



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 9 September 2026

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 July 2026)

Jacinta Allan (from 27 September 2023 to 28 July 2026)

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Gabrielle Williams (from 28 July 2026)

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023 to 28 July 2026)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

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

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 13 February 2026

⁶ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁸ Sworn in 4 March 2025

⁹ Sworn in 2 June 2026

¹⁰ Resigned 6 January 2025

¹¹ Resigned 7 July 2023

¹² Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹³ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 9 September 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notices of motion 76 to 88 and orders of the day 5 and 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions

Mornington-Tyabb–Racecourse roads, Mornington

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) presented petition bearing 716 signatures:

This petition draws to the attention of the House the intersection of Mornington-Tyabb Road and Racecourse Road, Mornington, which presents serious ongoing safety risks for pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users, including school students, older residents, people with a disability, and mobility scooter users.

This intersection is a significant concern for local residents. Pedestrians trying to cross can be left stranded on narrow median islands without adequate protection, creating an unsafe environment at a busy intersection.

The danger is heightened during major events at Mornington Racecourse, when traffic volumes and congestion increase, and over the last several months due to traffic diversions and extra traffic linked to the ongoing Peninsula Link roadworks. Mornington Peninsula Shire is also forecast to grow by over 13% by 2046, to 192,000 residents, and the Peninsula's population already surges to 225,000–250,000 during peak holiday months. So this situation will only get worse if not dealt with.

Residents have raised concerns about safety at this intersection for a long period, yet no meaningful action has been taken. The petitioners thus request the Legislative Assembly to call on the Victorian Government to urgently deliver safety improvements at the intersection of Mornington-Tyabb Road and Racecourse Road, Mornington, including immediate interim safety measures and a permanent safety upgrade.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-Demand Industries

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (09:35): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on the inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Maintaining State Roads (Volumes 1 and 2) – Ordered to be published

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 117

Victorian WorkCover Authority (WorkSafe) – Report of requests under s 10 of the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*, s 11 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and s 595 of the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*.

*Bills***Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:36): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026 without amendment.

Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (09:36): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026.

*Business of the house***Standing and sessional orders**

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended today to allow the members for Gippsland East and Malvern to make valedictory statements for a maximum of 15 minutes each at the conclusion of the matter of public importance.

Motion agreed to.

*Members statements***St Albans youth advisory council**

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Veterans) (09:38): I rise today to congratulate the fantastic St Albans youth advisory council members on their 2026 presentation. It was wonderful to see the council tackling two important local issues for young people: youth civic participation and, of course, youth mental health. The presentation and the projects that they worked on were showcased here in Parliament House yesterday and delivered by the young people, and their incredible teamwork was demonstrated. I am really proud of the working group for supporting their confidence and their leadership skills. I want to thank all of our youth council members: Audrey Lo, Sophia Mykhaylyk, Aarshiya Khillan, Minh Trinh, Ethan Lu, Kirthik Ramachandran, Neili Perera, Edward Iager and, of course, Maria Ansari. Best of luck for your journey. I know you will go far. You have demonstrated great leadership and confidence in working and collaborating on important issues. On behalf of the St Albans youth advisory council I am absolutely proud and honoured to have worked with you all, and I wish you the very best in your endeavours as you continue to shine in our local community.

State election

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:39): The Nationals are ready to get on with the job of strong and stable government, with a positive plan to rebuild regional Victoria. The Nationals will fix our roads, investing \$5 billion to repair and rebuild our state road network, plus \$288 million for local country roads and bridges. The Nationals will also tackle crime, with 3000 additional police, tougher bail and sentencing laws and consequences for repeat offenders. The Nationals will rebuild regional health care, attracting more doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals and getting mental health reform back on track. The Nationals will build more homes, cut red tape and unlock land so young people and families will have a better chance to buy a home and build their dream home and renters will have more affordable choices. The Nationals will ease the cost of living, scrapping Labor's

emergency services tax and unlocking our plentiful conventional gas reserves to deliver affordable and reliable energy to keep our power bills down. But that is not all. Through the Nationals' fair share guarantee the 25 per cent of Victorians who live in regional Victoria will finally get 25 per cent of new infrastructure investment that we absolutely deserve. These are the things that country Victorians tell us matter: better roads, safer communities, better health care and more homes and lower costs. The Nationals are ready to govern, we are ready to rebuild regional Victoria and we are ready to deliver country Victorians their fair share.

Melton electorate community

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:41): As I reflect on my time as the member for Melton I want to recognise the many community and sporting groups I have worked alongside over the years and thank them for the enormous contribution they make to our community. Our heart, diabetes and prostate support groups; the Melton Men's Group; Vietnam veterans and partners; the RSL; the Naval Association; Young Diggers; Probus; gardening clubs; environmental groups; Scouts and Guides; our community and education centres; performing arts; and our many multicultural communities are just some of the groups that bring people together and provide friendship, support and a sense of belonging. I also want to recognise organisations like the Vinnies soup van, Aspire and the Salvation Army Social Housing Service, who are there for people who are doing it tough. I am particularly proud of the work we have done together helping many people through housing applications and connecting them with the right support.

Of course our sporting clubs are just as important. There are far too many to name individually, and I have been proud to spend time with and support many of those clubs and sports across Melton over the years, from our biggest clubs to some of our smallest and more niche sports. I particularly want to acknowledge those smaller sports. Our community is rich and varied, and not everyone wants to play the same game. There should be a sport, a club and a place for everyone.

All these organisations do far more than provide activities. They create friendships, support people through difficult times and give people somewhere they belong. To every volunteer, coach, committee member and supporter, thank you for the opportunity of working together throughout my time as the member for Melton. Without our community groups and sporting clubs we would all be worse off, and I want to thank them all.

Bonnie Doon Football Netball Club

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:42): The netballers at Bonnie Doon are on fire. Their under-15s, under-17s, B reserve, B grade and A grade are all in the grand final on Saturday. That is five teams. What a remarkable effort for a small town club. If ever there was a good reason for a court upgrade, this is it. I hope their application for the 2026–27 Local Sports Infrastructure Fund grant is successful.

Michael Chesworth

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:42): Michael Chesworth is retiring from the Murrindindi shire after 30 years. Currently the director of people and corporate performance, Michael has had many roles and has always been relied on to fill gaps. You certainly know about it when you help your communities recover from a disaster like Black Saturday. Michael is capable, reliable, hardworking and incredibly decent. I trust his retirement will see his horsemanship skills develop and flourish.

Kim Chadband

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:43): There are some people who, through their working life, just get things done and make a meaningful and long-lasting impact on people and communities. Kim Chadband of Yea is one of these people. I want to acknowledge and highlight the impact Kim has had in the Murrindindi shire and regional Victoria. Through her roles with government, particularly Regional Development Victoria and the shire, Kim has helped people and organisations navigate what can be a complex and frustrating system. Whether it is support on an individual level for those

impacted by fires or floods or helping community groups and organisations optimise their chance for grants, Kim has been there. She gets it. She will be greatly missed as she rides off into the sunset of retirement. I am sure she will have a great time.

Bass electorate community

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (09:44): Serving, working for and walking beside the people of Bass on Bunurong and Boonwurrung country has been more than a privilege; it has been a journey of highs and lows, fierce collective advocacy and hard-won outcomes, treasured friendships and beautiful connections that leave a cherished imprint. Today I want to thank the extraordinary people and organisations across our electorate. From schools and kinders to health services, sporting clubs, arts and cultural organisations, neighbourhood houses, local businesses, emergency services, community and support groups and environmental organisations, thank you for welcoming me into your spaces and places, sharing your aspirations and challenges and working with energy and passion to make Bass stronger, fairer and more connected. It is your determination and vision that have enabled so much to be delivered: new and upgraded schools, expanded hospitals, more buses, sporting facilities, local clubs, early parenting centres, upgraded emergency services, more social housing, stronger planning outcomes and protections for our beautiful environment. Together we have delivered new paths and trails, boat ramps and jetties, playgrounds and skate parks and backed hundreds of projects across towns large and small. We have supported festivals and events galore that bring people together, celebrate creativity and showcase the best of our region. Above all, I want to acknowledge our glorious volunteers. Your spirited generosity, selflessness and countless hours of service thread us together, make our hearts sing and exemplify our true community colours. With an abundance of gratitude and pride, thank you for being in the world.

Clyde North infrastructure

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:45): I rise on behalf of my constituents in Clyde North, and obviously over the border in Clyde, who for years have been promised a new railway line and railway station by the Labor Party – since 1999. That promise has never been delivered, and the community continue to ask why. They are joining others in the community who are talking about the lack of road infrastructure, the potholes through the area and the neglect when it comes to phone reception. One thing they have noted is that the new candidates in the area are coming out and saying about all of these things, ‘We like to have no excuses; we are all about action,’ and then they give excuses of why they have not or cannot deliver. The Victorian community and the Clyde North community particularly are sick and tired of that coming from Labor, who promise one thing before an election and fail to deliver it after. Clyde North police station, Clyde rail, Thompsons Road, Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road – the list goes on and on, and people down there are sick and tired of it.

Members for Rowville and Croydon

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:46): On another note, I want to congratulate the member for Rowville and the member for Croydon, who over the years I have had the pleasure of working with. I note the member for Rowville is here right now, and he did say yesterday some of the good things he has had during this time. I will say to both of them as mentors and as people I have had the opportunity to work with that I thank them both for their service and for what they did. To the member for Croydon, who is not here, those in this room who know, they will know that when he walks into your room with that glass of whisky after you have had a bad day and comes in to support you is the highlight and one of the reasons he is such a great character. I wish them both all the best.

Felicitations

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (09:47): As the end of my term in Parliament as the member for Essendon approaches, I want to take the opportunity to thank a few people. To the people of Essendon who have placed their trust and faith in me, thank you so much for the opportunity to serve, and I am so pleased with what we have achieved together. To my campaign manager Darren, Glenice who

opened up her house and the countless volunteers who helped me turn Essendon from a marginal seat to a safe seat, thank you so much. To my chiefs of staff – Drew, Naomi, David and Kieran – thank you for your intellect, your commitment and for all your efforts. To my deputy chiefs – Jo, Claudia, Ben, Matt and Joe – you have played important roles in supporting me and the team. Thank you very much. Thanks to my long-serving executive assistant Jackie and to all my advisers over all the portfolios and the many years. Thank you for your dedication. In particular I want to thank Naomi's industriousness, Kieran's commitment, Jac's humour, Claudia's endurance, Liz's courage, Jules's judgement, Jono's humanity, Tony's loyalty, Joe's insights and Nevada's intellect. To my electorate office staff – Jayne, Frank, Jenni, Rod, Jono, Kara, Grace, Max, Rebecca and Ella – thank you for helping me build a better community in Essendon. To Bridget, previously Ray, the parliamentary staff, my committee staff, IT, catering and everyone else who makes this place hum, thank you for what you do to make this place work. To all my secretaries – Chris, Jeremi, David, Chris, Simon, Matt, Bridget, Bridget, Paul, Jeroen, Jo and Emma – thank you for your commitment to the service and to the people of Victoria. And to my family, thank you for your love and for keeping me grounded. To my caucus colleagues, thank you for your camaraderie and support over many years. To end, I quote the legendary Don Walker: 'Nothing stopped us on the field in our day.' Goodbye.

Warrandyte electorate

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:48): Three years ago the electorate of Warrandyte took a chance on me, the daughter of migrants, someone who had not grown up in politics and the first woman to represent the seat of Warrandyte. Since then I have worked hard every single day to earn my community's trust. I have stood up in Parliament for people who feel done over by the system. I have fought for real action on crime, for stronger laws and for safer communities. I have fought for children in our care system that this government has let down. I have not been afraid to call out the waste, the broken promises and the billions in corruption that should have gone into our roads, our schools and our hospitals. I have embedded myself in our local sports clubs and met locals at hundreds of community events. I have sat in tears with residents who have been hard done by and taken up their fight. When our community looks at the ballot paper in Warrandyte, there is only one name on it who has been fighting for them every single week in this Parliament. I am laying my record on the line and asking again to have the honour of being the member for Warrandyte. As I said in my maiden speech, I have not come here to make a career; I have come here to make a difference. From Doncaster East to Chirnside Park, from Ringwood North to Warrandyte to Wonga Park, I am asking for your support so I can keep making that difference and keep fighting for our community.

Brian Stahl

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (09:49): I was very sad to hear some weeks ago of the passing of Brian Stahl OAM. Most, if not everyone, in Hastings would know of Brian. He was truly a man of the people and of the community, and he was an inspiration to many. He simply led by example and set that bar very high. He first came to Hastings with his wife Bernice and young family in 1966, and like all newcomers to country towns he decided to join the Hastings Football Club as a trainer. That was the beginning of a lifelong relationship with the footy and cricket clubs and, more importantly, with the community of Hastings.

I need more time to talk about all of the things that Brian did in the community and the help and support he gave people, businesses, families and children. Brian was a councillor with the Shire of Hastings for eight years and served as the president in 1992 and 1993. He was also on the Mornington shire council for a couple of years and served as the mayor. Brian chaired the neighbourhood renewal project, was president of the Westernport Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was a director of the local branch of the Bendigo Bank and much more. He was named Citizen of the Year and in 2004 he

received a Queen's Birthday honour of an Order of Australia for his outstanding contribution to the community. The Hastings Football Club said in their tribute:

People like Brian a very rare, Brian's sense of helping the community was huge, and there would not be any organisation in Hastings ...

that was not touched by him.

Bairnsdale hospital

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:51): Bairnsdale needs a new hospital, and it needs to start with a new emergency department. I have had a petition out on that for a number of weeks now, and there are about 3000 signatures on it, about 1500 online and 1500 hard copy. I encourage my community to get behind this push to have a new hospital in Bairnsdale. We need a facility that is going to cater for future population growth and stop the ambulance ramping that we have.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:52): Over recent times I have been spending a lot of time with our outstanding candidate in Gippsland East, who I am hoping will replace me, Gemma Rendell. We have been crisscrossing the electorate, spending a lot of time on the road from Mallacoota down to Heyfield and up to Omeo over multiple trips, and the thousands of people we talk to simply tell us that they are sick of the waste and they are ready for a change. In government we will restore regional health care, we will fix our roads and we will ease the cost-of-living pressures on people. That is the message we are putting out, and that is the message that is being well received.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:52): I also want to briefly mention the new IBAC laws, and even more I want to welcome our commitment to making them retrospective. This Premier is so adamant about integrity – we hear it all the time in the chamber and we hear it at all the press conferences – but it is a massive failure on his part to introduce these new powers and not give them retrospectivity. He needs to do it now.

Castlemaine Secondary College

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (09:53): Speaker, I rise on behalf of you, the incredible member for Bendigo West. Back in May year 9 students from Castlemaine Secondary College took part in an innovative civics and citizenship education program called UnAssembly. It was run by Folio Collective and Really Local in partnership with Castlemaine Community House. The two-day student citizens assembly and mock election taught students all about democracy. They developed and applied key democratic skills, including constructive disagreement, critical thinking and compromise to design their ideal democracy. Together they set their own ground rules for the process and deliberated their way to consensus on fundamental features of a democratic system, including the basic values on which democracy depends.

In the mock election the students cast ballots in a pizza vote to experience how different voting systems – first past the post, preferential and proportional – can result in different pizzas being elected. And their votes mattered. The election results were delivered and devoured by the students. The joint report makes recommendations for improving democracy, including an institutional voice for nature and future generations and introducing optional voting from 16 years of age. As a proud former student of Castlemaine Secondary College myself, I would like to congratulate the students, staff and UnAssembly team for proving that young people are ready to do more than just study democracy, they are ready to practise it.

