents an electorate that is wholly protected in its fire services by volunteers. They are highly trained volunteers, and I do not use language like 'professional firefighters' and 'volunteer firefighters'. Every firefighter is a highly trained professional. The difference is there are career staff and there are volunteer staff. What I am very pleased about with this bill is that it gives all firefighters access to the presumptive right to compensation for firefighters who have one of 12 cancers. This is really important to me because my uncle Allan Radford lost his life about three years ago, and he firmly believed at the time of his death and in the lead-up to his death that the reason for the cancers that ultimately killed him were due to his exposure from his training as a volunteer firefighter at Fiskville.

Fiskville is a stain on the history of firefighting in this state. Successive leaderships papered over what had occurred there. It was a disgrace. I want to commend the members of the parliamentary committee for their attention to detail and the work that they did and those brave firefighters and their families and the people that lived on neighbouring farms that took the time to make submissions to that inquiry.

One thing that I always felt was disgraceful was that the then shadow minister barely attended any meetings and then when times got tough he resigned from that committee. The member for Gembrook is now again the shadow minister and he has put a reasoned amendment before this house. This is someone who did not care enough about career and volunteer firefighters, about the travesty that occurred at Fiskville, and it did not discriminate.

It did not discriminate whether you were a paid firefighter, a career firefighter or a volunteer. My uncle Captain Allan Radford was the captain of the Port Campbell fire brigade and he was the deputy controller of the Port Campbell SES unit. We spoke in this Parliament only recently about two dear friends of his who were also great volunteers alongside him. They served their community without fear or favour, whatever the uniform was that they had on.

I have myself as a firefighter undertaken training at Fiskville. I have been to Fiskville many times. I was the shadow minister during the period between 2010 and 2014 and I attended graduations at that time. I went to many graduations of career firefighters there when the minister at the time was the former member for Gippsland South and then Deputy Premier. I would be surprised—I was pretty

disgusted—if he attended any of the graduations there and it was lucky if he sent anyone from the government. I happened to be there when the information came out about how bad it was. I was there for a graduation.

I had heard stories then but the stories I heard got scarier and scarier. A former colleague in this place, a former member of this place, Justin Madden—his in-laws had a farm next door and they died of cancers at that place. Those who now are saying that we should go back to the drawing board on this bill were happy for Fiskville to continue despite all evidence to the contrary. I do not think we will ever hear the truth. We will never get to the bottom of exactly how bad it was there, because of the poor record-keeping. It was appalling.

The United Firefighters Union were able to get out information about their members when records began being kept about their records of training there. I spoke to Euan Ferguson, who was the chief officer when this scandal broke publicly. I said, ‘What about volunteers, Euan? What about volunteers? When were records started to be kept for them?’. I think this was 2011, and he said, ‘Danielle, I’ve got to be honest, it’s only been about five years’.

This is the organisation that we are now trying to hold up and defend it to the nth degree and say that it was perfect. The CFA has not been perfect. There have been numerous inquiries into our firefighting services, and enough is enough. I am very pleased to see someone of the calibre of Michael Tudball, who I have served on strike teams with, who I know through his local government service, who I know through his work with outer suburban communities and who I knew as a board member. He has said the time is now, and so I support longstanding people like Michael Tudball who have come to that conclusion.

I actually think we cannot say, ‘Oh, this structure served us well’. Well, as a volunteer I have got to tell you it did not. I was a volunteer on Black Saturday. That structure did not serve me well. It did not serve the hundreds of volunteers on that day. It has not supported us well since that day. I pleaded with the leadership of the Volunteer Fire Brigades of Victoria. I said, ‘I don’t want to play politics with this’. I was in opposition. I said to the government, ‘I am pleading with you—I am pleading with you. Andrew Ford, stand up for the exposure that volunteer firefighters had on Black Saturday, whether it was to their physical health or whether it was to their mental health’. I never heard Andrew Ford say a word. And you know what he did? He put his hand on me, and he said, ‘Oh, Danielle, I know you’ve had some issues since the fires’—what a patronising put-down—‘but the blokes are alright’. And I said, ‘Andrew, they’re not. They’re coming to me for support because I’m the nearest thing they see—a woman in leadership, the local MP. They’re coming to me for counselling. Andrew, I’m not qualified’.

I got a letter as someone that was exposed to the most horrendous things on that weekend, searching house to house. Twenty-two bodies were in the road where I was, Bald Spur Road. I got a very small debrief on the Monday afterwards, a crew debrief, and then, seven months later, I got a letter from region 14 going, ‘Oh, by the way, we think you might have been exposed to something bad on Black Saturday. If you’re not doing too well, ring Nev Goddard’. I love Nev Goddard. He is one of my closest mates. He is another volunteer. He coordinates peer support throughout region 14. For that region, that staffed region, that management could not even assign a full-time person to support every volunteer—the hundreds of volunteers that had been exposed to God knows what.

And they certainly were not truthful with what they said to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. I am telling you now that the truth did not come out about some of those decisions that were made on that day. The poor decisions were not made by volunteers; they were made by management. We need to change this structure, and I would point out to those opposite that it was not perfect on your watch. You halved the operational funding to branches during your time in office—that was your support to volunteers. We will have clarity and we will have transparency, and money will be able to be spent on them in a new system. I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr NORTHE** (Morwell) (18:13): I welcome the opportunity to provide a few comments on the bill before us this evening and this afternoon. Obviously the bill elicits many different opinions and conversations. Can I firstly put on the record my commendation for all firefighters; it does not matter whether they are career or volunteer. I have witnessed firsthand the bravery and courage of the men and women of the organisation within my community over a period of time, even as far back as 2006 as a newly elected member, at the Cowwarr-Toongabbie fires, where a number of homes were lost; at the Delburn complex of fires in 2009; in January, when again a number of homes were lost in the Boolarra area; and during Black Saturday of course, when not only homes but also unfortunately lives were lost. We had the Morwell mine fire in early 2014 and most recently the Yinnar South and Budgeree fires. So if anyone can attest to and express a sincere appreciation of the efforts of all firefighters, I can certainly do that this evening.

Firstly, on the bill itself I have to express my concern and disappointment about the inadequacy of the time provided for us to digest the bill, distribute that among stakeholders and consult with stakeholders about it. Obviously we have voted accordingly on that. It is very concerning that we have not had that opportunity. I appreciate the government's point of view on it, but the reality is to not have the opportunity to go out and talk in detail to stakeholders about the content of such a significant bill is certainly not satisfactory from my perspective.

The bill itself has two major facets: the creation of a new organisation called Fire Rescue Victoria and obviously the firefighters presumptive rights compensation. Might I say I think the notion of combining what I would describe as two separate aspects of the bill is unnecessary and unwarranted, and previously when it has been before the Parliament I expressed my concern about that. The member for Gembrook has moved a reasoned amendment. I can certainly say that that is something I will be supporting. It is important, from my perspective and that of firefighters I have spoken to, that we separate those particular elements of the bill.

Speaking to the fire services reforms component within the bill, a number of questions and concerns have been raised with me over a period of time since the bill and the previous bill have been out in the community. I can say that I know many career firefighters and I know many volunteer firefighters. It is true, and it is fair to say, that there are different opinions and views with respect to the reforms that have been proposed. There are some that are strongly supportive of them, there are some that are strongly opposed to them and there are many that do not express an opinion.

My concern is that in particular the volunteer organisation would potentially see a reduction in volunteer numbers and capacity over a period of time. They are not my words; they are actually the words that some of the volunteers within my community have put to me. I will refer to that more comprehensively shortly.

In my electorate there are two integrated CFA stations, at Traralgon and Morwell. It would be fair to say that there have been some challenges there over time, and I have witnessed firsthand some of those challenges. It is really about how we provide a cohesive and effective fire service that is there to serve and protect our community. There have been many concerns expressed to me over the previous months and years about the CFA as an organisation and how people are actually feeling on the ground. There is a lot of disappointment and disenchantment within my community, particularly from a volunteer perspective. We have seen a bevy of resignations and sackings when it comes to ministers, CEOs and boards. It obviously does not gel well for a positive outcome when you are working in an organisation where those types of situations are occurring—where there are mass sackings and mass resignations.

In a local context there has been a lot happening in recent times. One thing I have certainly been supportive of is a new Morwell fire station. As I have mentioned previously, the Morwell fire station currently is an integrated station, but as construction is about to commence on that station we have seen some major concerns raised. In the *Latrobe Valley Express* of 2 May this year there is an article headlined 'Brigade splits in Morwell'. The first couple of paragraphs of that article state:

Frustrated volunteer firefighters have voted to split from career fireys at Morwell and explore their options following months of 'tension'.

Senior brigade members claim frictions between career and volunteer firefighters have intensified in recent months, and stem from ... the long-running industrial dispute between the United Firefighters Union and state government.

So it is not right to say that there are not issues out there; CFA members are feeling the pinch with respect to some of these issues around fire reforms. Indeed in the same article it refers to:

Morwell Fire Brigade chairman Peter Quinn who joined in 1976, said the relationship between staff and volunteers "had changed" in recent years.

He said the state government's plans to transfer CFA career staff and integrated stations to a new body called Fire Rescue Victoria "lacked direction" and would mean an unknown future for volunteer members.

They are not my words; they are from Peter Quinn, who has been a member of the CFA organisation for some 43 years. There are other commentaries within that particular article that refer to the same.

On the other element of the bill, on presumptive rights compensation, I just find it ridiculous that we have the majority of members here, probably all members in this chamber, who support presumptive rights legislation, yet we cannot have a separate bill to pass it. It is just ridiculous. We respect and honour firefighters, and with regard to the 12 types of cancers that are referred to within the bill it would obviously make life so much easier in terms of not having to prove that you have those types of cancers when you are a firefighter. But I also remain concerned that there are different rules in this legislation that apply if you are a career firefighter versus if you are a volunteer. There seems to be some onus of proof that is still required by volunteers despite them potentially turning out to be the same fires under the same conditions compared to their career counterparts.

I want to raise the issue of Cowwarr volunteer Rob Gibbs. Rob's name will be familiar to many MPs, as questions have previously been raised in this chamber about his predicament and his efforts to receive support, from the Premier down. Rob has chronic myeloid leukaemia. He is a genuine, caring family man who has served and protected communities right across Victoria in various capacities over many years. His family, quite frankly, have been through hell, and his beautiful wife, Ann, has also had her own cancer battles. Rob believes, and it is the opinion of medical professionals—or some of them, as I understand—that his illness was contracted through the Morwell mine fire. The hurdles that Rob has had to endure to prove his leukaemia are an absolute disgrace. Within the legislation it states that one can only qualify for compensation post 1 June 2016. I note in the second-reading speech the minister refers to a special consideration process for firefighters who might not qualify or have attended an exceptional exposure event. I strongly support this provision within the legislation and particularly for the Morwell mine fire. Any firefighter, including the member for Frankston, who is here and who I commend for his efforts as well, and all firefighters who attended that particular fire should be eligible for exceptional circumstances.

I do say to the minister in closing that this man, Rob Gibbs, has been left to his own devices despite having leukaemia, which probably, most likely, in the version of events from medical professionals, came from the Morwell mine fire. We seek the government's support to help this man and his family.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** (Oakleigh) (18:23): It is indeed a pleasure to speak on this very, very important bill. The importance for Victoria of our firefighters, both career and volunteer, with their selfless work is enormous. I would like to begin by acknowledging all firefighters in Victoria for putting themselves in harm's way to protect our community and our great state. To them I say: thank you.

Victoria is the fastest growing state in Australia, and we need to ensure that the structural elements of how our fire services are organised keep up appropriately with that increased population and the demands of a modern Melbourne and a modern Victoria. Population changes mean that the boundaries of the MFB and the CFA need changing. Why is Springvale, near my patch, classed as country? The changes will come into effect only in the 2020–21 summer season. They will not impact in this year's summer. There will be no job losses. The enterprise bargaining agreement currently in place with paid

firefighters will remain until a new EBA is organised. The CFA becomes a purely volunteer-only organisation and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) becomes a paid organisation. In that way we give the volunteers the respect and the dignity of an organisation that is there just for their service and their dignity. The bill does not degrade volunteer firefighters, as those opposite try to say. It in fact gives them equal rights in their workplace.

I will get onto a couple of the absolutely disgraceful lies perpetrated by the opposition a bit later in my contribution, but I am so proud of this government's achievement in bringing this bill before the Parliament a second time. It is an all-important bill. We know the fire season has passed, but it will not be long before we come face to face with the next fire season. Had we not made some reforms, whether it be for this season or the one after, we would risk the safety not only of property but, more importantly, of lives across the Victorian community. To give our fire services the time they need to adjust to a new structure and to ensure the implementation of this legislation, we need a fairly reasonable length of time—12 months.

This bill will establish, as the minister said and as other speakers have said—Fire Rescue Victoria, which will cover existing MFB boundaries and serve metropolitan Melbourne, outer-urban areas and larger regional centres, which is only reasonable. These people need the same, consistent service that other communities have. These will be known as Fire Rescue Victoria fire districts. This structure will bring Victoria into line with most other states in Australia. This bill also seeks to bring the CFA's 38 integrated stations into the new FRV organisation, bringing all the state's career firefighters into one organisation, which makes absolute sense given we are doing the same for the CFA, with all volunteer firefighters being in the same organisation. The FRV will include the 450 extra career firefighters delivered by the Andrews Labor government.

This is not just legislated reform for us. We put our money where our mouth is; we put our investments where our values are. This government has already committed to an over \$100 million support package to strengthen and enhance the CFA. We created a \$56.2 million CFA Support Fund to strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention, increase training options, expand brigade support and develop brigade leadership, addressing exactly some of the issues that the member for Yan Yean—a CFA volunteer herself—talked about in her excellent contribution. We are also investing \$44 million in a station building and upgrade program for current integrated stations and volunteer stations so that CFA volunteers are working out of safe and modern facilities that accommodate them and their equipment properly.