Rotary Safe Families

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (09:54): I recently had the pleasure of meeting with the president of Hawthorn Rotary Dorothy Gilmour to discuss Rotary Safe Families, an initiative dedicated to

preventing family abuse before it starts. This initiative was founded by Dorothy in 2018 and built on the simple conviction that family violence is preventable through educating young people long before they enter an adult relationship. The Safe Families program uses a framework of three Rs: recognise, raise and refer. Each of us should learn how to recognise and identify signs of abuse, we should all provide guidance and raise a conversation with the victim and we should all refer a victim of abuse to a support service or appropriate police intervention. The Safe Families initiative has grown into a global movement involving more than 100 Rotary clubs and community organisations across the world. It is particularly impactful for our migrant and multicultural communities, who can benefit from the support this program provides. Violence, particularly family violence, is never acceptable – not now or ever – and it is important for each of us to do our part in empowering victims to speak up and also educate the next generation to prevent further acts of violence early on.

In addition to this amazing program, I thank and congratulate Hawthorn Rotary on their indefatigable work locally and beyond on so many fronts, like raising awareness around mental health along with international humanitarian projects alongside the Rotary Cub of Nhill in Myanmar so villagers can have safe drinking water. The Hawthorn community and beyond is eternally grateful to Hawthorn Rotary for all its great work.

Cranbourne electorate roads

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:55): There is a lot going on in Cranbourne, Clyde and Clyde North. I am not sure if you have heard the news, but we are upgrading the Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road intersection to ease congestion and make people's journey home safer and more reliable. Right now they are finishing major works on the intersection, and it will be reopened to traffic in just a few weeks.

But wait, there is more. The Clyde-Five Ways Road and South Gippsland Highway project is underway, and I could not be more impressed. We are improving safety with new traffic signals at each intersection, we are making it safer and easier to walk around the area with upgraded footpaths and signalised pedestrian crossings and of course we are improving traffic flow. From late September through to Christmas we will move into the final stage of major construction, so I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who lives in the area for their patience and also thank those people who are working on the project.

But wait, there is more. Last weekend the Minister for Roads and Road Safety announced that a re-elected Carroll Labor government will widen Evans Road between Thompsons Road and Central Parkway in Cranbourne West. Work is already underway further up Evans Road, so this is going to make a huge difference to everyone moving around the Cranbourne area. Cranbourne is unrecognisable at Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road, Hall Road, Evans Road and Western Port Highway, and dangerous level crossings have been removed, including at Camms Road. We said we would do it, and we have. There is a lot going on in Cranbourne.

Casey Warriors Rugby League Club

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:57): On another matter, I was honoured to be able to have a relationship with the Casey Warriors, and they have something to celebrate. All five of the Storm junior leagues have made the grand final. Go Storm!

One Nation Victoria

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:57): I rise to call out the extraordinary hypocrisy of One Nation and its supporters. They claim to stand for law and order, yet they have attacked Andrew Hastie for giving sworn evidence under subpoena in the Ben Roberts-Smith defamation proceedings. Mr Hastie and I disagree on plenty, but he served in our nation's defence forces for more than 12 years and deployed twice to Afghanistan. When compelled to appear in court, he respected the rule of law and gave evidence under oath. For that, Hastie says he has been called a rat, a traitor and worse. He ought to be thanked, not condemned. But this is not just about Andrew Hastie. More than 20 veterans and

witnesses gave evidence in those proceedings. Those who seek to shame people who gave evidence against Ben Roberts-Smith are not defending veterans, they are attacking them. Apparently, One Nation's respect for veterans depends entirely on whether those veterans agree with them. So which veteran matters more? The one who tells you what you want to hear, or the one who tells the truth under oath?

One Nation does not own patriotism. It does not get to redefine loyalty as silence. Victoria stands on the precipice of a Liberal–One Nation alliance – or LONA – government. If this is how One Nation treats veterans for respecting the law, I am loath to imagine what a LONA government would do to this state. Ben Roberts-Smith has been found liable in a civil matter, and the evidence of his fellow veterans stands against him on those matters.

Omnia Community Health

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:58): It is great to have the opportunity to speak about the Premier's visit to Omnia Community Health last week, speaking about the importance of a re-elected Carroll Labor government delivering 10 free dental clinics across Victoria. It was wonderful to be able to speak to staff and the whole team at Omnia, and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge David Wild, Peter Donlon and the entire team, who do outstanding work at that local service.

Betty and Joe Rizk

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:59): I also want to mention and put on the record my thanks and acknowledgement of Betty and Joe Rizk, who have for more than 28 years run the Goonawarra milk bar. The milk bar is known to so many in the community. Most importantly, the warmth and the generosity that the family provide for the community is something that is absolutely outstanding. That is why I was really pleased to be able to acknowledge both of them and their family as the Local Legends for the month.

Harley Elliot and Paul Wiggington

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:59): I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge Harley Elliot and Paul Wiggington, two outstanding members within my community, who I have spoken about before. They recently received Hume acknowledgement awards. Our community is full of great people, and I want to put that on the record.

Dromana Secondary College

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (10:00): It was a pleasure to return to my old stomping ground, Dromana Secondary College. Alongside the member for Mornington and the member for Flinders, I joined students from years 7 to 11 to discuss politics, leadership, our community and issues that matter to young people. They certainly kept us on our toes, and it was great to see such thoughtful and engaged students.

West Rosebud Bowling Club

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (10:00): I was delighted to join the West Rosebud bowling and croquet club for a lunch to celebrate the opening of its 2026 season. Founded in 1956, the club has a proud history and is a wonderful part of our community. It was a pleasure to address the members and present awards, and I wish everyone success for the season ahead.

Rosebud United Soccer Club

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (10:01): I congratulate Rosebud Heart Soccer Club and Rosebud Soccer Club on coming together to form Rosebud United Soccer Club. This is an exciting new chapter for soccer on the southern peninsula, bringing together two proud clubs with a strong sense of community and a shared love for the game. It was great to catch up with the club and discuss their facilities, and I wish the players, community and volunteers every success for the seasons ahead.

Just a Farmer

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (10:01): Farmers are doing it tough. Last week at Flinders Civic Hall, alongside the member for Mornington, I was proud to host members of our farming community for a screening of *Just a Farmer*. Written and co-produced by Leila McDougall, the film powerfully depicts the pressures farming families face and the devastating consequences of suicide. It is an important reminder to those struggling that they must feel that they are able to speak openly and seek support.

Nepal and Tibet floods

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:01): The tragic flood disaster in Nepal has an unknown number of lives lost and has impacted on the health and wellbeing of so many people. For many people the floods have brought unimaginable loss and uncertainty. They know there is a very long journey ahead. The Geelong Nepalese community recently held a vigil in Geelong. The member for Lara and I joined them, coming together to support and comfort those who have lost loved ones and for those who are still missing.

The Geelong Nepalese community have organised a fundraising dinner in collaboration with Lara Sporting Club to support Nepal flood victims on Monday 21 September. The funds raised will be donated to Nepal flood victims, with a focus on displaced children. The community of Geelong sends its support and strength to Nepal. I know there are many people across our communities wanting to do something for the people of Nepal. Buying a ticket is a great way to do that.

Geelong Running Festival

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:02): On another matter, the Geelong Running Festival is coming up on 20 September. Organised by Lee Troop, three-time Olympian, this will be the first time this event is held in Geelong. I am proud that the Carroll Labor government is supporting this significant event. I extend my sincere thanks to Lee Troop for his dedication and hard work in making this a reality. It is great to see Lee's commitment to ensuring that the marathon is an inclusive event. The event will include a marathon, half marathon and community 6.5-kilometre event, along with a kids 1 mile and an all-abilities 1 mile.

Greenvale electorate roads

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:03): It was a joy to join so many constituents on Friday to announce that a re-elected Carroll Labor government and I will duplicate Somerton Road from Greenvale to Roxburgh Park Drive, with a \$494 million investment in 4 kilometres of new road. Somerton Road will be widened from two lanes to six lanes, with new, safer intersections in Meadow Heights, Roxy and Greenvale and new shared pedestrian and bike paths. I have been fighting for this commitment for our community because it matters so much to so many across Meadow Heights, Greenvale, Roxburgh Park and beyond. If I am back here next year on the government benches, this project will start next year.

The Somerton Road upgrade will build on my record of delivery for our community: Greenvale Reservoir Park reopened; Mickleham Road stage 1 funded and delivered; Mickleham Road stage 2 fully funded, with early works underway; and now Somerton Road. This \$494 million commitment is so important to ensure that our local roads are safe and able to serve our growing community. Other parties are full of empty talk, but they never commit, fund or deliver anything in the north. I fought for this commitment, and I know it matters so much to our community across the electorate of Greenvale. Only I and a Carroll Labor government will duplicate Somerton Road.

Roxburgh Park United Soccer Club

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:04): Congratulations to Roxborough Park United Soccer Club, its players, incredible volunteers and coaches. The club's teams have secured a number of championships this year, and the senior men's team was promoted on the weekend. Thank you, Ayad, Dunia and all the volunteers and the fans who do so much for the club and the community.

Greenvale United Soccer Club

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:04): I was thrilled to be back at Greenvale United Soccer Club recently, and I congratulate the senior men on the promotion secured this weekend.

Nepal and Tibet floods

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:04): Last week I was very pleased but also saddened to join with our Premier in the Nepal commemoration at Federation Square. I offer condolences to all the community.

Hazel Glen College

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:05): Hazel Glen College's production of *Beauty and the Beast* had the audience excited before the curtains even went up. Parents were arriving at the Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre clutching flowers, full of emotion and anticipation, waiting to see their kids take the stage. Then it was time for *Be Our Guest*. What followed was a polished, energetic production and a striking showcase of the talent at Hazel Glen College. The performances were really terrific, but what stood out was just how many students were involved in bringing the production to life, both on the stage and behind the stage with costumes, props, sound and production. I want to recognise director Steph Williams, assistant director Emmie Hale, music director Damian Marshall, choreographers Cass Papotto and Georgia Rodda, costume lead Mahalia Rank, acting coach Joe D'Aspromonte and props lead Adam Sarros, together with all the teachers, staff and families who gave so much time and energy to the show. Thanks to Ajitesh for the invitation and congratulations to everyone involved. Special thanks and appreciation to Ellie Faralla, Tobey Lambert, Amelia Isatchenko, Peyton Condon, Will Attard, Mutsa Kundodyiwa, Aji Chumber, Emily Harding, Amileya Moro, Georgia Percy, Will Baillie, Mieke Van Nugtreen, Olivia Salisbury, Brynley Clough, Lilly Haas, Adam Janakievski and Parker Harris for such a fantastic production. You had me laughing.

Greensborough Tennis Club

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations) (10:06): I rise today to recognise the Greensborough Tennis Club, a wonderful local club with a proud 103-year history right in the heart of our community. For more than a century the club has called the same site in Greensborough home. Today, with around 170 members, it continues to be a place where people can get involved, meet new people and of course enjoy their tennis. The club calls itself a friendly club, and that spirit is evident in its free social tennis sessions, which have helped to bring new members through the doors and grow its competition teams. I would also like to recognise Nick Reid, who has been a part of the Greensborough Tennis Club for the past 10 years, including five years on the committee. As president, Nick has played an important role in helping the club to continue to grow and embrace new opportunities, including the introduction of pickleball. One person who really embodies the community spirit of the club is Michael Collins. Michael coached at Greensborough Tennis Club for more than 40 years before retiring a couple of years ago, but retirement certainly has not kept him away. He remains on the committee and is still an active player in one of the club's highest ranking teams. When the club began exploring pickleball ahead of its new courts, Michael embraced the challenge. Within just a few months he had become Victoria's over-70s pickleball champion – a fantastic achievement. Sport has clearly been a family affair for the Collins family, with Michael's wife Vicki also coaching for many years and their daughter Jackie Lacey now serving as the club's current coach. Congratulations to Michael and everyone at Greensborough Tennis Club for the passion, friendship and volunteer spirit that have kept this club thriving.

*Statements on parliamentary committee reports***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates*

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:08): I rise firstly as part of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, led by the chair, the member for Bellarine – I thank her for her work – on the inquiry into student pathways in in-demand industries. I note that in the house today we have a number of our youth associates, who have been a wonderful asset in helping us in this undertaking and in this inquiry. I know I cannot acknowledge them, so I will not do that. But what I will do is thank them for their insights, for sharing their lived experience and for helping us to understand as we undertook this inquiry how they feel as young people wanting to go into in-demand industries and what it means for us as legislators and as the government of the day to be able to shape and carve out pathways for students to go into in-demand industries in the workforce, particularly in an era when there is a changing workforce landscape with the rise of AI and many different things. It was all very interesting, and I thank them for their work and their contribution.

But I rise today to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2026–27 budget estimates, specifically chapter 9, subsection 9.1, regarding the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's financial analysis and its explanation that the reduction in the department's budgeted employee benefit was due to additional 2025–26 funding received for responding to emergencies, including bushfire, drought and biosecurity incidents. This report speaks to the funding that local emergency services receive, including our CFAs, and it is hard to read it without being reminded of the ageing emergency service vehicle fleet in my own electorate, which is in desperate need of both updates and upgrades. My electorate obviously is home to Warrandyte State Park. The bushfire risk is real in my community, and it was during the Black Summer fires where the risk came so perilously close that if it were not for the fact that the wind changed that day, we would have been swept up in that bushfire as well. It is something that is very real for my community and very real for the two local primary schools in particular, Anderson Creek Primary School and Warrandyte Primary School, and the local high school, Warrandyte High School, who often have to relocate given the bushfire risk in my community.

Warrandyte CFA's pumper is now 22 years old. A vital piece of firefighting equipment, this vehicle has served Warrandyte CFA well over the years, but it was the best option back in 2004, not in 2026. In a high bushfire risk community like Warrandyte, minutes matter, equipment matters and crew safety matters. A modern appliance would lift pumping performance, reliability, communications and interoperability on the ground. Particularly with Victoria facing another hot and dry fire season, we need that replacement pumper as soon as possible. Our volunteers have done their part for 22 years and beyond, and it is time that the government does theirs also. The needs of Warrandyte CFA have been made clear to me by their outstanding captain Will Hodgson, who at the moment is travelling across Australia. It is the acting captain Aaron Dean who is now in charge of Warrandyte CFA and the many dedicated members who serve our community so selflessly, who then have to get on trucks and do local fundraising so that they can update and upgrade their equipment. When we look at the budget estimates and we look at what money has been allocated to these emergency services fleets, it really begs the question: should these selfless volunteers have to jump on trucks to go around the community to deliver letters to ask for money to fight these fires, which they are doing as volunteers? I think that is a really pertinent question that the government should answer.

Looking at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2025–26 budget estimates, chapter 2, subsection 2.4.1, regarding taxation and its discussion of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and its impact on CFA volunteers, I look at Wonga Park CFA, also in my electorate, entirely staffed by local volunteers who respond to around 60 emergency incidents each year, including house fires, motor vehicle accidents, hazmat incidents and grass and forest fires. I think of,

in their brigade, John Greenwood-Smith, who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, who has been a member of Wonga Park CFA for 50 years and devoted his life in service to his community.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-Demand Industries

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:13): It is a real pleasure to rise to speak on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report into student pathways to in-demand industries, which we have just tabled this morning. This is a really important inquiry because it does talk about the future of this state. We know that the demand in our workforce is growing, and it is across health care, social assistance, construction, education and training, professional services, the clean economy and the digital economy. The Victorian Skills Authority predict that 87 per cent of new workers in the next decade are going to require a VET or higher education qualification. That is a statistic, but what is behind that statistic is a young person looking towards their future. They are making decisions about the subjects they may do at school, whether they will do further education, whether that might be an apprenticeship or training, and ultimately the kind of work that they would like to get into. We have a responsibility to make sure that those young people have the right information and the opportunities that they need to make those right decisions.

The clearest message we heard in this inquiry was that our careers education system absolutely needs to be strengthened. We heard that we have a shortage of qualified career practitioners in schools and about the impact staffing and resourcing constraints can have on this guidance. We heard that parents play a really critical role in helping young people make those decisions, but parents themselves are not always equipped with all the information that they need, especially to look at options other than university, which would be vocational education and training. Therefore career education needs to be more than just one conversation that happens at school.

We have a lot of other barriers that we looked at in this inquiry, and those include practical barriers like accessing VET, timetabling and cost, but also we had extra barriers for those students maybe who were regional students, First Nations students, students with a disability, female students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and additional education challenges around that training and employment and wraparound support.

There is a really particular thing I would like to mention about this inquiry that I think deserves stronger recognition today in my contribution, and that is the contribution of 10 youth associates, some of whom are here today. The committee did not simply want to ask young people what they thought; we wanted to make sure that they were part of this inquiry. They went and asked their peers for information. They presented then to the committee some of the data and some of the experiences that they had gathered. This brought different perspectives to the committee. It brought different angles and different ideas, and that diversity really mattered in our inquiry. I want to say too that it was not a contribution where they sat along an inquiry – their perspectives helped us make recommendations to the government. That is something that they should be very proud of, so I will take a moment to record my sincere thanks to each of our youth associates: Bianca, Dylan, Elijah, Harlequin, Matilda, Rowan, Atharva, Shanay, Sienna and Yesha. Thank you so much for giving your time, speaking with your peers and bringing this experience to the process.

Young people are not just our future. They are part of our communities now and they were making their voices heard. We should make sure that their voices are part of the decision-making that we are doing now for them. If we want young people to have confidence in our democracy and in our institutions, they need to see that Parliament is a place where their voice does matter. I want to make it clear on the record that they helped make this report better. They have helped our Parliament be better. They have shown us what meaningful youth participation can look like in this place.

Besides thanking the youth associates, I would also like to thank the deputy chair, the other committee members that were on the committee with me, the committee secretariat and the team, as well as

Naomi, who supported the youth associates, and all the organisations, educators, employers, unions and community organisations who have contributed to this inquiry. But again, I am just so thankful to the youth associates. Thank you for reminding us that young people should not just be a simple subject of our inquiries, you should be part of them. I really hope that this inquiry is one example of how we can continue to make sure voices can be heard. I hope that this is a test case to see more young people being involved in our committee. I am really looking forward to the government's response to the recommendations that we have made and making sure that we strengthen and improve the system so young people have the best advice and the best guidance to make sure that they have the best pathways to great careers.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:18): I rise today to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report into the 2026–27 budget estimates, and I am going to get stuck straight into some of the detail. I am conscious of time and the many elements of the Labor government's investment and whether we are getting a return on investment into regional Victoria. The short answer is a fat no. Let us delve into the detail. We are going to talk about roads to start with, because regional Victorians have been gaslit a fair bit in the last few weeks with a substantial announcement, no doubt following our \$5 billion commitment if elected this November into government to fix Victoria's roads and establish Better Roads Victoria, which is a standard and KPI to make sure our roads are fixed for good. Where does this come from? It is because Labor's own budget estimates and analysis of their investment show that 87 per cent of Victoria's road network is in pretty bad condition, largely in regional Victoria.

I want to quickly mention, to back up some of those claims, today's report from the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) *Maintaining State Roads*, which has just been tabled. Concerningly, 48 per cent of Victoria's state roads are in poor or very poor condition. That has gone up nearly 40 per cent in the past few years, since 2021. This is shameful, and regional Victorians are paying the price. Just to explain the description of 'very poor', this is structurally failing roads. They have jumped to 37 per cent in three years. This is not a badge of honour that my region wears proudly, but sitting at the second-worst for road conditions in Victoria is Hume, with nearly 50 per cent – 47.98 per cent – of the roads rated very poor.

I know that for a fact, because people like Roberta Begg and Olga Novak have reached out. Olga's story is just symptomatic of the issue in Victoria right now. She has a beautiful young family and is a nurse in our health services. She hit a pothole on the Saturday, could not work over the weekend and spent nearly half her wage in fixing a tyre. Olga is like every Victorian travelling on the roads in Victoria right now. It is really shameful the condition they are in. Considering VAGO were investigating the state of the roads, it is a coincidence when Labor comes out with a pothole fix blitz, I think. It smells like an election. But one thing is for sure: we are really proud to establish Better Roads Victoria, because Victorians are sick and tired of the standard of the repairs.

I also want to quickly mention health. We can go on on roads for the whole 5 minutes, and I wish I had more time, but right now we need access to health care. In the time I have been elected here, Labor has closed maternity at Benalla Health services, we are at risk of losing podiatry and in Kilmore it is very difficult to have a baby outside of business hours, 9 to 5. Try as you might to cross your legs, you cannot always time labour during business hours.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Thank you to the minister at the table. Who can time a labour during business hours, because that is what Labor is expecting? Your party is expecting us to time our births between 9 and 5, otherwise we are sent to Melbourne hospitals. In this 12,500 square kilometres it is difficult to have a baby in regional Victoria. Closing our services erodes our health services, and we

lose that whole-of-life care in regional Victoria. I am sorry, Minister, it is no laughing matter when you get redeployed. Listen to my maiden speech. This is the purpose of why I am here. These are not statistics, these are human stories of women being redirected to safer hospitals because you have closed our services. The Nationals will promise regional health care. We have committed – I am so proud – \$40 million over four years to establish a rural health workforce incentive scheme with a \$10,000 sign-on bonus to attract doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals into regional communities, because if we want better regional health care, we need the workforce to deliver it.

I want to talk about public transport in my last 20 seconds. We do not need Labor to convince us of their poor investment in regional public transport, but we are going to fix that and double the services. Finally, there will be generational investment on the Seymour to Albury line, doubling the services from six to 12. This is exciting and going to be a game changer for our region. I want to thank the Liberals candidate for Benambra Steve Martin for fighting for this on the ground.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-Demand Industries

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:23): I rise to support the Legislative Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry report into student pathways to in-demand industries. I commend the chair, the member for Bellarine, for tabling and just speaking to the substance of the report. Victoria's economy is undergoing significant and rapid change, and a growing and ageing population is increasing demand for workers in health care, construction and other essential sectors. At the same time, climate change and fast-moving technological advances are reshaping industries and transforming the types of jobs that will be available for people in the years ahead. As a result, students and workers will need to navigate an increasingly complex world of work.

According to the Victorian Skills Authority, as we highlight in the report, over 1.4 million workers will be needed in Victoria by 2035. This includes both people filling newly created jobs and workers replacing those who retire. It is forecast that 87 per cent of those workers and jobs will need post-secondary qualifications. Of the approximately 1.5 million workers, there are about 716,000 that will be in occupations generally aligned with vocational education and training qualifications and about 551,000 occupations aligned with university level qualifications. The industries forecast to experience the greatest growth over the next decade, accounting for around 42 per cent of all new workers, are in health care and social assistance, that is about 16.3 per cent or 363,000 workers; then professional, scientific and technical service, that is 10.5 per cent or 136,000 workers; retail trade, 9.4 per cent or 108,000 workers; the education and training sector, 9.2 per cent or 139,000 workers; and construction, 9 per cent or 162,000 workers.

These industries will require new aged care workers, disability carers, registered nurses, carpenters, joiners, construction managers and plumbers, amongst so many others. As well as industries that employ a large number of people, the government, through our report and the committee, have identified new and emerging industries as in demand. These include some of the sectors outlined in the government's *Economic Growth Statement*, which are the backbone of Victoria's economy and focus for future growth. We highlighted advanced manufacturing and defence, health technologies and medical research, clean and circular economy, digital technologies and agribusiness. I want to highlight as well major events, the visitor economy, the arts, creative cultural industries, all of which continue to be drivers for our economy. The transport sector was also identified as a key area of growth.

As Victoria's economy and labour market changes, the skills and qualifications needed to participate will continue to evolve. To ensure Victoria can meet these workforce demands and avoid skills shortages, workers, students, parents and caregivers will need clear pathways and career guidance. This especially is the case for those new and emerging industries and even traditional industries that will be increasingly disrupted and impacted, requiring workers to have stronger digital and technical

skills which are envisaged to greatly boost productivity and efficiency over the coming years if we can manage and guide that growth correctly.

That is why on 20 May 2025 the committee received its terms of reference. We called for submissions on 10 June 2025, with 280 stakeholders contacted and 141 submissions received from industry groups, unions, educational institutions and organisations representing school staff, students and families. Between November 2025 and March 2026 the committee held seven days of extensive public hearings: three in Melbourne, two online, one in Warrnambool and one in Geelong. We also consulted young people aged 18 to 25 through the committee youth associates. All 10 of them did a magnificent job in advocating on behalf of the interests of young people, many of whom are here today. I particularly want to acknowledge Sienna Seychell from my electorate of Pascoe Vale, who was a proactive member, like all the other members, of the committee, in voicing the views and priorities of young people. As a result we put forward a total, when combined, of around 100 collective findings and recommendations.

As part of the inquiry we also identified many key challenges, barriers, opportunities and areas in need of policy reform if we are to meet our employment, skill and industrial demands. These include the inconsistency of career education and counselling, especially across our secondary schools; the need to introduce age-appropriate career education even earlier in primary schools; work-based learning, training and experience opportunities – the absence of a statewide coordinated approach to work experience for year 10 students, for example; challenges around school-to-work transition on both the student side and the employer side; the influence of parents and industry or job preconceptions from families; attitudes towards universities and TAFEs and completion rates; opportunities, challenges, incentives and disincentives around apprenticeships and traineeships for both young people and employers; the positive role of free TAFE in creating more opportunities; all of the roles played by universities, TAFEs and registered training organisations; the versatility and growing interest in micro-credentialing; access to VET and vocational majors across our secondary schools; cost affordability and logistical barriers for students training and employing, including in regional areas – that was a particular highlight; the need for greater collaboration across all levels of government, industry, education and community to align pathways; barriers for multicultural and diverse backgrounds; and the importance of lifelong learning. We put forward a number of recommendations. I thank all the committee members.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organised Fringe Groups

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:28): I rise to speak on the parliamentary inquiry into the recruitment methods and impacts of cults and organised fringe groups. We tabled the report on 29 July, and I was part of that inquiry. I must say it was quite an enlightening inquiry with the evidence that we heard from so many people that have been involved and families who have had lifelong involvement, people who have been recruited in and people who were born in who have left. When we started this inquiry I think most of us had really thought about cults as people being recruited in. It was fairly early on when we did a questionnaire – it was a little bit unusual to put out this anonymous questionnaire – that we realised that there were so many people who had been born into cults, and we had not really given a lot of thought to that. A lot of those people did not know any different for a long time. I am sure there are people that are still living in that sort of situation, but many realised things were not the same for them as they were for other people. At their schools they had been advised to keep to themselves and not be involved in a lot of things that kids are normally involved with such as after-school sports. Their activities were scheduled and highly controlled as to what they could do and who they could hang out with. It was pretty eye opening to hear some of the stories that people had told.

One of the things that I am particularly proud of that we did as part of the inquiry is we actually, in effect, have two parts to the tabled document. The first is called *Crossing the Line*, which is the substantive report that you would normally expect with a parliamentary inquiry. The second volume

is called *In their Words*, and this was particularly good because what it did was everyone who provided evidence – not everybody – through submissions or through the hearings we were able to verbatim quote so that no-one could dispute what it was that they said. If somebody said, ‘This is what happened. This is how it felt. This is how I feel now,’ that is how it was reported, in their words. I think it was particularly powerful for members of the committee to look at that and to read again what had been presented to us, because it was pretty harrowing to see some of the sorts of things that had happened.

We had some parents that came along and talked about their children who were lost to cults and are still lost to cults, and they do not know where their children are. I think for many families that is something that is particularly scary. There are others that had been going about their normal business, young students at Melbourne Central and at universities, where they were preyed upon – all very nice and friendly, asking a simple question. They have noticed somebody maybe religious because they have a cross around a chain on their neck – little things like that – and they strike up conversation. They might ask about where you got your jacket – ‘Gee, that’s nice. Look at this. Let’s have a coffee,’ and then all of a sudden they ask, ‘Why don’t you come to my Bible class?’ Then they are finding out that they are roped into all sorts of activities at all sorts of odd hours – at midnight or 5 am – where there are expectations of what they should do. Hearing from young people that had been coerced into these high-control groups was pretty scary. People should be aware that these things can happen and talk to people about the fact that it could happen innocently.

The other thing that stood out was people who are preyed on when they are vulnerable, people who have been through a pretty tough situation. Maybe somebody died, a marriage broke up, a relationship broke up, something had happened and they are looking for a bit of comfort, and all of a sudden somebody comes up to them and is particularly friendly and says, ‘Hey, why don’t you come along to my group? I’m involved with this group of people.’ You go along, and it is kind of that love bombing – a little bit like coercive control in the family violence sector. They are love bombed and made to feel so warm and so welcomed to the organisation, and they like it initially. It takes some time for them to actually wake up and think, if they can recognise it, that they are in a cult. I commend this report and the inquiry, and I hope other people will take the time to read it.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into Voting Centre Accessibility

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:33): You will be shocked and blown over to hear that I am not talking on one of the reports related to gambling, but I am indeed this time talking about voting centre accessibility – an inquiry that was delivered just yesterday to this Parliament by the Electoral Matters Committee. It speaks to a foundational need for our community and our democratic institutions of being able to access having a vote – probably the most important thing that we can do here and certainly the most important thing that the Victorian Electoral Commission can do. Their guiding principle needs to be the accessibility of people who turn up to vote or find another way to vote, which they should be entitled to. I say very firmly that people with disability should have access to the vote, just like everybody else across our community. I call on the VEC to take this report very seriously. I know they have started to implement some of the things that have been recommended here and deal with some of the findings here, but I would like to see as much of that incorporated into this election cycle.

Certainly we know exactly when the election will be in 2030 and we know exactly when the next 10 elections will be in Victoria, so the VEC has ample opportunity to get on with the job, to listen to the findings and the recommendations from this report and to deliver those recommendations and findings, because fundamentally this goes to the heart of our democracy.

I want to talk a little bit about what is set out in the executive summary first:

To better support people with disability, the VEC needs to take a new approach. This should involve:

- changing how the VEC thinks about accessibility –

it is not just having wheelchair ramps into a voting centre, although, as we found, there are precious few of those –

- improving planning with specific actions and targets
- properly evaluating new initiatives and ongoing practices
- publicly reporting on its efforts and their effectiveness.

I am going to come back, in a few moments, to some of the guiding principles that we set out in this report, but I do want to say that I feel a little like I stole somebody's homework and just put my name on it as the new chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, because I got to this committee when this report and the public hearings had already been completed. I want to thank, firstly, Dylan Wight, the member for Tarneit, who brought forward this report and guided these public hearings through their processes, and secondly, the deputy chair, the member for Mornington, not only for a wonderful effort around the international aspects of this report but also for his extraordinary effort on grammar and spelling. He did a deep dive on that and really helped out our committee in that regard, so I do want to thank the member for Mornington in a genuine, appreciative way. I also thank, from the other place, member for Western Victoria Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank from Western Metropolitan, Dr Sarah Mansfield from Western Victoria, Evan Mulholland from Northern Metropolitan Region and Lee Tarlamis OAM from South-Eastern Metropolitan Region for their contributions but also members from this place the member for Lowan and the member for Preston. Each member of this committee, I could tell straightaway, has made a deep contribution.

It was interesting, as I sat down with some of the team from the Electoral Matters Committee afterwards, how they talked about this being actually one of the reports that they really loved being involved in and said that it opened their eyes to some of the challenges for people accessing the vote. From the secretariat I want to thank Dr Christopher Gribbin, Aileen Clarke, Dr Chiara De Lazzari, Sarah Catherall and Nathan Chan Yam. This report, as everybody who has been on a committee knows, would not have happened without their efforts. I want to thank them for those efforts in bringing this report together.