I want to pick up on some of the matters raised by colleagues on this side, including the member for Frankston in his excellent contribution. The fearmongering in this debate over the last couple of years by the opposition and some of their cheerleaders has been absolutely woeful. It has been disgraceful—absolutely disgraceful—even on this day by the member for Euroa, and given her senior position in the opposition she should know better. I was in the chair when she was talking about the Fire Registration Board and the number of appointees or 'stats', as she called them, by the union. She completely misrepresented the role of that organisation.

Let me refer to part 8 of the bill, as the member for Frankston did, which says clearly that the registration board will only be for employees of FRV—the new structure—paid and career staff only, not volunteers. She is completely muddying the waters, as the opposition has done for two years, and is causing such grief. We heard the member for Shepparton and the member for Mildura talk about the fearmongering that these people have expressed in their communities. Good public policy is not served by fearmongering and scaremongering. Good public policy is served by attention to detail, a conviction to your values and good service delivery. They have no idea how that is implemented, because they have never implemented good public policy, particularly not in 2010–2014 when they were in office.

I want to address the three big lies of the Liberal Party and the National Party. The first one is that somehow we are treating volunteers differently. Are you serious? The same 12 cancers will apply, the

same length of service will apply. The only difference is that because there are many CFA members who are not operational—they admit that themselves—they will have to demonstrate operational service on a very, very low threshold, far more generous than Queensland and Tasmania. And we will make sure that that threshold is met very easily by CFA volunteers. So this is rubbish that they have perpetuated about a difference in treatment—same cancers, same length of service.

The number 2 big lie of the Liberal Party and the National Party is that somehow this bill was rushed. Oh my God! I have not heard anything other than this bill for two years in this place. This has been heavily contested in the Parliament of Victoria and heavily contested in the public. It has been on the Parliament's website, for instance, since Good Friday last year. It has been heavily contested in the media. I have read the bill clause by clause in the *Herald Sun*. I cannot understand what element of this has been rushed. What element? This is the exact same bill that came before you—with the amendments, as the member for Shepparton said—so how on earth you think this is a rush—

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr DIMOPOULOS:** You could not make this longer if you tried, mate. And also there is a gross misunderstanding on the other side of how government operates. I do not blame them, because half of them have never had the honour of executive office. They think that somehow you can absolutely drive the entire bureaucracy to set up IT systems and heads of agreement and spend their time on a bill on an authorising environment that does not exist. We need the bill to exist as an act of Parliament to drive the investment by the public service into the entire organising of this thing. They have no idea. They think you can pass the bill one day and have operational new fire services of Victoria the next day.

**Mr Edbrooke** interjected.

**Mr DIMOPOULOS:** Exactly, member for Frankston—like the side letter. You know, this is not kindergarten; this is the fire services of the state of Victoria. Over 6.5 million people deserve better than just a 24-hour set-up tomorrow. This does not work that way. We need 12 months of implementation to get this right.

Apart from all that, even on the other side they have talked about experiences of firefighters who have died waiting for compensation, and now they are trying to hold it back again. There are too many firefighters and their families who have missed out, and we need to get this done today because we should have got it done last year when the opposition failed in its duty to not only honour an agreement that is as old as the Westminster system but also honour its own word and its own integrity.

The third big lie of the Liberal Party and the National Party is that somehow the unions are there for nefarious reasons. No, they are the workers' representatives, and we consult the unions, as we absolutely should. By God, is that some strange concept to you? I will give you an example of consulting with unions. We proudly consulted the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation, and because of that consultation we came with up with nurse-to-patient ratios. Are you going to deny those? No. We consult the workers' representatives because we value their contribution to public policy—that is why. You do not.

I have wasted too much time on the opposition, but I do want to finish on the following point. I am incredibly proud that this government has good leadership and excellent ministers like the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the member for Bellarine, and the previous Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Monbulk, to shepherd such important legislation through not only the community but this Parliament. I commend their leadership, I commend the work that firefighters across Victoria, volunteer and paid, do and I wish this bill a speedy passage.

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (18:33): I rise to condemn the Andrews Labor government for this horrible piece of legislation in front of us today—so bad that it could not even see the light of day until yesterday. We get less than 24 hours to actually go through the bill, much of which was not

introduced in the lower house and we have not been able to go through. The people on the other side have tried to fabricate that the bill was available. It has not been available. It was introduced yesterday. I think it is incredibly disrespectful to the community, particularly in the country areas that actually rely heavily on the volunteers.

Let me tell you: I have been in this role for three and a half years, and that whole time the volunteers have been asking me to stand beside them, stand with them and fight for them. They do not feel like they are being represented by a government that decides to wrap fire services reform up with presumptive rights legislation. Let us be clear: we want presumptive rights legislation, and I support the reasoned amendment put forward by the shadow minister for emergency services, the member for Gembrook. We want to see this.

We have a government in power at the moment who have voted this presumptive rights legislation down twice. And it is not equal. Do not let anyone tell you that there are equal rights for both the paid and the volunteer firefighters. It is totally disheartening for the volunteers, and they feel undervalued. They feel let down. I have had so many conversations with friends of mine who are farmers who have said, 'Look, we'll just get our own truck. We'll do our own thing'. That is not what we want to hear. We have 140 years of history where we have refined things. Yes, I understand there can be improvements, but we do not want that attitude where people are actually saying they will not be part of the system. That is where we will see lives lost. That is where we will see dangerous activities that we do not want. We want this wonderful training that we see for all firefighters, both volunteer and career, who are professional in their role and who do the job that we need them to do—to protect our homes, particularly out in the country.

We are 5 hours from Melbourne—4 hours at Nelson, 4 hours at Portland and 3 hours where I live. We have not got the people to be able to fill jobs to be able to grow the region, so we rely on volunteers. When we had the St Patrick's Day fires not long ago—it feels like not very long ago—I was at home. It was about 10.30 when we saw the fire front coming over towards our farm. The whole of the horizon was alight. I packed up the car and took my daughter and a girl from Holland who was staying with us, and the dog and the cat, and went in the car with all our clothes—with what we could grab—and headed into town. It is a 20-minute drive, and on the way into town, I swear to you, it was like I was on the Geelong–Melbourne road, seeing the amount of lights that were coming in the opposite direction. I have never seen that much traffic on Caramut Road in my life. It was all the guys and girls who were coming out from 40th birthday parties, from weddings—I cannot remember all the functions; there was an amazing amount of functions on that night—and they dropped everything and headed in the exact opposite direction from where I was going. They were heading into the fire front.

We will not have that surge capacity if we have volunteers who have lost the capacity to fight for what they want to do—volunteer their time, give of themselves. I have received a number of emails, and I want to just quote from a couple of them. This gentleman said:

... thank you for your unfailing dedication to us CFA volunteers. I am really very sick in the guts with this disgusting and callous performance of Daniel Andrews, the Labor Party and the UFU.

**A member** interjected.

**Ms BRITNELL:** This is a gentleman—give him some respect. He continued:

I have been a very active volunteer for 50 years and I have enjoyed every minute of that time and no doubt that is why I'm still part of a wonderful worldwide recognized organization. No Union should have the power to run this or any other organisation. Ask them why are UFU members entitled to cancer compensation no questions asked and volunteers have to show proof, we are just second rate citizens.

That man is a volunteer. He has been very involved. It is not only him that I want to quote from. Another gentleman also emailed me today, saying:

I don't have all of the answers to the issues below but I would love to know the details ...

Exactly, because we cannot find out; we only got the legislation introduced 24 hours ago. He then said:

... where is the money coming from for this expansion (our fire service levy?)—surely this will result in less for the volunteer CFAs as there is only so much money to go around.

We have so much need in our community to upgrade our services. The fire station at Bolwarra does not even have lights. There is so much we need to do. Volunteers are happy to give their time, but they need the equipment. We are not going to be able to afford more equipment with this situation we are going to find ourselves in. He continued:

Lastly the CFA will not be independent as our management will be unionised and seconded from the new organisation—not really independent.

And he is right, because the staff will be seconded to the CFA. So you only have one boss. Two bosses has never worked in my history of those sorts of examples.

Lastly, I want to quote from a fantastic gentleman from Portland, a former CFA board member and Portland volunteer, Lieutenant Frank Zeigler. He said:

Unless we're going to change the fire services for the better, don't change it at all.

What scares me—

he said—

there's been little consultation.

That is the issue here. These are volunteers. Frank Zeigler was on the board of the CFA. He has been involved the whole way and he is saying there has been little consultation. He cannot believe it is being changed if it is not being changed for the better. None of us disagree with improvements and better situations, but ripping apart the CFA and only being able to do it by wrapping it up with the presumptive rights legislation is completely underhanded. If that does not tell you enough about the bill, I do not know what would. Why could the government not have introduced the presumptive rights legislation, like they said they would, within the first 100 days? They did not have to wrap it together in this bill. It just shows how disrespectful they are being and what they may be trying to hide. This bill is not what the volunteers are wanting and it will not bring integration; it will bring separation. The guys in Portland, who are all working quite well together, have had this thrust upon them. They said to me that it was like being forced into a divorce when you are actually in a happy marriage. They were the quotes those Portland fellows gave me a couple of years ago.

I am very, very disappointed that the government has pushed this so hard. They want to smash up what we have seen as one of the best volunteer organisations across the world. That is probably one of the things I have noted and found to be most remarkable about this role—that is, that people in our communities who are good, who are just wanting to give back to their community, virtually have to beg for the right to do so. If this is not an example of that, I do not know what is.

I will conclude, because I know there are other people who want the opportunity to speak, by saying that there is nothing we want to do more on this side of the house than to protect our volunteers and ensure they feel valued. We will stand by them and we will not continue to let this government destroy the CFA. They can change the legislation, but we will back our volunteers every time.

**Mr PEARSON** (Essendon) (18:41): I am delighted to make a contribution on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2019. It was quite interesting to be in the chamber today when the member for Gembrook got to his feet to make his contribution. I listened to what the member for Gembrook said and I remembered very clearly the contribution he made yesterday. Now, the member for Gembrook yesterday said that he had great difficulty in dealing with the fact that the government had brought on this legislation and wanted to debate it today. He was arguing that he did not have enough time. When he got to his feet today, the first thing he said was, 'It's groundhog day', because we were back where we were two years ago.

You cannot have it both ways. You cannot turn round and basically say, 'Oh, well, it's all a great shock and surprise that you're doing this', and then come in here the next day and say it is just like it was two years ago. There are no surprises with this; there are no surprises at all. We made it absolutely clear that we wanted to reform our fire services, to drag them into the 21st century, and it would have been on the statute book but for the outrageous behaviour of those opposite when they ratted on a pairing deal in the other place.

Power reveals, as Robert Caro wrote in his fantastic set of biographies of Lyndon Baines Johnson—power reveals. When this bill went to the other place, a pairing arrangement was entered into. Pairing arrangements are entered into between the major parties, between the government and the opposition, to reflect the composition of the Parliament. What you saw happen on Good Friday was an absolute abomination. It was absolutely disgraceful conduct and behaviour by opposition members in the Council. It is probably not that surprising because the opposition, conspiring with the Greens political party, managed to kick out the Leader of the Government for an unprecedented period of six months. Those opposite have routinely torn up the rule book on parliamentary convention and procedure to suit their own political ends. That is what they did.

**Mr D O'Brien:** Like sitting on Good Friday.

**Mr PEARSON:** By sitting on Good Friday.

**Mr D O'Brien:** Like sitting on Good Friday. That's a parliamentary convention, is it?

**Mr PEARSON:** Well, I would suggest to the member for Gippsland South that we have not had the gag and nor have we had the guillotine in the other place. The other place is a house of review, and the other house has routinely sat late at night. It has sat well into the wee hours of the morning. It has sat, I believe, if you go back to the Kennett government, on a Saturday as legislation was pushed through. That is the prerogative of that house, and under exclusive cognisance, as the member for Gippsland South would know, the chambers are separate but equal. It has always been that way. We did not seek to prevent the other place from doing its bidding or its ability to be able to consider these matters.

**Mr D O'Brien** interjected.

**Mr PEARSON:** The member for Gippsland South is going on about sitting on Good Friday. Well, you know what? We stand by our deals, we stand by our agreements, and if we say that we are going to have a pair agreement, we honour it. We do not turn around and protest that, 'I need to have leave because of my religious beliefs' and then come skulking back into the chamber at 11.30 to defeat a piece of legislation that should have been passed. I respect the member for Gippsland South and I know the member for Gippsland South would not have been party to such an agreement if he was in the upper house, because he would not do that. But clearly that is not the case where Mr Finn is concerned, nor Mr Ondarchie. They saw fit to behave in an appalling way.

I remember years ago I had a conversation with Peter Redlich, who founded Holding Redlich. Peter and I did not get on particularly well, it would be fair to say, but one thing he said to me has always struck me as being very true: 'The only thing you have in this life is your name, and if you trade against that, you've got nothing'. I do not know how long Mr Ondarchie or Mr Finn will have as parliamentarians, but forever they will be condemned for their abject failure and their just utter betrayal of the system of the Parliament. It is absolutely outrageous.

We have heard a lot from those opposite complaining about us bringing forward this legislation. What they have not fessed up to and what they have not acknowledged is that when they sat around the cabinet table, when they were in government in the 57th Parliament, they stripped \$40 million out of the CFA budget. Again, power reveals, and we are judged by the decisions that we make around that cabinet table and by the budget that we bring into this place. When they sat on this side of the house, when they had the opportunity to support their CFA, to defend their CFA, to defend their volunteers,

to get behind and back their CFA, to support the hardworking volunteers, to protect regional communities, their response was to strip out \$40 million—\$40 million they ripped out! So you cannot trust them. You cannot believe in them. They have got no values, because when it comes down to it they will do whatever suits them, and it clearly suited them at that time to rip the money out of the CFA and to deprive the volunteers of the equipment and resources that they needed and to deprive them of training. That is what they did.

There was evidence in the course of the 57th Parliament in relation to presumptive rights—the need to make sure that people who serve as firefighters have got the ability to access compensation because of the hazardous and dangerous work that they do. Those opposite did not introduce presumptive rights; they had no interest in introducing presumptive rights. They had that opportunity. They had an opportunity to support hardworking volunteers—to give hardworking volunteers the opportunity to access presumptive rights—and they failed to do so. They had no interest in doing so. So when they come in here now bleating about this as an issue you just cannot take them seriously, because when they had the chance to do something they did nothing.