In the 45 seconds I have left, a new approach should incorporate three new guiding principles. The first is an accessibility-first approach, where systems are designed to be accessible by default wherever possible. Accessibility should not be an add-on to a system that was designed without accessibility in mind. The second is a whole-of-journey approach. Accessibility should be considered across the whole voting experience. This includes finding information about an election, travelling to a venue, waiting in line, voting and leaving a voting centre. Finally, understanding the diversity of disability, planning must consider the many types of disability and lived experiences. We should listen to people with lived experiences. That is the first recommendation of this report. I encourage people to read this report.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (10:39): We support stronger powers for IBAC, we support giving the commission genuine capacity to follow the money through contracting change and we support the broadening of the statutory framework that has far too often left serious misconduct beyond the reach of Victoria's integrity system. This bill does move in the right direction, but the government has stopped short at precisely the point where scrutiny matters most: retrospectivity. Genuine retrospectivity is a non-negotiable aspect of any reform to IBAC legislation. This bill expands the concept of 'corrupt conduct', replacing the existing 'relevant offence' threshold with conduct that would constitute 'an offence or a serious disciplinary matter'. It broadens the benefit captured by

section 4 and makes it clear that conduct can be corrupt even when the intended benefit or outcome was never ultimately obtained.

It also introduces associated entity and third-party contractor provisions. That is an important element because public money obviously does not stop being public money when it passes from a department to a head contractor, from a head contractor to a subcontractor or through another layer of some commercial arrangement. Clause 6 in the bill correspondingly expands the definitions of 'public body' and 'public officer', extending the existing provision dealing with public funds to persons and bodies that use or expend those funds. These are worthwhile reforms. They are also reforms that the coalition have been demanding for months, reforms that we tried to make law, but Labor blocked us from doing so at every turn.

On 3 March the Shadow Attorney-General, the member for Brighton, moved to introduce the coalition's Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Follow the Money) Bill 2026 in this house, but Labor used its numbers to block the introduction of that bill. That is nothing short of a disgrace. The same bill was introduced in the other place. It was debated, and on 18 March it was amended to give the follow-the-money reform retrospective operation. The bill then passed the Council. It then came back to this house, but Labor again used its numbers to kill it. Now, months later, the government asks us to support this principle, the one that it refused to even debate when the coalition put it forward. While we welcome the desperate backflip, the history should not be rewritten, and their abandonment of true retrospectivity cannot be ignored.

The coalition's bill confronted the obvious question that Labor's bill now trashes. Ours made follow-the-money reform truly retrospective, and there was a very good reason for doing so. Corruption does not become less corrupt or less serious because it occurred before the Parliament finally gave IBAC the right legislative tools. A contracting arrangement does not become clean because the law at the time was too narrow to follow the money through every entity involved. If public money was misused five years ago, the public interest in exposing that misuse does not extinguish or disappear. The government bill accepts the principle only in part, and in fact it falls well short. Proposed section 200 applies the expanded regime to some precommencement conduct. It captures pending matters and investigations that are incomplete, but it draws a line around matters that IBAC has already dismissed, referred to another body or completed. Proposed section 200(3) then expressly provides that those matters cannot be reopened. This may determine whether serious historical conduct can ever be examined under the so-called stronger jurisdiction this Parliament is now trying to create.

The clear concern is about historical conduct connected with Victoria's Big Build. Victoria has spent extraordinary sums of public money on major construction projects involving long and complex contracting chains. Where allegations have already moved through the integrity system under the old, narrower statutory definitions and a matter has been dismissed, referred elsewhere or completed, the new regime simply does not allow IBAC to go back and apply a broader law. That is the gap that the coalition wants closed. The Labor government cannot credibly tell Victorians that IBAC must be able to follow the money while legislating so that some of the money most in need of following sits behind a statutory line. It defies all common sense. Proper retrospectivity is also a matter of principle. IBAC is not a criminal court, and an IBAC finding is not a criminal conviction. We are dealing with the jurisdiction of an integrity body to investigate conduct and expose corruption risks. The Parliament can ensure that the jurisdiction is capable of examining historical conduct where the public interest requires it.

Our integrity agenda has gone much further than this bill. Our March follow-the-money bill also introduced a restrictive exceptional circumstances test for public examinations. In June the Shadow Attorney-General again sought to introduce a private members bill to facilitate timely IBAC reporting. I voted for that bill to be introduced, and Labor again voted it down in this house. The proposal would have preserved procedural fairness while seeking to prevent delay from becoming a mechanism by which important IBAC reports are kept from Parliament and the public. There is a pattern. The coalition proposes integrity reform, Labor then blocks it, political pressure builds and Labor then

returns months later with only part of the reform and asks everyone to forget what came before. It would be a joke if it was not so serious.

My constituents in Nepean care whether public money is protected, whether corruption is exposed and whether the watchdog has the powers that it needs. We support the broader corrupt conduct test. We support the associated entity and third-party contractor provisions. We support a stronger capacity for IBAC to trace the use and expenditure of public money. But we are moving amendments because stronger integrity laws should not be designed with an artificial blind spot for the past. It should not be designed to hide the conduct of Labor and their mates in the past. In its current form, that is the poison in this bill. Victorians are entitled to more than a promise that future corruption will be easier to investigate. They are entitled to confidence that serious historical allegations can be and will be examined under a framework that is fit for purpose. If the Labor government truly believes IBAC should be able to follow the money, then it should let IBAC follow it wherever the evidence leads – through contractors, through subcontractors, through associated entities and, where necessary, back in time. That is the test of whether this is a genuine integrity reform or merely a political response to an integrity crisis leading into an election. We will fight to make this bill stronger, more complete and worthy of the public confidence that Victoria's integrity system must command. It is up to the Labor government to show Victorians whether integrity is really non-negotiable, but so far their actions suggest the opposite.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:46): I am pleased today to contribute to the debate on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, because trust in our public institutions is crucial for a healthy democracy. We have seen globally in other jurisdictions what can happen when trust in institutions dissipates. You can see that misinformation and disinformation can feed more misinformation. One of the important elements of a robust democracy, which we are very fortunate to have here in Victoria, is faith in government institutions that every dollar is spent appropriately and that people are acting in the best interests of Victorians, with integrity and in an ethical way.

In July this year the Carroll Labor government announced various measures to provide a holistic and comprehensive response to allegations of misconduct on government-funded construction projects. This announcement utilised a multipronged approach, with this legislation being one of three new mechanisms announced to respond to allegations of misconduct. The other two components of the government's plan to get to the bottom of any allegations was of course the calling of the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria and the establishment of an office of the special prosecutor to work in parallel with the royal commission. And of course as this chamber well knows, the Premier has announced, without foreshadowing the bill that is going to come to this place, that the South Australian Supreme Court Chief Justice Chris Kourakis AC will be leading that investigation as the royal commissioner. As Special Minister of State Minister Stitt reiterated in the other place yesterday, the royal commission into alleged misconduct on government-funded construction sites is the highest form of interrogation and investigation that this state – indeed this nation – has. It is my expectation that every member of this place will be unequivocally supportive of that process. I know I will be.

This bill seeks to empower IBAC to work alongside the royal commission and the special prosecutor to ensure that allegations of corruption on government-funded construction sites are investigated by the appropriate body. The bill has two main components, one creating the follow-the-money powers for IBAC and expanding the definition of 'corrupt conduct' to empower IBAC to make more concise and definitive findings. 'Follow the money' means that when there is a trail of alleged corruption that might go cold as it is alleged to occur outside of government responsibility, IBAC can continue its investigation.

The follow-the-money powers mean exactly that – that our Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission will be able to follow trails of alleged misconduct as they find them. The bill will clarify IBAC's jurisdiction to investigate allegations of corrupt conduct linked to the use of public funds

regardless of whether the funds are expended through public or private entities. The definitions of 'public body' and 'public officer' in the IBAC act will now include reference to associated entities. This will expand IBAC's jurisdiction to allow the commission to investigate third-party and private contractors where there is a link between the alleged conduct and government funding. The bill also broadens the definition of 'corrupt conduct', which until now has been at a higher standard of required proof than the criminal standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt. The commission has told us that the definition of 'corrupt conduct' was impeding their ability to make findings and impacting their ability to investigate allegations. They told us that, the Carroll Labor government has listened, and today we are delivering on that.

With the introduction and debate of this bill we are futureproofing the integrity, accountability and stability of the Victorian government for people who might not even be born yet, for our future Victorians. As I mentioned from the outset, trust in our institutions is paramount for our democracy. The Carroll Labor government has made it clear that integrity is not optional, and this bill is at the centre of that. This bill makes important and immediate amendments to IBAC's jurisdiction to respond to strong public interest about the expenditure of public money.

On this side of the chamber we are so determined to stamp out corruption in this state that there will be no delay in the commencement of these legislative changes. As soon as our Governor gives royal assent to this legislation, IBAC will be equipped with these expanded and enriched powers. We are not interested in getting in the way of the important work that Victorians deserve for the sake of politics and grandstanding. Successive Labor governments have demonstrated a deep respect for independent organisations and bodies in this state, respect which at times those opposite have not shared with us. The Leader of the Opposition has said that she does not support the broadening of the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. Those in this chamber who have expressed that they would make changes to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission have attempted to walk on both sides of the street. Going back to expanding the definition of 'corrupt conduct', when the Leader of the Opposition is on the record saying she does not support changes to the definition, I wonder what has caused such consternation on the other side.

This bill before us today implements changes that IBAC and the integrity oversight body in Victoria have asked for and recommended. On this side of the chamber we do not give directions to independent bodies; we respect their independence. We understand how delicate the fabric of democracy is and how crucial independent bodies are to maintaining our democracy. We will not tell independent bodies what to do; we will give them the tools they need to get on with the job. That is what we are doing here today. Labor is committed to working with Victoria's integrity agencies to ensure that their legislation enables them to perform their important accountability and oversight functions.

I am proud to be part of a government that respects IBAC, and I am proud to be standing here today speaking in favour of this bill, in favour of strengthening IBAC's powers and for integrity and accountability. I would encourage everyone in this place to be supportive of these reforms. I think that one of the most essential elements of our democracy is confidence and faith that every single taxpayer dollar is spent appropriately and not wasted. Throughout his time as Premier, Premier Carroll has made it clear that this is a priority, and that is why the speedy passage of this bill is so important. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:56): I am delighted to rise and speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026 – a bill that on face value claims to strengthen integrity in Victoria but in practice falls well short of what Victorians deserve. This is nothing new from a government who over 12 years has been the most secretive, corrupt and dishonest in Victoria's history. Coming off the Cain–Kirner years, that speaks volumes about the tenure of this Labor government. For years this government has hoodwinked Victorians that our integrity framework is robust, modern and fit for purpose, yet here we are again debating legislation that silently admits quite the opposite.

Premier Carroll said on day one that integrity would not be optional, and this bill demonstrates under Labor that integrity is always optional. This bill is an acknowledgement that IBAC's jurisdiction has been too narrow, too constrained and too easily avoided. It is an admission that the government's own contracting and government practices have outgrown the integrity system designed to oversee them. While the opposition welcomes any genuine attempt to strengthen IBAC, we will not pretend that this bill is sufficient – it simply is not. It is a half-measure, it is a political shield and it is deliberately drafted to avoid scrutiny of the very matters Victorians most want examined to get to the bottom of Labor's corruption.

The bill expands the definition of 'corrupt conduct' by replacing the existing relevant offence threshold with an offence or a serious disciplinary matter. Granted, this is a step forward. It recognises that corruption is not always neatly packaged into criminal offences. It acknowledges that misconduct, poor administration and serious breaches of public trust can be just as destructive. But the government has stopped short of the reform that matters most: full retrospective application. Under the bill, IBAC will not be able to revisit matters already dismissed, referred elsewhere or completed under the old, narrower regime. I think it is outrageous that we are not able to go and revisit some of these matters. That means some of the most significant historical matters, including major Big Build investigations that were shunted off to Victoria Police or the Ombudsman, will remain permanently outside IBAC's reach. This confirms that nothing has changed under the Carroll government – just more cover-ups.

Victorians deserve better than selective integrity. They deserve a system that can follow the money wherever it leads, not wherever the government is comfortable for it to go. That is why the opposition will move amendments to make this bill fully retrospective, consistent with our Council private members bill from earlier in the year. If the government is serious about integrity, it will support that amendment. If it refuses, Victorians will rightly ask, 'What's the government afraid of in what IBAC might find? What are they hiding?'

Can I say that associated entities and third-party contractors are long overdue. Clauses 4 and 6 introduce the concepts of 'associated entity' and 'third-party contractor', which extend the definitions of 'public body' and 'public officer' to those performing public functions through contracting arrangements. This is overdue. For years public money has flowed through increasingly complex contracting chains, layers of consultants, subcontractors, joint ventures and special purpose channels. Billions have been spent through entities that sit just outside the reach of traditional integrity bodies. This bill finally acknowledges that reality, but again, it does not go far enough.

The government wants to take credit for strengthening IBAC with follow-the-money powers, yet it refuses to allow these powers to look backwards to examine the very projects and contracts that prompted the need for reform in the first place. Victorians know why. We have all watched the cost blowouts and the procurement corruption under Labor's watch. We have seen illegal contracting practices plague major projects for more than a decade; we have seen IBAC investigations delayed, constrained or quietly referred away; and we have seen ministers hide behind cabinet confidentiality to avoid scrutiny. This bill plays at the edges. Our amendments from the member for Brighton will fix the core problem.

I also want to touch on timely reporting – ending the Richmond-style delays. The opposition will also move to insert a timely reporting requirement for IBAC reports, consistent with our Assembly private members bill again from earlier this year. Victorians remember Operation Richmond, a report delayed for years, leaving the public in the dark and undermining confidence in the integrity system. Justice delayed is justice denied. Integrity delayed is integrity denied. If IBAC is to be effective, its reports must be delivered in a timely manner. This is not controversial, it is just basic accountability, and the government should support it. Somehow we all know Labor wants to hide it.

I also want to touch on public examinations – restoring transparency. The government's bill retains the provisions that examinations are generally to be held in private. The opposition will move to repeal section 117(1)(a) as we proposed previously. Public examinations are a critical part of transparency.

They shine a light on misconduct, they deter wrongdoing and they give Victorians confidence that integrity bodies are not operating behind closed doors. The government has consistently preferred secrecy over transparency. It has resisted public hearings, it has resisted public reporting and it has also resisted public accountability. Our amendment restores the presumption of openness. If or when the government opposes it, Victorians will draw their own conclusions.

I also want to mention public interest immunity – removing the cabinet shield. On this side of the house we will move to repeal the public interest immunity provisions that allow cabinet ministers to refuse the sharing of certain cabinet material with IBAC. This is one of the most significant weaknesses in Victoria's integrity framework. It allows ministers to shield documents from scrutiny simply by asserting cabinet confidentiality. It is a loophole that undermines IBAC's independence and effectiveness, and this should change. If the government truly believes in integrity, it will close that loophole. If it refuses, it will confirm what many of us already suspect: that cabinet confidentiality has become a political shield, not a public interest safeguard.

Victoria deserves a real integrity system. This bill is a step, but it is not the only step that Victoria needs. It broadens IBAC's jurisdiction but not enough, it strengthens follow-the-money powers but not where it matters the most and it acknowledges past failures but refuses to allow those failures to be examined. The opposition will support genuine integrity reform, but we are determined to amend a bill that protects the government from scrutiny while pretending to strengthen accountability. Our amendments – which include full retrospectivity, timely reporting, public examinations and the removal of cabinet immunity – are essential. They are very reasonable, they are consistent with our longstanding policy and they are what Victorians deserve. If the government chooses to reject them, it will be clear this bill is not about integrity; it is about optics, it is about control and it is about avoiding accountability for the past decade of governance in this state. Victoria deserves better and the opposition will fight for that. The Carroll Labor government has an opportunity. Today they can take on board the amendments, genuine improvements, or prove to Victoria that nothing has changed under the Carroll Labor government.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (11:05): I rise gladly to make my contribution on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. Words are hard, I guess. The facts get lost in the rhetoric in this place on a common basis. Look, we are all political animals in here, so it is not surprising. I will try and keep this in the commonsense area, and people can make comments about my rhetoric as well.