Actually, you know what? What it comes down to—and I turn to the member for Gembrook's reasoned amendment—is that doing nothing is all they are good for because whenever there is an opportunity to do any hard work they abdicate any responsibilities. A reasoned amendment: for those new members of this place, what that means is this is about withdrawing the bill—not debating the bill, not passing the bill, not having the legislation on the statute books and not providing our regional communities with the support they need before a fire season. This is about doing nothing. Those opposite excel at doing nothing. They get a high distinction when it comes to doing nothing because for four years they did nothing—and they were absolutely condemned for it.

How bad would you have to be to be a government that gets thrown out after one term? It has not happened since 1955, and those opposite were able to achieve that KPI. It is just extraordinary, and now they are trying to prevent us, they are trying to stop us, from getting on with the job of delivering a modern, 21st-century fire service to protect Victorians both in Melbourne and in regional and rural areas. The reality is that these boundaries were established in the 1950s. Areas where I grew up were turned into housing estates in the 1970s but were previously orchards. Where I grew up, 25 kilometres east of Melbourne, they were all orchards until the 1960s and 1970s. The boundary for the CFA was drawn, I believe, in about the 1950s.

We are growing at 147 000 people per year. We are adding a city the size of Canberra to our borders every three years. Those opposite are suggesting that we should be stuck in the 1950s. That is where they want to take us. They want to take us back to the 1950s. It is not *Back to the Future*. This is about providing modern protections for our communities. It is about providing protections and making sure that we have got a world-class service that is properly resourced and that reflects the 21st century and not the 1950s.

We are absolutely committed to bringing forward this legislation. We made it absolutely clear that this was what we were going to do when we were confronted with the absolute treachery and appalling behaviour of those opposite when they pulled their dodgy stunt in the other place on Good Friday. We have been absolutely clear on this. Those opposite know full well what we have intended to do, and we are going to do this because we have got a mandate to govern.

We do not idle. We do not shy away from hard work. We are here to work, and we are here to get things done. Those opposite might have been happy to take ministerial salaries and do no work for four years—to have a four-year holiday from hard work, like the member for Manila. That is not what we are here to do. We are here to get on with the job of delivering good administration to this state. This is vitally important legislation, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Mr D O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (18:51): We have an extraordinary situation in my part of the world where we now have two Labor members neither of whom are originally from the area. One of

them, in the members register of interests, currently lists her only residence as Carlton North. That member is Jane Garrett, and she is now one of the Labor members for Eastern Victoria Region. The fact that the former member for Brunswick has ended up as a member for Eastern Victoria Region is a long and sorry saga, and it is only one of the consequences—

**Ms Halfpenny:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, we are talking about the fire services bill. I do not know what that has to do with where people live or do not live. It is all very strange.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr McGuire):** The member for Gippsland South, to continue on the bill.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** As I was about to say, the fact that Jane Garrett is now a member for Eastern Victoria Region despite previously being the member for Brunswick is one of the very, very many sorry outcomes of this process that we have seen as the Andrews Labor government has attempted to destroy the CFA. It started in 2014 when the United Firefighters Union (UFU) campaigned so strongly for the Andrews Labor government, and as a result we have ended up with Jane Garrett as a member for Eastern Victoria Region. Whilst I do not for a minute support someone well out of our region representing us, I have no particular issue with Jane Garrett. Indeed I think her performance as the Minister for Emergency Services and the strong position that she took is to be commended. It stands in stark contrast to all those over the other side, particularly the ones who have just come in in 2018, who have got the government notes and are reading them furiously and just doing what they are told to do.

It is a disgrace that we are here debating this bill today. There is no reason for us to be debating this bill a day after it was introduced. I heard those opposite say time and again that we have had two years to look at this. I ask all those opposite to have a look at the bills we have debated so far this year. I reckon there have got to be 10 or a dozen that were introduced and debated in this place last year or the year before that did not make it through the last Parliament. Did we do those in one day? No. We followed the usual processes of the house, and they were adjourned for two weeks to give us the opportunity. Those opposite are saying, 'Oh, you knew this bill; you've had plenty of time to consult'. So we are supposed to take your word yesterday on this piece of legislation—172 pages—that it is exactly the same. Righto! It would be an absolute dereliction of our duty to our constituents and to the people of Victoria if we took your word for it.

So it is disgraceful that we are here debating this a day after it was introduced, and those opposite need to explain—no-one has explained—why there is an urgency to introduce this. No-one has explained. If there was such urgency to introduce this, why didn't we do it before 18 May? Could you explain? Why didn't we do it before 18 May? We have had about four or five months of sittings so far this year. Well, we all know the reason for that. We know that this is a sham. We know that in 2016 the Premier messed up Bill Shorten's first attempt at the Lodge, and so we know that this is now another attempt to pull the wool over people's eyes. That is why it was not introduced before the federal election, and we all could have predicted that this would be what would happen straight after 18 May. Unfortunately for those opposite they thought they would be dealing with a different federal government, but there you go: it did not work out for them the way they wanted.

I hear those opposite saying that we have got to move out of the 1950s, and we had the member for Yan Yean saying there have been countless reviews of the CFA structure. That is true, and not one of them, including the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, recommended a change to this. Indeed it went the opposite way. The royal commission said that the CFA structure as it was was critical to providing the surge capacity that the CFA, and particularly those brigades in the outer suburbs, provide in times of major bushfires. So again, not one of those opposite has explained why this is needed.

Now, the member for Essendon just then—and I do respect the member for Essendon—talked about how we have got to modernise, how we cannot have a system from the 1950s and that where there

used to be orchards there are now suburbs. Again, he did not provide any compelling evidence that the current model is broken. We know that the only reason we are doing this is because of Peter Marshall and the United Firefighters Union. I know many of those opposite—perhaps not those in the chamber right now but those who were actually around in the previous Parliament—are internally shaking their heads too. They are not quite sure why the Premier has been so determined to do whatever Peter Marshall wants.

I will just go on. Jane Garrett was not the only casualty of the wreckage that this has been. We can go through the other casualties: Danny Michell, the chief of staff to the minister, resigned; Jane Garrett, as I mentioned; and the member for Monbulk, the then minister, sacked the entire CFA board, being Claire Higgins, John Peberdy, Ross Coyle, Katherine Forrest, Michael Freshwater, Peter Harmsworth, James Holyman, John Schurink and Michael Tudball. Then of course we had Lucinda Nolan, the Premier's own hand-picked CFA CEO, she went as well; Joe Buffone, the CFA chief fire officer; the Metropolitan Fire Brigade chief officer, Peter Rau; Bruce Byatt, the CFA deputy chief officer; Paul Stacchino, the MFB acting chief officer; and Jim Higgins, the MFB CEO, who quit. And then we had 10 senior MFB firefighters in October 2017 outlining how they were forced into early retirement by the UFU, launching legal proceedings on what they said was a 15-year campaign of bullying, harassment and intimidation against them by the UFU and Peter Marshall.