Obviously this bill has been long talked about. Many members have made comments on why we need this bill, and we all agree, I think. If I am correct, without trying to verbal the opposition, I believe we are all supporting the bill, so that is a thing all by itself. We are all supporting this bill as is. Members on the other side have issue with what the bill could be further, and that is why we are all here to debate. I take up some of the points that I have heard on the limitations of the retrospectivity of the bill. We have to be very careful in this place, with any law, when we apply retrospectivity. As a general principle that is something that we do not do lightly in this place, for very good reason. Now, in this case we have issues that we are trying to address not solely with this bill. I will not go into the bills that we are likely to do later on the government business program that also are part of the action against the alleged behaviour. I think we all accept, even though it is alleged, there are certain wrongs that appear to have been done that need to be addressed, and that is partly why we are here. Also, as has been said by others, we cannot operate in the vacuum of just this bill; we have got a royal commission that is also going to look at the specific construction-based allegations of bad behaviour that no Victorian wants to see continue.

Going back to retrospectivity, I am certainly no lawyer – and the legal profession is probably happy about that – but I am aware of the concept of double jeopardy in the law, where if somebody has been tried for an offence, the law in general says we should not retry that person for the same offence. The

legal protection around this relevant to what we are talking about today is the concept of finality. An explanation of section 26 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities says:

Right not to be tried or punished more than once

Section 26 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) protects your right to not be tried or punished for the same crime more than once. The Charter applies to public authorities in Victoria, such as state and local government departments and agencies, and people delivering services on behalf of the government.

I accept in good faith that the opposition think that possibly in this case that should not apply. They are certainly words that I have heard from the other side, without trying to verbal the opposition. I think we have to be very careful of principles in the law, because at the end of the day it is our job to change the law, and the law tends to be a sledgehammer. I am comfortable with upholding those basic human rights in respect of what we are doing here today. But I would point out to members on the other side that in my mind this does not necessarily mean that something that was referred with regard to, say, alleged misbehaviour in the construction sector is now completely out of the bounds of IBAC.

I have heard that from others, who say, 'Oh, well, now that this was referred a while ago, you can never do it again.' I point out that if IBAC were to get a notification of new conduct, something they have not been told of before, related to a dismissed or referred complaint, they could look at that under the new power. Let us say there was an allegation about misconduct by an associated entity, labour hire, a union organiser, a corporate body, a construction company or whoever and that was referred to them two years ago or three years ago or four years ago – back to 2013, which is I think when the retrospectivity starts – they would have specifics. What was referred would have specifics in it that would say, 'This is what we were referring to IBAC back then.' So after this bill is passed – and I think we all want to see this bill pass – if someone was to then refer a similar matter, but not the same matter, that included new conduct that was not previously referred, without telling IBAC what to do because that is not our place, IBAC would be able to consider whether that was new conduct and whether they could consider that under the law as it stands today. I have not heard anyone on the other side in all of their naysaying consider that. Feel free to tell me I am wrong, but I do not think I am. Without getting into the weeds of the words that IBAC have been told, they have the ability to consider those facts under the law that we are debating today.

The other consideration with this is the fact that these new powers, with the retrospectivity as is put in this bill, essentially allow anyone – and I am not saying this is a wrong thing, but let us all be clear on what this means – to make a referral to IBAC about anything that would, in their opinion, constitute grey corruption, as I think the former commissioner liked to phrase it. Anyone can put that forward back to 2013. That is not a bad thing. I think we all agree that IBAC's powers need to be strengthened; that is why we are here. But without going into details, every news story regarding allegations of political parties, governments, bodies or corporations – you know, some very, very big corporations have had a bit of trouble in the old area. All of that is potentially now open. I would not be surprised if there were a lot of corporate boardrooms – well, maybe not right now, because they are possibly not listening right now – having a look, once this has passed, at what their risk profile has just become.

There is one thing I have noticed in all of the allegations that we have read in the paper. I do not often say this, but I do commend the media on their work in highlighting some of some of the misdeeds that are alleged and, let us face it, probably most likely will turn out to be with merit. I commend the media on that work. But I notice that in that work, without excusing any other body or responsibility or accountability, time and time again we hear, 'Labour hire, labour hire, labour hire, labour hire, labour hire, labour hire, labour hire,' and I am sick of it. I will just finish with this. We have spent the last 40 years outsourcing everything in our country. It is not just us; it is the whole Western world, if not the whole world. When you outsource and subcontract and outsource and subcontract and outsource and subcontract, you are diminishing not only your direct response but your responsibility.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:15): I rise today to talk on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026 in the chamber before us at the moment, and I would like to just say that we are not opposing the bill coming in. I think that any bill that we can tighten and actually expand the capacity of IBAC to look into wrongdoings or allegations across the journey of Parliament here is a good thing, and I think every person in this chamber would agree with that. I do note, though, that the member for Brighton has put forward some amendments to expand the bill we are discussing now, and I would like to think that the government would have a look at those, because there should not be any place for people to hide, especially in this place. We should be transparent, and we need to remember the one true point on this bill – that we are talking about the misappropriation of money that is not our money but is the people of Victoria's money. It is money that they have worked hard for and paid in taxes. We can be flippant and try and brush it off, but we are talking about allegations made against the Big Build, probably more to the point, and money that has not been spent in the right way. We do need to have a look at that, and we do need to have some clear guidelines when we do go looking for what actually went on.

We are here, and we have spoken obviously in the chamber before about money being misappropriated on the spending on plants and artwork. These are probably standards that we have all sort of walked past, especially on the government side of things, bits and pieces that have been allowed to happen. But they build up, and we lose the trust of the people of Victoria. It is on the lips of every Victorian. It does not matter where you go, they want to know where the money has gone. It is our duty to make sure that we bring in through this Parliament bills that can enable IBAC to follow the money and actually see where their money has gone and hold to account the people of the Big Build who have done the wrong thing, whether it be putting in invoices for works that were not carried out or if they have played the game a little bit and have received money that they actually have not done works for.

So we need an arm separate to us here in the chamber that can go investigate and ask the hard questions. No matter what you do, if you have been a business owner, at the end of the day the buck stops with you, and you need to be able to stand up and answer the hard questions that do come your way, because you are the person that is in charge. We have spoken about former Premier Daniel Andrews and we have spoken about the member for Bendigo East and former Premier Allan in this place and their involvement. Then we have had the current Premier come out and –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Use titles, please.

Martin CAMERON: Titles? Who did I miss out on – Bendigo East? I thought I said the member for Bendigo East, the former Premier. And there is also the current Premier in this place, who has come out and stood on the mantra of wanting to make sure that every dollar that comes through this place is scrutinised and is going and being spent wisely. That is a noble gesture, to be able to put that out, but then you have to follow that up. If you are going to stand there and say, 'This is what we want to do as a government and this is what I want to do as Premier,' you cannot then wind it back. We need to make sure that we are giving all opportunity for the people of Victoria to know what actually did go on in the Big Build.

Before I came into this place I talked to workers in the Latrobe Valley that were travelling down to work on the Big Build. I will be honest and say they never spoke about corruption back then, but they did talk about the amount of money being spent on the Big Build which was – I will be careful in the words that I choose – being wasted. They did speak about ghost shifts that were happening where they were required to be at work but did not have to be on the job, so to speak. This is going back six or seven years when I was still a mere plumber down in the Latrobe Valley, but we had these conversations and we used to, in all honesty, have a bit of a joke about it and say, 'Oh, well, it's the government spending money.' The people of Victoria now have had enough of that. They want a government that is held to account and MPs that are held to account. When people talk about corruption on a government scale, they are talking about me, because I am now an MP in this place and it falls on me. I think everybody would have had discussions in their communities and people throwing out that line, 'Oh, you're all corrupt in that place and you're all misusing our money.' It does

fall back on us. When we are giving IBAC the powers to actually investigate what has gone on, why are we baulking at the chance of giving them the powers to actually investigate from day one what went on and to follow the money to find out what actually happened? We should do it once and we should do it right. There are a lot of times in this place where we pass bills and then we come back in six or eight months and have to amend them because we have not got it right the first time. This is clear cut. It is one of the most important things on people's minds at the moment. If we cannot get this investigation right, how are they going to believe us in the future?

People talk about the \$15 billion that has gone missing. Where is it? Who got it? The media chase it. The day-to-day punter on the street wants to know because it is their money. It is not my money. I have probably paid taxes that have gone towards the supposed misappropriation of funds. We just want to know where it has gone. As we stand here, why don't we just give IBAC the complete powers so there is no grey area? They should be able to talk to former premiers. They should be able to talk to ministerial staff and ministers themselves. They have their opportunity to say, 'No, this did not happen.' That is the best part about an IBAC investigation – you can be asked the questions and you can actually have the chance to answer honestly. As I stand here today I do not think this goes far enough without the amendments that we will move on our side. Yes, we have made a point that IBAC is going to have some more powers – the government has moved that, and we welcome it – but we do need to go further. So I would hope that in the scheme of things, when the government reads the amendments and takes a while to digest them, they will think, 'Well, you know what, let's once and for all give IBAC the powers that they do need so we can follow the money, so we can follow the corruption and we can stamp that out,' because the people of Victoria want to know. We are going to find out on 28 November if they are believing of us that we are doing the right thing and stamping out corruption on the Big Build or whether they think that once again people are hiding in the shadows and are not game enough to stand up and actually say what went on.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (11:25): It is always interesting to speak after a contribution by the member for Morwell given his experience in the industry. I rise today to make a contribution in support of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. This is another important bill, one that will give effect to the government's commitment to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, the IBAC act, to empower IBAC to follow the money, broaden the definition of 'corrupt conduct' and make other consequential and technical amendments to give effect to the reform.

These are important changes. As we can see, the Premier has come out really strongly on this and made it clear that integrity is not optional for this government. We can see that with legislation before us this week as well as the special prosecutor amendment. This legislation goes to the heart of the integrity of the state, and I am really glad to see it here before us this week. This is something that is raised with me often in my community. Many of my constituents have a strong sentiment that Victorians deserve the truth. They deserve to know how organised crime found its way onto our building sites, who allowed it to happen and how we can make sure that it never happens again. The royal commission has been a welcome announcement – a royal commission with full coercive power and public hearings, with terms of reference that are broad and expansive and with nothing off limits. This has been a really welcome announcement, and this bill before us is another welcome development, with follow-the-money powers, a broadened definition of 'corrupt conduct' and other consequential and technical amendments to give effect to the reforms.

The first of the amendments here are changes to the definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body' and new definitions for 'associated entity' and 'third party contractor' to expand IBAC's jurisdiction to enable it to investigate suspected corrupt conduct by third-party and private subcontractors where there is a connection between the alleged corrupt conduct and the performance of a public function funded by government. These are really important changes. Follow-the-money powers will provide IBAC with power comparable to that of the Victorian Auditor-General in order to investigate corrupt conduct by third-party and private subcontractors where there is a connection between alleged corrupt

conduct and the performance of a public function funded by the government. To do this, the bill will amend the definitions of ‘public body’ and ‘public officer’ in the IBAC act to include reference to ‘associated entity’, drawing on the definitions in the Audit Act 1994. This is in line with the Integrity and Oversight Committee report recommendation.

The bill seeks to ensure that IBAC’s jurisdiction is enlivened where there is conduct by an associated entity in the performance of a public function on behalf of the state, public officer or body with a nexus or connection between the suspected corrupt conduct and the expenditures or use of those public funds or the publicly funded project, functions or undertaking. Again, these are really important changes that go to the effectiveness of IBAC’s jurisdiction, changes that I am really glad to see here today.

Further, we have really important changes alongside these, as we have heard from the IBAC Commissioner that any proposed follow-the-money reforms should be accompanied by other legislative reforms, including changes to the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’, which are here today. That is what we are bringing here today, removing the relevant offence requirement and setting a new threshold to enable IBAC to investigate conduct that would constitute either an offence – a change from ‘relevant offence’ – or a serious disciplinary matter. Within that, ‘serious disciplinary matter’ is defined as:

- serious misconduct; or
- any other matter that constitutes or may constitute grounds for –
 - termination of employment, appointment or engagement ... or
 - a significant employment, appointment or contractual penalty ... or
- a serious contravention of –
 - the Code of Conduct set out in Part 3 of the **Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978**; or
 - the Model Councillor Code of Conduct within the meaning of the **Local Government Act 2020** ...

This is really expansive and is what has been called for in terms of a broader definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ in Victoria, replacing the requirement that conduct constitute a ‘relevant offence’ with the requirement that the conduct constitute any offences that add to the lower threshold of conduct constituting a serious disciplinary matter to allow IBAC to investigate a broader range of integrity-compromising behaviours. We have transitional provisions to apply the reform to certain conduct that occurred prior to the bill commencing, subject to appropriate limitations, as well as other necessary consequential and technical amendments.

Finally, we have consequential amendments to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 to provide that amendments to include an ‘associated entity’ in the definitions of ‘public officer’ or ‘public body’ in the IBAC act do not apply to the Public Interest Disclosure Act to avoid unintended flow-on impacts to that scheme resulting from changes to the definitions of the public officers and public bodies in the IBAC act.

These are strong and comprehensive changes to address allegations of misconduct and corruption occurring on government infrastructure and construction projects, especially in relation to the projects forming part of the Big Build construction program funded by the government, as called for by IBAC, by my community and by the broader community. I am really glad to see them here today, because it is very important to have measures that provide a holistic and comprehensive response to these allegations, which also include calling the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria and establishing an office of the special prosecutor to work in parallel with the royal commission. These are changes that bring forward amendments to the IBAC act to empower IBAC to follow the money and broaden the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ for passage this term. All of this is to ensure that any allegations of misconduct and any allegations of misappropriation of funds from those matters will never happen again.

I commend the Premier for bringing these changes forward and for the strong stance taken on integrity in Victoria. It is what many in my community have called for, and we have listened, the Premier has

listened, and that is what my community deserves and what Victoria deserves. I commend the bill to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:33): I also rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, and I note how many members have said on the government side of the house that their community have called for this for a long time, so I am just following those comments. It is true, and it is something that our side of the house has been calling for for over a year. So I do want to indicate from the outset that the Nationals support this bill, and we support, importantly, the amendments to be moved in this place by the member for Brighton, our Shadow Attorney-General. You have heard throughout today that there are some very strong elements in this bill and important things that are coming, finally, to be debated in this place. That includes broadening the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ and replacing the old ‘relevant offence’ threshold with a broader set that captures serious disciplinary matters as well as criminal offences and provides that conduct can be corrupt even where the intended benefit is never actually obtained.

Critically, it extends the definitions of ‘public body’ and ‘public officer’ to associated entities and third-party contractors. This gives IBAC, for the first time, the ability to follow public money through the layers of contracting and subcontracting that have protected Labor when it comes to scrutiny of taxpayer funding and money. These are sensible reforms and things that we have been calling for for a very long time. We have absolutely been gaslit by the Labor side of the house when it came to acting on these reforms that Labor has resisted for so many years, and only now, facing an election in November, has decided to embrace. Let us be honest with Victorians about why we are here today: this is not Labor suddenly discovering integrity; it is Labor spending a year in this place refusing to call a royal commission into corruption on Big Build sites and then finding one the very day of a leadership spill. Last March the opposition asked the Premier at the time directly why she would not call a royal commission, and she told the house:

... my focus is on taking the action now that needs to be taken to stamp out the rotten culture ...

It is almost an oxymoron, denying a royal commission at the same time as saying you are stamping out the rotten culture without the tools to do so. This was Labor’s position, and everyone that has spoken on behalf of the government today had also spoken on rejecting a royal commission. However, the polling has brought them to the table.

A member interjected.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Not the people. But Victorians are tuned out from Labor now because they have been gaslit and lied to and they have lost trust in the government. When Labor members spend an entire debate in the matter of public importance – I was going through some of the comments, and the gaslighting is astronomical. They marched out the lines of the day and they have done an entire backflip. I listened to the member before me saying his community asked for this, but they asked for it over a year ago when the revelations first started coming out in the *Age*, when we were first calling for it. Now it is contentious whether he will have a place here next Parliament because his community were asking for this long before it came here –

Members interjecting.