There is a trail of wreckage that has been left across the state by the government's mishandling of our fire services, and we have seen that affect our volunteers. In my electorate they are sick of it. They do not have any integrated stations, but they know that there will be a big impact because they are going to be governed, effectively, by the UFU through Fire Rescue Victoria. They are already concerned about CFA HQ. They certainly do not want their new career staff to be controlled out of Melbourne by the UFU. So I think this is ridiculous, and as a result of that concern that they have we have seen the number of volunteer firefighters plunge, according to the annual report, which of course was hidden away from Victorians before the election last year and only released in December. We saw in that the reason why; there are 3749 less operational volunteer firefighters than there were in 2014 when the Premier came to power—a reduction of 3749. It is an absolute joke that those opposite think that this is somehow a good thing.

The haste with which it is being rushed through this place is evidence of the government's stance. Victorians know this is not being done in the interests of their safety; this is being done for the base political wants of the Premier, the Labor Party, Peter Marshall and the United Firefighters Union. I will go on to say, as a number of my colleagues have, quoting Jack Rush, QC, who was—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue his speech when the matter is next before the house.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### Adjournment

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

That the house now adjourns.

### SANDRINGHAM ELECTORATE GRAFFITI

**Mr ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (19:00): (738) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action that I seek is for the Premier to urgently respond to the constituency question I asked him on 28 May in this place and confirm for the Sandringham district community that graffiti along the Sandringham line will be cleaned up during the line closure, including on private property abutting the train corridor.

I note with interest the government media release of today that was effectively published in full, including grammatical errors, in today's *Herald Sun*. This release was filled, in my view, with all the

PR lines and statistics that could be imagined, but the proof of the effectiveness of this release will be in the removal of the graffiti along the train line. The stretch of unsightly graffiti that I am particularly concerned about is near the intersections of Abbott and Beaumont streets, Queens Square and King Street, Queens Square and Bath Street, Bridge Street and Moor Street, and areas in the vicinity of the Bridge Street overpass. There are members of the Sandringham community ready and willing to clean up this mess themselves. This citizen army is not waiting for bureaucrats to twiddle their thumbs and pens while this blight on our community remains. They are ready and willing to take the action that this Labor government has so far failed to take.

Noting that I first raised this matter with the Premier some three weeks prior to the scheduled line closure and that normal passenger services are now due to resume in less than a week, it is my belief that members of the Sandringham community and surrounding communities are entitled to an explanation as to the Premier's inaction to date. I encourage the Premier to reflect upon his own words and do what he says instead of simply saying what he will do.

#### **HERTFORD–ALBERT STREETS, SEBASTOPOL**

**Ms SETTLE** (Buninyong) (19:02): (739) The action that I seek is to ask the Minister for Roads, the Honourable Jaala Pulford, to come to my electorate and visit the Hertford Street roundabout. On 13 April this year I hosted a well-attended event, Spotlight on Sebastopol. It was a community engagement event to listen to the needs and concerns of the Sebastopol community. The Andrews government is investing \$5 million to enhance the area and the consultation was to hear feedback and suggestions on how the funding would be best spent—after all, no-one knows the area better than a local. One of the issues that came up in almost every conversation held that day was the Hertford and Albert streets roundabout. Although the funding being discussed was not to address roads, this consultation served as a reminder that this particular roundabout has been the bane of local road users' existence.

This intersection is used by those living in Sebastopol daily and is a part of the route into Ballarat from Buninyong all the way down to Geelong. The Andrews government in its 2019 budget included a 'Keeping Ballarat Moving' package worth over \$60 million. Those of us who use this road will welcome the news that this package includes the funding to widen this intersection and replace the roundabout with new traffic lights. This was a celebrated election commitment, and the community certainly appreciated a government that listened and was getting things done.

Given the importance of this vital upgrade to the local community and the essential role this intersection plays on a major travel route, I would like to request that the Minister for Roads, the Honourable Jaala Pulford, inspect this site with me. It is important that this intersection upgrade is one of the highest standard and that work is carried out with as little disruption as possible to the traffic flow. It would be wonderful to welcome the minister to visit the Hertford Street roundabout with me.

#### **GLEN NAYOOK RESERVE WEED CONTROL**

**Mr BLACKWOOD** (Narracan) (19:04): (740) I raise a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for her to direct her department to immediately take action to address the infestation of noxious weeds in the Glen Nayook Reserve. The Glen Nayook nature reserve has been maintained by the Friends of Glen Nayook for about 15 years. With regular working bees, they have put thousands of volunteer hours into maintaining the walking tracks and keeping the park in excellent condition. Over the past few years the blackberry infestation has been getting gradually worse, as no action is being taken by Parks Victoria to address this problem despite persistent pleading from the friends group.

Another year has passed and there has been no action to address the blackberry infestation at Glen Nayook. In fact it will be four years on 3 July since the friends group first notified Parks Victoria in 2015 that there was a problem with blackberries. During the last working bee it was observed that the

blackberry patches are expanding exponentially and the friends group are sure that the seeds are being transferred to the neighbouring properties.

Minister D'Ambrosio issued a ministerial decree, outlining that it was Parks Victoria's responsibility to control such infestations, and I quote:

Parks Victoria are responsible for managing established weeds and pests on public land, including in parks.

Parks Victoria works with the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, other land managers, landowners and community groups to manage weeds in parks.

The four objectives for weed management are to:

Prevent their spread by making sure equipment and vehicles are clean of seeds and spores

Eradicate small infestations that are unlikely to have spread beyond a definable boundary

Contain infestations where they can be prevented from expanding beyond a defined containment line

Protect assets (e.g. native plants and animals, neighbouring agricultural land) from the impacts of invasive weeds by reducing population densities.

So I call on the minister to ensure her department adheres to her decree and immediately takes action to protect the magnificent amenity of the Glen Nayook nature reserve, and by doing so acknowledge the tremendous contribution the Friends of Glen Nayook have made for many years in assisting Parks Victoria with the maintenance of the reserve.

#### **EASTERN HEALTH AGED-CARE FACILITY**

**Mr TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (19:07): (741) I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. The action I seek is for the minister to come down to my community in Wantirna to visit Eastern Health and the new site for the aged-care facility funded by the Andrews Labor government in this year's budget. This government has a strong, proud history in delivering for senior Victorians and on health care across Victoria. This government ended the shameful war on paramedics. We enshrined in law nurse-to-patient ratios, giving respect to those who care for us and better care for those who need it most. This government has made record-breaking investments in more nurses, more doctors, more allied health professionals and more midwives to ensure every single Victorian is cared for when they need it. And we recently announced that we are investing a record-breaking \$5.5 billion into health to ensure every Victorian gets the best care.

Right here in our community in the east, we are doing exactly what we said we would do. In September last year we promised we would build a brand-new aged-care facility in Wantirna—and we are getting on with doing just exactly that. It is \$81.5 million well spent, giving local seniors the care, attention and facilities that they deserve. Spread across four floors, its 120 beds will be divided into 60 general high-care beds as well as 60 mental health beds, meaning nobody will miss out. It will change the game for aged care and health in our area. This centre will complement the existing geriatric medicine hospital and palliative care services already offered at the site, creating an unrivalled health-care hub for older residents in Melbourne's east.