Annabelle CLEELAND: October 2024 in fact. I hear quite a few interjections about listening to your community. This is over a year – October 2024; I thank the member for Mildura. That is a long time. That is nearly two years of gaslighting Victorians, saying that there is no problem in Victoria, and then reading the polling. I note the members that have stood up and done an absolute backflip trying to support their different leaders one day and then changing their position the next. Within hours the new Premier, after spending a year denying that there was need for a royal commission, said, ‘I am not the old Premier with the old values,’ despite sitting around the very table that endorsed not holding a royal commission. It is no wonder people have lost faith in the Labor government. Even now, introducing this very bill this week, the Premier has said a fresh IBAC referral into the Big Build

is not necessary, because the royal commission's scope already covers it. It does not explain 12 months of refusal beforehand, and it certainly does not explain the gaps and why there are still significant shortfalls in this bill that are not addressed.

It is not just the Big Build allegations either. IBAC's own Operation Richmond found corrupt conduct in the negotiation of enterprise bargaining agreements for the CFA and the MFB in the very establishment of FRV – corrupt conduct found by the state's own anti-corruption commission in the way Labor dealt with our firefighters. The same CFA volunteers across my region, those volunteers who protected our community in January, deserve a government that protects the integrity of their service too. Instead they got the short straw and they got the Labor government. Let it be clear that on the corruption from within they never said anything until they were forced to, until the polling said they absolutely had to come to the table.

We support broadening IBAC's powers, and we support the amendments by the member for Brighton that will be moved today. This bill, as drafted by Labor, does not go far enough, as you have heard. The member for Brighton's amendments insert a clear statement that Parliament intends that applications to IBAC be determined with proper speed rather than languishing indefinitely. If Labor were genuinely serious about integrity, it would have written these protections into its bill, but it did not. Again the opposition has forced it to.

'Corruption', as this bill defines it, is one form of failure, but there is another form of failure Labor excels at, and I want to use the time I have left to talk about that because it affects every single Victorian whether they can see it or not and because I do not believe it is entirely separate from the culture which this bill is trying to fix in Victoria. Eight months ago, on 7, 8 and 9 January, the Longwood fire burnt more than 130,000 hectares of the Strathbogie shire. Homes, farms and livelihoods were gone in hours and in some cases minutes. Eight months on, Labor has delivered precisely one modular home and three caravans to bushfire-affected families across the entire Strathbogie region – one modular home and three caravans in a region that was absolutely destroyed and devastated. I revealed in March that Emergency Recovery Victoria's now deputy commissioner for recovery, responsible for housing these families, had been quietly selling off modular homes that had sat in storage since Black Summer – homes that could have gone to the very families now facing a housing crisis of Labor's own making – six years after those homes were built and paid for for Victorians that need them.

The independent inquiry into Labor's handling of the January fires report in July found systemic shortcomings and recommended that temporary modular housing be provided and maintained until people's homes were rebuilt. The report has not been responded to by the government, and the fire season is just weeks away. Last Friday night Channel 10's Jessica Maggio put these failures to Victoria's emergency management commissioner Tim Wiebusch on camera, and he denied flatly that there was any problem and suggested people were choosing homelessness rather than accepting government help. This is not what is happening. What is happening is that of around 600 registrations for the bushfire clean-up program –

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am listening very carefully but I am unsure how this is relevant.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Euroa, keep it relevant to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026.

Annabelle CLEELAND: We are talking about corruption, so I will get to the point. Of the 600 registrations for the bushfire clean-up program, only 240 were deemed eligible, and after nearly five months only 30 of those properties had been cleaned up. Compare that to Black Summer: 736 registrations, 736 deemed eligible, every single one of them cleaned up within eight months. This is not a difficult comparison to make. It is the difference between a functioning recovery agency and a failing one.

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have continued to listen very carefully, and I would like some relevance, please.

Jade Benham: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member is making reference to Operation Richmond and the timeliness and effectiveness of government departments and investigations.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I am absolutely appalled that Labor members have used my time to deny our community – *(Time expired)*

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Order! Member for Euroa, take your chair. I am on my feet. Members will take a point of order when they are called upon to take a point of order or they will take a point of order on a point of order when they are called to and will not speak until they have been called to in this chamber.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (11:44): I just want to pick up on the previous speaker's implication regarding the emergency management commissioner Tim Wiebusch. To suggest that he is corrupt is ridiculous, and I think it was totally inappropriate. I have known Tim Wiebusch for many, many years and had a lot to do with him when I was cabinet secretary, and I would think that –

Annabelle Cleeland: On a point of order, Acting Speaker: relevance to the bill. You never let me finish.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): That is not the way to take a point of order. On the first part, relevance, I believe the member for Melton was responding to the previous bill contribution made by you, member for Euroa, and will continue.

Steve McGHIE: The point that I was trying to make is I do not think Tim Wiebusch is corrupt.

Annabelle Cleeland interjected.

Steve McGHIE: You implied that he was in an interview on TV last week. But, anyway, I will contribute on this bill. I rise to speak in support of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. I have had a longstanding interest in Victoria's integrity system, having had the privilege of serving as the inaugural chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee in the 59th Parliament. That was a great experience, and I want to acknowledge the IOC –

A member interjected.

Steve McGHIE: That is right; the Liberal government did introduce the legislation in 2011, and I notice they did not have follow-the-money powers in their legislation. Funny about that, isn't it? In more recent times all of a sudden the Liberals have found follow-the-money powers. Ted Baillieu did not think about it, did he? That is why he did not last. Ted Baillieu did not think about follow-the-money powers.

I want to acknowledge the IOC secretariat, in particular Sean Coley, who was the executive officer, for their support and the great work that they do in supporting the committees. I know they are still doing that. I know Sean is doing a great job, and I thank them for all the work that they did when I was the chair of the IOC some years ago. That experience taught me a hell of a lot about integrity legislation, and it says that integrity legislation just does not stand still. Of course the way government operates changes over time. The way we procure services changes, the way we deliver infrastructure changes and the relationships between government, contractors and subcontractors become more complex. Unfortunately the ways in which people can seek to exploit those arrangements change too. People are always looking at ways to exploit things. There are people in our community that do that on a daily basis, unfortunately, in many, many different ways. So the laws that protect public money and public institutions have to keep pace with these things that are changing all the time. That is exactly what this bill is about. The principle at its heart is straightforward: where public money goes, public accountability must be capable of following it. If taxpayers are funding a public function, the fact that those funds move from government to a contractor, then to a subcontractor and perhaps through an

associated entity, should not create a point at which our integrity system suddenly loses sight of them. Public money does not stop being public money simply because it has passed through another set of hands. Government today does not deliver every public function directly.

There is one point I will make about the construction industry, and it appears when people publicly talk about the alleged corruption. We have major construction companies that negotiate enterprise agreements with the building unions, not the government. We do not negotiate enterprise agreements with building unions, those companies do. The arrangements between those companies and the unions are negotiated and put before the Fair Work Commission and approved. I noticed the member for Morwell was talking about some ghost shifts and things like that. He knew some workers down that way in the Latrobe Valley that allegedly claimed that there were ghost shifts. I notice they did not come forward. I notice they took the money. He did not say that they did not take the money for the ghost shifts, if there were ghost shifts. They did not refer it to IBAC, did not refer it to the police, did not refer it to any authority, but apparently there were ghost shifts and these particular construction workers played the game.

A member interjected.

Steve McGHIE: We do not know what he did about it. He did not say what he did about it. But anyway, major infrastructure projects can involve enormous and complicated supply chains involving principal contractors, subcontractors, labour hire companies and associated entities. There are perfectly legitimate reasons for those arrangements, but complexity must not become a shield against scrutiny. Again, that is what this bill is all about. The bill therefore extends IBAC's reach when suspected corrupt conduct involving an associated entity or third-party contractor is connected to a publicly funded function, project or undertaking. There must be that connection. This is not about giving IBAC unlimited jurisdiction over private businesses, although the member for Ashwood said earlier that there might be some boardrooms where people will be shaking in their boots the moment this bill is passed. This is not just about trade unions; this could be also about corporations and people in big boardrooms.

It is also about recognising that when private entities are performing public functions with public money there is a legitimate public interest in ensuring corruption connected with that expenditure can be investigated. There is already a useful precedent for that concept in the powers available to the Victorian Auditor-General. If our Auditor-General can follow public money through complex delivery arrangements to scrutinise its use, it is entirely reasonable that our anti-corruption commission should have an appropriate capacity to do the same where corrupt conduct is suspected. A subcontract cannot be allowed to become an integrity loophole.

The second important reform concerns the definition of 'corrupt conduct' itself. Under the existing legislation it is not enough that particular conduct adversely affects the honest performance of a public function or involves another form of integrity failure. Before IBAC can investigate it as corrupt conduct it must also meet the statutory definition of 'relevant offence'. That definition is quite narrow. The effect is that potentially serious integrity-compromising behaviour can fall outside of IBAC's investigative jurisdiction because it does not fit neatly within the existing criminal threshold. This bill changes that. Conduct capable of constituting any offence can be captured as an outcome of this bill.

The bill also introduces the concept of a serious disciplinary matter, and that could include serious misconduct or behaviour capable of justifying termination or significant employment or contractual penalty or serious breaches of codes governing parliamentarians, councillors, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. I think this is an important distinction. Not every grave abuse of public responsibility begins within an indictable offence. There can be behaviour that fundamentally compromises the integrity of a public function even before a criminal threshold is established, so anti-corruption commissions need to be capable of investigating that behaviour. I note that IBAC itself has argued that follow-the-money powers and reform of the definition of 'corrupt conduct' need to be considered together, and that seems to make good sense.

There are questions in regard to some experiences from when I chaired the Integrity and Oversight Committee, where I gained a very strong appreciation of both sides of this question. We need powerful independent integrity agencies, but those powers must exist within a carefully constructed legislative framework. Again, that is what this bill is going to do. IBAC exercises some extraordinary powers for very important reasons. Corruption can be difficult to uncover and evidence can be concealed. We know that, and that is what they will investigate, and they will have the powers to do so. People involved may have considerable resources and considerable incentive to prevent wrongdoing from being exposed. This is an extremely important bill that is before the house. I am pleased that the opposition are not opposing it. I do not accept their amendments, but it is an important bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:54): I rise to make a contribution on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. When we are debating this bill we need to revisit some timelines that have led us to where we are today. I want to go over a few of them, because the government knew that there was a gap in IBAC's powers going back to 2024. It is wrong that it has taken over two years to get here and now address the gaps that were identified such a long time ago.

We know this is fact: that in July 2024, following the allegations of the corruption on Big Build sites, the Premier of the day wrote to IBAC asking it to investigate. The Premier has conceded that herself. Here is the clincher: in October 2024, almost two years ago, IBAC wrote back to the Premier and said that the investigation that she had asked for was outside their jurisdiction. Almost two years ago they wrote back and said it was outside their jurisdiction. For the next 16 months we heard nothing – nothing done, no legislation brought in to fix those gaps. Then in February this year, when it all became public that IBAC had actually written back to the Premier and said, 'We don't have the powers to investigate,' we then headed down the path of getting legislation in. Now, in September, just a short time before the election, we are debating this bill in Parliament. As I think the member for Mildura pointed out in her contribution, this is not just about the Big Build corruption; this is about red shirts, Operation Watts and Operation Daintree, and there are key elements that need to be investigated.

I have been in this chamber a number of times when the new Premier has stood up and said that integrity is important to him and it is not optional. If you are going to talk the talk, you must then walk the walk. Let us recap what we are doing here. Let us just have a look at what is being done here. The Premier of the day asked for IBAC to investigate the Big Build over two years ago. IBAC wrote back and said they could not investigate. We then, two years later, have legislation here giving them the power to investigate what we had all hoped they would have been able to investigate over two years ago. But in this legislation we are denying them investigating that very issue that brought this on. It is just madness. This legislation is here largely because – and I do not think any member in this chamber would disagree – IBAC said they did not have the powers to investigate the Big Build sites. We have got this here now to correct that, but we are telling them, 'Here are your new powers, but you can't investigate the issue that brought this on.' It just makes no sense whatsoever.

When we are talking about integrity and honesty and transparency, here was a chance to actually show it. Here was a chance not to just talk the talk, here was a chance for the new Premier to walk the walk, and it has not been done. This bill represents an admission that the investigative powers and the laws have been too narrow; therefore, we are not opposing. We support the objective, but we also support the amendments to strengthen this legislation, because Victorians expect one standard for all, whether they be members of Parliament, whether they be ministers or whether they be departments, agencies, contractors and subcontractors taking what is inevitably taxpayers money here at the end of that chain – union officials, corporate executives, everybody is involved. If a person fits into the wheel of spending taxpayers money, then they need to have this level of oversight, and we need to have these follow-the-money powers to investigate them. But I come back to the point that the very issue that brought this on has been excluded from investigation. It just makes no sense at all.

An integrity commission must be able to follow the conduct, follow the evidence and follow the money. Its work must be independent, its processes must be fair and the reports must be brought on

and not uncovered with endless delay. I support the bill, but I also support the member for Brighton's amendments to strengthen it even further. What has happened here is this legislation basically is the government giving IBAC a new microscope to have a look at things more closely and more intently but saying, 'You can't use that new microscope we've given you to investigate the very issue that brought this legislation on.' It is absolutely indefensible.

Parliament should not predetermine which matters IBAC can revisit or visit, and it certainly should not construct a legislative safe harbour around wrongdoings of the past. The member for Brighton's amendments remove those restrictions. The member for Brighton's amendments do not declare anyone guilty. The member for Melton, who spoke before me, and the member for Morwell, who spoke before him, raised the issue of ghost shifts. Whether they went on or not, that is what we are trying to find out. That is one of many, many, many issues we need to have thoroughly investigated, but we cannot have legislation come in that does not allow that to happen with some level of retrospectivity. I repeat: the Parliament should not predetermine which old matters IBAC revisits, whether they relate to people on either side of the chamber. If IBAC see fit to investigate those matters because they think where there is smoke there is fire, they certainly should have the power to do that.

I will finish off by saying we support the bill. We support the amendments proposed to the bill, and we think they will provide a far, far, far better outcome. I would just say to the Premier of the day, and I am sure we will hear it again in question time: integrity is non-negotiable, transparency is non-negotiable. Here is a chance for the Premier to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. He cannot say that and then introduce legislation that does not allow the matter that has triggered all this to be investigated. It will be a real test to see if these amendments, if not supported in this chamber, are supported in the other place to give IBAC the power to have complete free rein, which is what an integrity agency overseeing taxpayer funds should have. I conclude my comments with those remarks.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:02): I too rise to make a contribution and indeed to support the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. The bill implements this government's commitment to giving IBAC the power to follow the money and changes the definition of 'corruption' in Victoria to give our integrity agencies more power to ensure corrupt conduct does not go unchecked.

The bill amends the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to implement recommendations of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's good work and subsequent report into the legislative framework for IBAC. The bill complements the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. I am not pre-empting anything; we know that bill has been introduced to this place for debate and that it will be before the house this sitting week. It will establish the office of the special prosecutor to respond to and investigate misconduct on government-funded construction projects in conjunction with the royal commission. This government has made it really clear that integrity is not optional, and this bill makes important and immediate amendments to IBAC's jurisdiction to respond to strong public interest in ensuring public money is spent appropriately.

The threshold of conduct that IBAC can investigate will be lowered in this new legislation. The new laws outlined in this bill will capture a broader range of conduct, including that which does not currently meet the threshold of a criminal offence. The definition will be extended to serious disciplinary matters, including serious misconduct and conduct worthy of termination. The new definition includes a specific provision for elected officials, meaning that they can be investigated for serious breaches of their respective codes of conduct.

Speaking of empowering IBAC to follow the money, under the current laws IBAC can only investigate conduct that includes a relevant offence with direct links to public offices or public bodies. This in itself limits its ability to uncover unlawful and integrity-compromising behaviour. Once this bill is passed, IBAC will have the follow-the-money investigative powers it needs to trace public funds. This means that they can investigate the conduct of private and third-party subcontractors on

government projects. These tougher laws will clamp down on corruption and target serious allegations of misconduct.