While aged care might be daunting for some, it will mean that they are able to have the world-class care in our community that they can call home. It will change the game for aged care well and truly in our area. I am proud that we are delivering on this important election commitment, and I would love for the minister to come down to our community to meet the hardworking health care workers at Eastern Health and to see the site where this is going to be delivered for our community. I thank the good minister for his hard work in ensuring that this promise is being delivered in full.

#### **SOUTH-WEST COAST ELECTORATE WEED CONTROL**

**Ms BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:09): (742) My adjournment is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for the minister to increase departmental resources to help control weeds, including sweet pittosporum, which is spreading exponentially and cannibalising south-west Victoria's forests.

In the 1990s native forests in the south-west of Victoria were closed to logging and became designated forest parks and national parks. It was the Brumby Labor government which recognised that these areas were of the highest ecological value in the state. It was a Labor government that called for this protection, but successive Labor governments have ignored their duty to maintain and protect these areas. The consequences are devastating and potentially irreversible.

At present the future of these forests around Bolwarra and Heywood is largely in the hands of volunteers who are doing all the hard work trying to eradicate sweet pittosporum but feel like they are fighting a losing battle. Our authorities are grossly under-resourced and completely hamstrung to manage this issue. In south-west Victoria we have a few rangers who oversee all the forests and national parks from Port Campbell to Tower Hill. The passionate ranger I met with recently grapples to control the weeds which cannibalise our revered bushland. She is reliant on the goodwill and commitment of a volunteer workforce, including the Friends of Tower Hill, whom I met with recently and who begged me to assist them with their passionate work maintaining Tower Hill.

When it comes to protecting our ecosystem against the scourge of weeds, Labor has left us with no commitment, no plan, no resources and almost no hope. If the eradication of these weeds is not prioritised, our forests as we know them will have disappeared within a generation. Destruction of this kind is heartbreaking and unconscionable. Labor appears to have forgotten that sweet pittosporum and other weeds substantially reduce biodiversity. The growth of flowering flora and native grasses is inhibited, and native birds are then starved of nectar and seeds. Imagine our forests without robins, wrens, finches and the seed-feeding crimson rosella.

Does the state government care about the survival of our native flora and fauna? If it does—and it ought to—then action must be taken. Within my electorate there are no fewer than six volunteer groups who are devoting their time and efforts to eradicating weeds in the bush reserves, coastal reserves and state game reserves, but they have many thousands of acres to maintain. It is a never-ending battle, one which ought to be fought using state-funded resources. I call on the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change to devote the resources required to work to eradicate this cancer from our region before it is too late.

#### **DAREBIN CITY COUNCIL PARKING STRATEGY**

**Ms THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (19:11): (743) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action that I seek is for the minister to investigate avenues available to the state government to prevent the Greens-controlled Darebin council from implementing its proposed parking strategy. My office has been flooded with concerned and distressed locals, and there are many aspects as to why they are concerned—not least of these is the blanket approach used to designate large swathes of the electorate as 2-hour permit-only parking from 8.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m., seven days a week, and severely limiting the availability of permits. This leaves thousands of my constituents with an impossible choice: being forced to sell their cars or else move out. It is heavy-handed, ideologically driven and out of touch with the reality of so many lives.

Consider the example of my constituent Olivia. Olivia is a new mum with a two-week-old baby. Her husband goes back to work very soon and will use public transport for this. They have a car fitted with a baby seat to get from A to B. Olivia's mum will drive over several times a week to help her daughter. Under the strategy, neither Olivia nor her mum would be able to park in the street for more than 2 hours at a time—a completely distressing situation.

To add to the chaos, late last week we were greeted with the news that some of Darebin's own councillors will be supporting a motion to withdraw the Darebin parking strategy. They claim not to have written the strategy or even to have considered it. In attempting to wash their hands of the strategy they have unceremoniously thrown the CEO under a bus. The CEO is of course appointed by the councillors and takes her riding instructions from them. It is completely unbelievable that these

councillors were not briefed on the strategy and were not in fact cheerleaders of its passage. No, they knew about it all right!

This bold strategy, as they call it, is aimed at getting cars out of Darebin by shaming and penalising car owners under the veil of the climate emergency. There is virtually no recognition of the complex reasons why people need to use a car. Whether it is a mother with a baby, a tradesperson or a young couple who commute to work but use their car on weekends, this strategy tells them they are not welcome in Darebin. We all want a cleaner future, but this is yet another example of the Greens being driven by ideology and leaving both reality and locals in their wake.

Perhaps most insulting of all has been the public consultation, which made no genuine attempt to reach those affected. But the people of my electorate are not so easily deceived. To their credit they have galvanised, and their petition now has almost 6000 signatures.

Last week I wrote to the mayor of Darebin to express my concerns, and this week I met with her in person. She has assured me that the proposal as it stands will be withdrawn at the next council meeting. We will see if that eventuates. In the meantime I ask the minister to investigate avenues to prevent the harm that would be imposed by this hardline strategy. To my constituents I say this: my promise to you is to be vigilant. I will continue to push for you to be treated with respect and fairness and to keep your neighbourhoods livable.

### GRAMPIANS ROCK CLIMBING

**Ms KEALY** (Lowan) (19:14): (744) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently intervene to permit and guarantee licensed tour operators (LTOs) continued access to Summerday Valley in the Grampians National Park and to ensure the current licensing arrangements that allow access to Summerday Valley continue until the Grampians landscape management plan review is completed and released. LTOs that currently operate in the Grampians National Park are permitted under their current licensing arrangements to take rock climbing tour groups to Summerday Valley. They will be able to continue to do so until 30 June, but there is great uncertainty beyond this date.

Summerday Valley is a key climbing site in the Grampians. It is popular because it is a great climb for new climbers and for children and is even accessible for people with a disability or in wheelchairs. In fact it is one of the few climbs that is accessible to all rock climbers to enjoy our beautiful Grampians National Park and learn to climb safely. I myself have abseiled, with my slightly terrified National Party colleagues, in Summerday Valley with the fantastic LTO Tori Dunn. Like all climbers and LTOs I have met from the local region, Tori has enormous respect for the Grampians. She sees herself as a protector of the area and as someone who has responsibility to connect with and care for the environment and Indigenous history of the region and to educate and share that respect with all those that tour with her.

It is deeply concerning that with little notice or consultation LTOs like Tori will have their permission to take tour groups into Summerday Valley denied, even though there is no evidence that rock climbers have damaged areas of cultural significance in Summerday Valley or that climbers have damaged the environment in the region. Given there is a review already underway of the Grampians landscape management plan and given LTOs already have many bookings into the new licensing year to take tour groups into Summerday Valley, there is no good reason for these operations to cease in the interim period until the management plan is complete. Failure to ensure access will cripple local tour operators and close one of the most significant climbing sites in Victoria. As Tori said:

Kids are the real losers. The opportunities provided to children to rock climb will be significantly reduced if Summerday Valley is closed without consultation and full understanding of the impacts on climbing opportunities in Victoria and on local businesses.

Again, it is essential the minister understands there is no evidence of damage to areas of cultural significance in Summerday Valley and therefore no trigger or reason to cease LTOs' access to this fantastic climbing region.

So, Minister, I ask you to see reason and to support these important small businesses, to protect tourism in the Grampians, to support the great activity of rock climbing, to ensure there is ongoing opportunity to access one of the very few climbing sites that is wheelchair accessible and child friendly, and to provide permission and a guarantee to local LTOs that they will be able to continue to access Summerday Valley after 1 July, as they have done so respectfully and in an environmentally sound way for decades.

### **BAY HOTEL WORKER ENTITLEMENTS**

**Mr RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (19:17): (745) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Industrial Relations, and the action I seek is an update on the progress of the Andrews Labor government's wage theft policy and how it will protect workers in the Mordialloc electorate. The importance of this policy has been highlighted in recent times by the challenges facing former workers of the Bay hotel in the Mordialloc electorate. The Bay hotel was for many years the place to catch up with family and friends over a meal, over a beverage or two, across the road from the beautiful Mordialloc Creek and Port Phillip Bay. Sadly, this beautiful image was shattered when in February of this year workers at the Bay hotel noticed that their wages were not being paid on time. Shortly after that no wages were being paid at all, and in May the Bay hotel closed its doors and the dedicated and passionate staff were left without jobs, with months of pay and entitlements taken away. During that time frame the former owner of the Bay hotel sold the bricks and mortar of the business for \$6.15 million and began leasing it back to a new landlord. Millions of dollars were secured from the sale of the premises while millions were ripped away from the workers of the Bay hotel. And to add further pain to these workers, we have learned that five years worth of superannuation was never paid into the accounts of Bay hotel workers in Mordialloc. United Voice Australia has done a wonderful job of taking up the fight for their wages and entitlements, and I place on the record my admiration for their hard work and their fight on behalf of these wonderful workers.

The Andrews Labor government committed at the last election that employers who deliberately underpaid or did not pay their workers at all would face massive fines and up to 10 years jail under new laws to be introduced when it came to government. This legislation will be crucial for all Victorians, and I will fight alongside United Voice for what is rightfully these workers' entitlements and wages. I want to take this opportunity to join the call for the former owner of the Bay hotel in Mordialloc to do the right thing immediately: pay your workers the millions of dollars in wages, entitlements and superannuation right now that are owing to the wonderful workers of the Bay hotel in Mordialloc. I ask the Minister for Industrial Relations to update my community on the progress of the Andrews Labor government's wage theft policy and how it will protect workers in the Mordialloc electorate.

### **SHEPPARTON ELECTORATE EARLY PARENTING CENTRE**

**Ms SHEED** (Shepparton) (19:19): (746) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health in the other place, and the action I seek is that she visit Shepparton to meet with the proponents of an early parenting centre. Of all the matters I have lobbied this government for over my time in this place, an early parenting centre, which I have always referred to previously as a mother-baby unit, is one of the most pressing. There has been strong advocacy for many years for the establishment of an early parenting centre in Shepparton. My husband, a senior consultant paediatrician for over 35 years in Shepparton, commenced lobbying back in 1997. I am disappointed that the budget last week allocated \$135.1 million for seven new early parenting centres, with new centres for Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong and metropolitan areas but not Shepparton.

If the government is seeking the greatest return on its investment, there is no better place to invest than Shepparton. Our need is arguably more pressing than the other three regional centres. I say this,

Minister, because there is much evidence for it. The most recently released *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2018* confirms what we have known for a long time—that is, the most vulnerable in our community continue to have increased vulnerability across all indicators in that Australian Early Development Census domain. The evidence is that in our region access to services is delayed, interventions are delayed and critical infant brain development time is wasted as infants wait for professional parenting assessments before stable parenting or care arrangements can commence. Travelling to metropolitan centres creates considerable hardship and results in many people not seeking the support they need. So much work has been done to progress the plan, including visits to Tweddle Child and Family Health Service in Footscray and the unit in Ballarat. We now have a very clear picture of the sort of service we want to provide and believe it accords with the philosophy behind the parenting services. I would like to point out that at the moment at the unit in Ballarat there is already a mother-baby unit. It was funded some time ago and is up and going.

I call on the minister to consider why one regional centre would receive two similar early development centres while another very needy community receives none. The Andrews government has delivered on a range of projects for Shepparton since I entered this place four years ago. The Goulburn Valley Health redevelopment and the Shepparton education plan are two of the very big-ticket items in our region, but I ask the government to deliver on what is a critical but much smaller area. I would like to quote the Minister for Health:

There are so many expectations on new parents these days. It's why we're making sure they're getting the support they need, in the moments they need it most.

Minister, Shepparton's parents and babies arguably need it the most. Will you make sure they get the support they need?

#### FOOTSCRAY CITY COLLEGE

**Ms HALL** (Footscray) (19:22): (747) My adjournment is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for her to prepare a response to a policy report prepared by students at Footscray City College about the reduction of crime at train stations. It was a very professional report, and I know that the Andrews government is committed to improving safety throughout Victoria, particularly at train stations, for the benefit of passengers and staff alike. I know the students would appreciate a response to the recommendations and findings of their report.

#### RESPONSES

**Mr WYNNE** (Richmond—Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Planning) (19:23): The member for Sandringham raised a matter for the Premier, seeking a response from the Premier to an earlier adjournment matter pertaining to the removal of graffiti on the Sandringham line, and I will make sure the Premier is made aware of that.

The member for Buninyong raised a matter for the Minister for Roads, seeking that the minister visit her electorate specifically in relation to an intersection upgrade of a roundabout at Sebastopol, and I will make sure the minister is aware of that matter.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change pertaining to noxious weeds, particularly blackberry infestations in the Neerim Junction area, and I will make sure the minister is aware of that request.

The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers in relation to an important election commitment for Eastern Health around site inspections for a new major facility that is going to be built, I think, next door to the Eastern Health facility, and I will make sure the minister is aware of that request.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change seeking funding for weed control activities around the Heywood area and environs,

particularly pertaining to the Tower Hill precinct as I understand it, and I will make sure that the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is aware of that.

The member for Northcote raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government seeking what capacity the Minister for Local Government has to address some significant local concerns of her community in relation to proposed car parking policy changes which have been mooted by the Darebin council. I will make sure that the minister is aware of that.

The member for Lowan raised a matter for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in relation to tour operators' access to Summerday Valley in the Grampians National Park for rock climbing activities for the community generally, and I will make sure that the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is aware of that matter.

The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Industrial Relations seeking an update from the minister in relation to the important policies of the government as they relate to wage theft, particularly pointing out a hotel called the Bay hotel where both workers' wages and superannuation have failed to be honoured by the former owner of the Bay hotel. I will absolutely make sure that the Minister for Industrial Relations is aware of that matter.

The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Health seeking the minister to visit the Shepparton region and to take representations in relation to her argument about the acute need for a parenting centre for Shepparton, a most needy community as we know, and I will make sure the minister is aware of that request.

Finally, the member for Footscray raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services seeking a formal response to an excellent initiative by the Footscray City College and a number of recommendations that the college students have made in relation to safety around the train station at Footscray. I will make sure that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is aware of that.

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

**House adjourned 7.28 p.m.**