The Integrity and Oversight Committee report into the adequacy of the legislative framework for IBAC raised important issues, but they are also complex, and our government response, which has been tabled in Parliament, also reflects that. The committee made 31 recommendations with respect to IBAC's legislative framework and broader integrity structures that IBAC operates within, 29 of which were directed to government. Of these, the government response supported 21 of the recommendations in principle and placed eight under some further review. The two remaining recommendations, recommendations 19 and 31, were directed to IBAC, and so it is only appropriate that IBAC responds to those as it sees fit. It really was a terrific report from the IOC, and I concur with the comments made by the member for Melton, as previous chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee. It is a committee where one gets a much deeper view into all of our integrity agencies, their operations and what they need to do. The secretariat behind that committee really does a power of work, and I commend them for that work.

Any legislative reforms to IBAC's scope need to consider the broader landscape and functions of our integrity agencies. Central to the government's response is the creation of a time-limited expert reference group, which will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Members of the group will include those from IBAC, the Victorian Ombudsman, Integrity Oversight Victoria and Victoria Police, as well as other members who may or may not be added to the group as is required. The purpose of the group is to consider the legal and operational implications of the recommendations that government has supported in principle, provide advice to the Special Minister of State on their proposed implementation and assess the feasibility of those recommendations that are currently under review. This recognises that Victoria's integrity framework is a really complex one, made up of a number of agencies who each have defined remits within the legislation that they operate under. It really is a very complex framework. This is about ensuring that there are no unintended consequences of implementing the committee's recommendations.

I have often spoken in this place about democracy and the Westminster system and the supremacy of what goes with our doctrine of separation of powers and the role that it plays within the rule of law. We have this complex framework of rules to oversee our integrity agencies, and we know that it too plays a role in underpinning our democracy. But we also know – and we have seen this in other democracies – just how fragile it can be when the principles that underpin democracy are slowly eroded away. IBAC really should be independent, the royal commission into corruption in the state that will be running should also be independent, and political parties should really be very, very careful, for instance, when they are doing things like making proposed witness lists and that sort of thing to purportedly influence these independent agencies or independent commissions. As politically tempting as it may be, it is certainly not a wise thing to do in terms of the human rights and the freedoms that are certainly protected by the supremacy of this place and by the laws that are created in this place. On this side of the chamber as a government we are pulling all levers that we can to investigate and strengthen regulatory bodies so that they have the powers that they need to hold those involved to account.

Victorians value the services our government provides, and they want confidence that public funds are going to the services that we all rely upon – to good schools, to great public transport, to quality hospitals. Our major construction works have been incredible landmarks for this government, and we have made inroads to the growth and connectivity across the state. From roads and houses to our public transport network, the work has transformed Victoria over the last 12 years, but dodgy behaviour, whether that be on building sites or in the construction industry, must be stamped out. That is why we are going hard on this and giving regulators not only the resources but the time and the powers that they need. Once these laws have passed, they will come into effect immediately.

Cleaning up our worksites can only benefit workers and can only improve their daily conditions, while restoring integrity and pride in the industry is a good thing for every single Victorian in the state. Our

government is really proud of these reforms. The operation of IBAC will be strengthened, as will the integrity and accountability of organisations, institutions and public state money. On that basis I commend this bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:12): I rise to make a contribution on this bill. One of the reasons we are doing this bill now is a previous Labor government actually watered down the IBAC legislation that was originally introduced by the Baillieu government, which I was part of. We are only going back to try and put some rules back in place that the Labor Party actually took out of this legislation. The previous speaker talked about having to be careful of unintended consequences when it comes to legislation like this, and I agree with that. It is very hard to put my mind in the space of a Labor Party minister, but this bill is making sure there are no unintended consequences where Labor ministers or premiers can actually be held to account for what has happened over the last 12 years.

This bill effectively strengthens IBAC. It does a lot of good things, but it actually gives the Labor government of the last 12 years a get-out-of-jail-free card. Effectively, anything that was done over the last 12 years that has been reported – has been sent to someone to be investigated – cannot be touched. This is a get-out-of-jail-free card for the Victorian Labor Party, their ministers and their premiers over the last 12 years. That is where it is wrong, and that is why the Shadow Attorney-General has a number of amendments to this legislation to make sure it is actually real and can do something. The current Premier made statements when he was first elected as Premier that integrity is not optional. I think Victorians actually appreciated hearing that. The issue is, since that day the Premier has not walked the talk. Things have been walked back and walked back. Yes, they are introducing this bill and giving IBAC more powers, but they are powers prospectively, not retrospectively at all for all the things that have been done wrong.

Thank goodness for the Queensland inquiry where Geoffrey Watson actually got to air his report – a report that he was stopped from airing here in Victoria – which lifted the lid on corruption in the Big Build projects. If it had not been for that Queensland inquiry where Geoffrey Watson got to give evidence where he could actually table his report that estimates that there has been something like \$15 billion worth of corruption on the Big Build projects, that most likely would not have seen the light of day. Again, this legislation does not let us shine the torch back into history to actually look at the things that were done over that particular time. If I go through the amendments that the Shadow Attorney-General will move to make the bill fully retrospective, if integrity is not optional in this state, the Labor Party should have made this bill retrospectively go back and look at the things that could not be done under the existing rules of IBAC. That would have allowed IBAC, with the new rules, to shine a light on those particular issues. It is imperative that we get to the bottom of what has gone on in Victoria, particularly what has gone on in the Big Build projects.

If you think about COVID and the issues around COVID here in Victoria, we had the Coate inquiry to deal with COVID. I sat and watched that inquiry in my office. I am not a lawyer, but I have watched a few inquiries. Every time counsel assisting Coate got to the point where I thought, 'The next question is going to be this,' they stopped asking questions. It was a sham. The Coate inquiry was a sham, a cover-up of everything that was done wrong under COVID. Not having this legislation function retrospectively means that everything that has happened in the last 12 years will be covered up as well.

The other amendment that the Shadow Attorney-General moved is about timely reporting. Those of us who were around for the 2016 CFA issues with Peter Marshall and then Premier Andrews wanted the Richmond report out as soon as possible to make sure it shone a light on the issues of that particular inquiry. Through the creative use of the courts to try and block the release of that report, it was seven years from that inquiry starting to when it was finally tabled in this place. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of United Firefighters Union members' funds were used to run the court cases to keep that report from being tabled. As I said in a radio interview at the time, the way that report was written was that they used polite language, but if you read what was in there, it was absolutely damning of what went on through that period of time. The ones that suffered the most, from a country point of view,

were the CFA and the CFA volunteers. Unfortunately the CFA is a shadow of its former self because of what was done by Peter Marshall, the UFU and then Premier Andrews.

As has been said quite often in this place, absolute credit to Jane Garrett as the minister for standing up and blowing the whistle on that. For anyone that has done the company directors course, they always say that if you raise concerns in a board you are on, or in this case in a cabinet you are in, and no-one listens to you and no-one takes any notice of the concerns you are raising, if you feel strongly about it, you need to step out of it. To the minister's credit, she believed it was wrong, she could not get any action on getting that fixed and she stepped aside. I think that was to the absolute credit of her and the integrity of her as a minister and a person, compared to those that were going against her.

Speaking of integrity, one of the other things you learn if you do the company directors course – I assume those rules apply to cabinet ministers here in Victoria as well – is that if there is something on the table before you, if there is a conflict of interest, you should recuse yourself from that particular meeting. Given that this legislation protects action of the past because it cannot be investigated, I ask the rhetorical question: how many ministers around the cabinet table when this legislation went through cabinet recused themselves from the meeting and went outside? They have a vested interest, a pecuniary interest, because this legislation means they cannot be investigated in the future. Why would they be in the room making a decision that protects their actions in perpetuity? As I said when I started, this legislation is a get-out-of-jail-free card for all the ministers and the premiers of Victoria over the last 12 years who have done things wrong here in Victoria. They should not have been sitting at the cabinet table when this legislation was signed off to come to this Parliament, because they had a pecuniary interest in the legislation. You are looking at me puzzled, member for Point Cook. It is etiquette of a board, of any decision-making body, that if you have a pecuniary interest in something that is on the table then you leave the meeting and do not talk about it. It would have probably been an interesting thing if people actually did that. Maybe cabinet would not have had a quorum because there would have been so many ministers involved. That would be just so interesting.

The other thing that the Shadow Attorney-General has also proposed is this issue of the defence of public interest immunity. Again, if you think about that, the Labor Party has not walked the talk on that particular issue. Premier Andrews actually gave directives to his Department of Premier and Cabinet secretary to release cabinet papers from our time in government, to release cabinet papers about the east–west link. Again, that was a total break of protocol, but a protocol they now hide behind that they cannot release papers. He had the secretary release all the papers around the east–west link. He also had 80,000 pages of cabinet papers released around other issues from our time in government, again, and they now want to have protection for never having papers released and not having to be released if IBAC comes knocking on the door.

In government they have double standards. They were very happy to tip those papers out the door against our government, but they do not want their government held to account. So, yes, IBAC does need more powers and the Liberals and Nationals support them having more powers, but we most definitely want those powers to be retrospective so there can be a light shone on the last 12 years of the Labor government here in Victoria, because if that light was shone on them they would be appalled. It would make Fitzgerald in Queensland a number of decades ago look like a kindergarten picnic compared to what the Labor Party has done to Victoria here. There is the corruption, the nepotism and the public funds that have been wasted. I think the \$15 billion that Geoffrey Watson identified would be the tip of the iceberg if a real torch were shone on the management of this state by the Labor Party.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:22): I am always encouraged when following the member for Murray Plains, and I appreciate his contribution. There is a distinct advantage, in fact, should those opposite form government that we will not be short on understanding the decisions of their cabinet and decisions of their subcommittee of cabinet, because of course every meeting will be recorded by the member for Caulfield. There is a distinct advantage for IBAC and anybody looking into these matters, because we will have pretty much a live commentary available, and I thank the member for Caulfield for his service to integrity in this state. I am sure some of those decisions recently taken by

the shadow cabinet around putting guns into emergency departments, which I understand had an extensive set of consultation – I think they called one person – will certainly be recorded and available to the public at a certain point in time. I appreciate the openness and the ability to have these decisions and decision-making processes in the public domain very quickly. It is appreciated that that will be happening in the cabinet room should those opposite be so honoured to form government.

The member for Murray Plains also raised issues related to Peter Marshall and the United Firefighters Union. Look, I do not think he presented the invite to Peter Marshall to be in the gallery of this chamber some time ago, but certainly the coalition parties were very encouraging of seeing Peter Marshall in the gallery and available. I think there was a little bit of hugging going on afterwards. I understand that that is the response that the member for Murray Plains expected when he had challenges around decisions of IBAC and reporting and that the hugging approach is the Liberal approach to those concerns raised around corruption or otherwise – that is to invite, to hug, to congratulate, to high-five on the way through. But that is not the approach I think this government is taking. This government is taking a very different approach.

I know the member for Murray Plains is a longstanding member of this house and really does understand these bills, so I do not think he is going to be deliberately misleading the house in his commentary on them. But it is important to put onto the record the transitional provisions that are related to this bill, which are that if IBAC receive a complaint or new evidence regarding conduct that has occurred, they can consider historic conduct from finalised, referred or dismissed matters as part of a new investigation using their new powers.

The concern they have raised about IBAC not being able to access and not being able to investigate, I will allay that for the member for Murray Plains. The member for Murray Plains will also be aware, having considered some of the legislation that has been through this house, that the royal commission can refer new evidence to IBAC. If it does refer to IBAC new evidence, IBAC can use it to begin a new investigation and consider conduct that it may have already looked at as part of any investigation. I know the member for Murray Plains knows that. I am not informing him of anything new.

Something that was new was raised in this house a little bit earlier by the member for Morwell. He raised issues and knowledge of ghost shifts. He put this in probably a little bit of a jocular way – that is my take on it, because it is a very serious allegation that he put forward that he was aware of this before his time as a member of Parliament and around people that he knew. What he did not step through then, which I would have thought was an important thing to do considering he is a member of Parliament and a public official, and what he did not talk to us about was what he did to refer those allegations. He heard them before becoming an MP, but even before becoming an MP I am sure he was deeply involved in public life, and he should have referred those matters immediately on to IBAC, immediately on to appropriate authorities.

But that was a missing piece. He did go on for some time afterwards. He had a lot of time to add to that contribution, but he did not decide to disclose what he did with those allegations. He does have the opportunity to come before this house again in this sitting week or in the remaining sitting week that we have after this one to let the community know that he has met his obligations in referring to the appropriate authorities these so-called ghost shifts that he is aware of, which he has put on the record in this chamber, but he has so far failed to disclose what he has done about them. I hope that he has gone and taken these to the appropriate authorities. I know that members on this side of the chamber would do so. I hope he can clarify the exact point in time that he did disclose these matters to the appropriate authorities and raise this very concern of the use of public money.

The royal commission has announced that we are bringing in a special prosecutor, but I know those matters are before the Parliament, so I will not cross too far into that. But it is a bit of a confused approach from the opposition – knowing of issues, knowing of serious concerns about people that they then congratulate in this chamber and then just being still so supportive of them. It is confusing and it really leads me to the conclusion that this is all about politics; it is not about the policy, it is all about

the politics. You know, embrace Peter Marshall one day, say that they have got deep concerns about him the next; oppose or sort of shadow oppose this bill, wanting to have some changes to it and being caught off-guard that there has been a royal commission called and just very upset that they did not get the chance to call the royal commission. As the Premier said, integrity is not optional. We are just getting straight on with it. That is why we have got another set of legislation that some of us might be talking about later in the day around a special prosecutor.

I just thought I would give some further context around the IBAC concerns that have been raised by those opposite, and that is if IBAC receives a new complaint or notification, they can investigate it. That is very clear. If IBAC are yet to assess a complaint or notification they already have, they can investigate that. If IBAC get notification of new conduct related to a dismissed or referred complaint, including through the royal commission, they can investigate that. If IBAC are currently investigating something, then the new powers will apply. That should satisfy those opposite that those powers are in place and that any new referrals can be considered.

Regarding the member for Euroa – and the member for Melton certainly called this out when he got up on his feet – there is an appropriate use of parliamentary processes and our voice in Parliament, our opportunity to say things under parliamentary privilege. It was disappointing to hear the implications that she put forward around a complaint of some sort of poor behaviour by an important person within our community and within our politics and our public service. This public servant should not have had their name impugned in the way that she did it, without referring the matter to the appropriate authorities. It was a completely unfair use of the Parliament's processes – the implication of that, without a substantive accusation that she has delivered to integrity agencies. It is disappointing to see these public processes, these parliamentary processes, used in such a way. They should not be. I would hope that she has the opportunity over the next week and a half of parliamentary sittings – this weekend in two weeks time – to make that right. She should make that right. People should not take public servants into this political space and damage their reputations unfairly and without any warrant to do so. I thank the member for Melton in particular for raising that immediately after the fact, as he should have.

I might move to the bill's main role now in the limited time that I have left, which is that it enables IBAC to follow the money. This was announced some time ago, and this delivers on bringing that to this Parliament. This is to investigate suspected corrupt conduct by a third party. It includes private subcontractors and includes where there is an allegation of connection to corrupt conduct in the performance of a public function funded by government. I think one of the most important elements to me when I first heard about these concerns was that there is always someone paying a bribe when someone receives a bribe, and that is an important element of this. Too often it has been workers being harangued and harassed in the discussion of the opposition but not very often those people who are paying the bribes. I would like to hear them talk more about that – the businesses, the subcontractors; that is a space that they should enter as well.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (12:32): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. This is an incredibly important bill and something that Victorians have been calling for and we have been calling for. There are some really important amendments that will be proposed for this bill from our side of the house, because we know that this bill does not go far enough.

It does not matter where I go or who I talk to, people are angry. They are upset, and they are distressed about the level of corruption that this state has had to endure. The \$15 billion that we have seen go up in smoke – \$15 billion that could have gone into our communities – I find incredibly distressful. For an organisation – I will call us that here in this place – to have allowed that to happen I think is extraordinary. I think we have a lot to blame here, a lot of shame and a lot that needs to be exposed during the next process, because it is wrong and it should not have happened. It should not have happened to the people of Victoria. As a person that owned a business, I look back on that and think, wow, what if I had done some of these things or done that to my community or organisations that I

connected with over the years? I had about 17 companies that I was financially responsible for and worked with; I used their money and put it in the right places. I just find it astounding that this has been gotten away with to this level.

From the outset, the Nationals and Liberals do not oppose this bill. We do support it. We do want to see the change that needs to happen, but I will note that the member for Brighton has moved some really important amendments to the bill and that I support those amendments strongly. The bill broadens IBAC's corrupt conduct and follow-the-money jurisdiction, including by extending the concepts of 'public body' and 'public officer' to associated entities and third-party contracting arrangements, and replaces the existing relevant offence threshold with 'an offence or a serious disciplinary matter'. After its more than a decade in office, Victorians are sick of the corruption that continues to be exposed about this government. Day after day, week after week, Victorians are finding out more about the level of corruption and mismanagement of funds in this state. For far too long Labor has continued to drag its feet on this issue and failed to act to address this shocking corruption. The Premier on his first day fronted the cameras and gave the commitment that integrity under his premiership would not be optional, but what we have here today is a bill that proves that integrity is entirely optional, not only under his watch but also under this government.

I support strengthening IBAC, I support giving IBAC the powers it needs to investigate corruption, I support giving IBAC the ability to follow the money and I support broadening IBAC's jurisdiction so that serious misconduct and corrupt conduct cannot simply fall through the cracks of our integrity system. But supporting the principle of stronger IBAC powers does not mean we should support a bill that does not go far enough, because when it comes to corruption, half-measures are simply not good enough. Victorians rightly deserve an integrity system that is genuinely independent, one that is powerful and capable of following the evidence wherever it leads. This also includes following the evidence in the past. The Nationals and Liberals for some time have been calling for IBAC to be given the new powers that they need. IBAC themselves have also been calling for those powers. Integrity experts have been calling for increased powers, and as I said, the people of Victoria have been calling. Most importantly of all, Victorians are calling to see corruption in this state cleaned up. Though we have been calling for IBAC to be given new powers, IBAC has been calling for powers, integrity experts have been calling and all Victorians have been calling, what we need to make sure is that when we go through this process that \$15 billion can be explained to the people of Victoria. That is what they want to hear. They want to hear where that money went, whose hands it went into and why.

What this IBAC bill does is enable what are called follow-the-money powers so that IBAC has the capacity to go to third parties, which have been a significant issue for IBAC in terms of operating investigations into matters, particularly in relation to the Big Build, where third-party contractors were at fault and alleged to have committed many of the corrupt acts. The bill also changes the relevant offence threshold within the current act to extend the capacity for investigation beyond simply an offence to also cover a serious disciplinary matter. Some of the measures proposed in this bill by those opposite are welcome, but the government has chosen to put limitations on the retrospective operation of those powers. If we are serious about corruption, why should the date on which something happened determine whether IBAC can properly investigate it? Corruption does not suddenly begin when a law commences or receives royal assent, public money does not become public money only from the date a bill passes this Parliament and misconduct does not become less serious simply because it occurred before the government decided to come to the table and strengthen IBAC, something which we on this side of the house have been calling for and something the Victorian people have also been calling for. If we are giving IBAC new powers, those powers should be fully retrospective. We as an opposition introduced a private members bill back in March this year that sought to give IBAC the ability to investigate public expenditure beyond the contractual shield that can currently prevent proper scrutiny of where taxpayers money ultimately goes.

Over the past 12 years this government has spent an enormous amount of public money on major infrastructure projects. We have seen serious allegations concerning the construction industry,

contractors, subcontractors, unions and the use of public funds. Our amendments will make sure that IBAC finally have the powers that they need, the powers they deserve and the powers our integrity experts, agencies and Victorians have been calling for. Instead we have a bill which reverts entirely to Labor type, which is to cover up a \$15 billion bill of corruption. It is hard to comprehend how this has been gotten away with for so long and the billions in money lost to corruption.

Victorians are angry. They want answers. They want to know what has happened to their \$15 billion – money that should have gone into our hospitals, roads and infrastructure and into our communities. The GV Health redevelopment is only half completed and funded. We need an integrated cancer centre. It is wrong that whilst billions have gone up in smoke, people in my electorate have to travel to Melbourne to have treatment, putting stress and pressures on their families, who want to be with them. It makes me so angry when we have people homeless, who cannot get a roof over their heads. Our public housing waiting list is over two years. Whilst this government wastes billions of dollars, our people are homeless. We have a run-down 1972 sports stadium. It is a disgrace that investment has not gone into this facility for our community whilst money has gone up in smoke – billions of dollars that could have gone into that type of infrastructure. The roads – as we speak, someone is hitting a pothole and damaging their car and then having to pay for costly repairs due to no fault of their own. Whilst our roads have been falling apart and neglected, this government has blown billions in corruption. It is just astounding and wrong at every level, the investment that has not been made over many years, because of money that has gone up in corruption.

After months of outcry and disgust and Victorians calling for answers, the government now has finally decided to establish a royal commission, one that will examine corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct connected with major construction projects. But as I said, it does not go far enough. It cuts short an opportunity to ensure that no stone is unturned. That is why we have proposed the amendments that this government should accept. Why wouldn't they want to do this fully, to have an opportunity to fully expose the depth of corruption in this state?

If the government is serious enough in establishing a royal commission, the government should also be serious enough to give IBAC the powers to investigate properly and fully. Our amendments that the member Brighton has circulated in his name on behalf of the Nationals and Liberals seek to make the bill fully retrospective, as I said, and Victorians deserve to know the full truth of such allegations that have occurred, not only now but in the past. If IBAC has new powers, it should also have the ability to exercise those powers where appropriate in relation to historical conduct, because Victorians deserve answers about their money, regardless of where that money has been spent or misused.

Another concern we have is around timely reporting. This is something that should not be controversial. When IBAC completes an investigation, Victorians should not be left waiting indefinitely for that investigation to be made public. As we have seen with the consequences of delay through Operation Richmond, that investigation itself exposed serious misconduct risks arising from dealings between the former Andrews government and the United Firefighters Union. Even though IBAC did not make a finding of corruption, that distinction is important and that exposure is important, but the public still deserves timely access to the findings of any integrity investigation. IBAC must be independent, and that is critically important, but independence should not mean that reports can sit indefinitely before the Parliament or even the public. Timely reporting means accountability while it still matters, and it means that the community can have the confidence that integrity investigations are not disappearing when they have concluded.

As I said when I started, this is an incredibly important bill. It is an incredibly important time for the people of Victoria – for what they have been calling for and what we have been calling for – and we must make sure that this is done fully, not just in parts that suit the other side of the house. We have to make sure that everything is transparent and that we have the opportunity to address this \$15 billion in corruption.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (12:42): I rise in support of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. This is an important piece of legislation that strengthens Victoria's integrity framework and reinforces the principle that should unite every member of this house: that public power must be exercised honestly, transparently and in the public interest. Victorians rightly expect that public money is used for its intended purpose. They expect strong safeguards against misconduct and corruption. They expect accountability from those entrusted with public resources. Most importantly, they expect confidence that our institutions have the powers necessary to identify wrongdoing, investigate it thoroughly and hold people to account when standards are not met, and that is exactly what this bill seeks to achieve.

The bill delivers on the government's commitment to strengthening IBAC's powers in two significant ways. First, it allows IBAC to better follow the money by extending its ability to investigate suspected corrupt conduct involving third parties and private subcontractors where there is a connection to publicly funded functions and activities. I think that is a really important thing to have, the follow-the-money powers. I am so proud that we are introducing them.

Secondly, it broadens the definition of 'corrupt conduct' so that serious integrity-compromising behaviour can be investigated even when it does not fit within the narrow confines of the current legislative framework. These reforms recognise an important reality about modern government. Across Victoria, public services and major projects are often delivered through partnerships involving contractors, consultants, labour hire providers, subcontractors and other entities. Public funds can flow through a range of different organisations in the delivery of government-funded work, yet the public expectation remains the same regardless of who is undertaking that work: if taxpayers money is being spent, there must be transparency; if public functions are being delivered, there must be accountability; and if serious misconduct is suspected, our integrity agencies must be able to investigate efficiently and effectively. This bill helps ensure that they can.

I would also like to note the many good people across the construction sector who have worked on government projects – those workers who have contributed to building significant infrastructure for the public – and many of them live in my electorate. We have got a lot of tradies, as you do too, Acting Speaker Walters, in our electorates, and across my seat of Broadmeadows we have had a number of government projects investing in community infrastructure. There are so many of them. I am going to go to a list of not even all of them here, but we have got the \$60 million Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute. I know you are also very proud of that building, Acting Speaker. It is a magnificent jewel in the crown of Broadmeadows and gives so many people the opportunity to do our free TAFE programs there. Just next door we have got the new tech school, which you loved opening alongside me. You know how much difference that will make to our kids in the north. It will have a focus on building skills in growth industries – renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, logistics, robotics and IT – to give students the skills they need for the jobs they want and the jobs we need into the future.

Next door again we have 120 new homes being constructed – so ready to open – which will give people the dignity and the safety of a roof over their heads. We know how important housing is, and in the last budget we committed to 7000 new homes in addition to the 16,000 we have been delivering while in government. Down the road a little bit further we have got the \$20 million that we have invested in the Broadmeadows Special Developmental School, doubling its size and giving it a whole new indoor gymnasium, new art and food tech rooms, a performing arts centre and high-quality staff amenities.

I am really proud of what we are doing in disability and across special schools, and I know you are too, Acting Speaker. We have upgraded every special school across the state, and I know that is something our former Deputy Premier was very proud to deliver. It makes a huge difference. I have got six special schools in my area, and I am so proud of the improvements that have been delivered to them. Also, nearly every kinder in the area has been expanded and improved to deliver on our free kinder program, which gives every child the chance to thrive.

Across the road from the Broadmeadows Special Developmental School we have the Gowrie early learning centre. I was there with Minister Erdogan last week. They are such a high-quality service, doing such important work in my community, and with that expansion they will now be able to provide even more kids with opportunities to learn there and to thrive and to grow into incredible little human beings, as they already are. On Dimboola Road, on the other side, is the new court building, and I am visiting there with the Attorney-General, Minister Kilkenny, very shortly to see what those expansions will deliver for our community. And that is just Broadmeadows.

We have got the full rebuild of Glenroy West Primary. John Fawkner has \$14.5 million of improvements. A new arts and technology centre, science, food tech and new classrooms are making a massive difference to the kids there. We have had an \$8 million investment in Fawkner Primary. Moomba Park has got its new toilets now, and the art and music room is coming soon. We have got the 130-place, affordable, government owned and run Wimbi children's centre. There is now a waiting list to get in there. It is making a massive difference to parents and children in Fawkner in particular, but also it is co-located with the school, and we know how important that is.

We have got the \$7 million SES building. I was with the SES last week to launch their book. Apparently the library said there were not enough books on trucks, so they have now written a book about their SES truck. They do a magnificent job there, and I am looking forward to seeing them on the weekend at the Fawkner festival. We have had massive investment in our hospitals, including the Northern Hospital, and we have got a full rebuild of the ambulance depot in Oak Park, as well as sports improvements, parks improvements – all of the things we have delivered in my seat but across the north and across Victoria. I would like to thank all of the good people who have built or are building these important projects. This public infrastructure is key for our community's future.

One of the most significant reforms contained within the legislation is the broadening of the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. Under the current framework IBAC's ability to investigate corruption is restricted by the requirement that the conduct in question must constitute a defined 'relevant offence'. As the house would be aware, that definition is relatively narrow and focuses largely on indictable offences and a small number of specific common-law offences. The consequence is that behaviour can seriously undermine confidence in public administration and fall well below the standards that Victorians expect while still remaining beyond IBAC's investigative jurisdiction.

That is not a gap we should be comfortable with, and it is certainly not a gap any of us are comfortable with. Integrity in public life is about more than criminal convictions; it is also about maintaining ethical standards, protecting public confidence and ensuring that those entrusted with responsibility act appropriately. The bill addresses this issue by removing the relevant offence requirement and replacing it with a broader and more practical threshold. Under the proposed reforms 'corrupt conduct' will include conduct that would constitute any offence or a serious disciplinary matter. The inclusion of serious disciplinary matters is particularly important. The legislation recognises that serious misconduct can take a variety of forms. It may involve conduct that warrants dismissal or termination. It may involve significant breaches of professional obligations. It may involve serious contraventions of codes of conduct that apply to members of Parliament, councillors, ministers and parliamentary secretaries. These are matters that clearly go to the integrity of public administration. They affect public confidence and they deserve appropriate scrutiny.

Importantly, these reforms respond to concerns that have been raised by the integrity agencies themselves. The IBAC Commissioner has publicly argued that any meaningful expansion of follow-the-money powers should be accompanied by reforms to the definition of 'corrupt conduct', and this bill does precisely that. The key second reform is the extension of IBAC's ability to investigate misconduct involving entities that are performing publicly funded functions, and that is really critical too. Corruption does not always occur neatly within the walls of a government department. Modern-day project delivery arrangements can be complex. Public money can flow through multiple organisations and contractual relationships before reaching the point where services are delivered or

projects are completed. That complexity cannot become a shield against accountability, and this bill expands the relevant definitions within the IBAC act. I commend the bill to the house.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (12:52): It is my pleasure to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. What a great speech that was from my friend the member for Broadmeadows. I am sorry I missed the first half. I am unsure how we weaved our way through to books and the SES, but I will listen to that later on and see that path, my friend – fabulous.

I have had the absolute pleasure of being on the Integrity and Oversight Committee for the last four years, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the incredible people that I have had the opportunity to work with. First of all, our chair. Some people would be confused as to why I am saying it is a pleasure working with people from the Greens, but Tim has been a great chair. We do know that he is unwell at the moment, and I send him our regards from here. But he has been a great chair of our committee, and I thank him for all the work that he has done. And then Kim Wells, the grandfather of the Parliament, I thank for the incredible work that he has done on integrity and oversight. He has been on that committee for a very long time.

Brad Battin interjected.

Belinda WILSON: No, I am not talking about you, member for Berwick. I do thank him for the incredible work that he has done on our committee as the deputy chair, and the swiftness with which he handled the meetings that we have had. We have had the quickest meetings in the world sometimes when they have needed to be quick over the last four years, so thank you to Kim. To Sean, who is our incredible secretariat, and his team, I did not realise until I became a member of Parliament the work that happens behind the scenes on these committees. We have an incredible team behind us on that committee, way too many people to name here, mainly because I do not have a list of all their names, but thank you for all the work you do, all the research that you do and all the answering of emails. They receive a lot of correspondence, and they do a lot of work, which is really, really appreciated. Other committee members include my friend sitting to the right of me here, the member for Hastings. Thank you to Eden Foster, the member for Mulgrave, to Mr Ryan Batchelor in the other place, an upper house member for Southern Metro who is also on the committee, and to my colleagues on the other side of the chamber. I have already mentioned Kim Wells, but there is the member for Mildura and also Rachel, who is a member for South-Eastern Metro in the upper house.

It has been really interesting hearing all the speeches in the Parliament today. I thought that the member for Preston was going to interject then, and I was not sure if that actually happens, if someone from the government could actually interject. I want to say it has been really interesting hearing the speeches from everyone today and interesting to hear the challenges that people have made. I think that integrity is extremely important. There is nothing more challenging or upsetting than when someone tells you that you have no integrity. I think it is one of the things that costs nothing and is very, very important to each individual. We take these matters very, very seriously. That is why we have decided to introduce this royal commission. It is very, very important. There have also been a number of people on the other side who have mentioned that they are aware of things that have been happening out in the building industry particularly. I say to them – and I know that a couple of people have also said this in the past – that they need to go to Victoria Police with those matters. It is very, very important. This is something we want to stamp out. Unless we speak up about these things that are happening in the building industry, then they do not come forward. This will take a deep dive into what is happening in this industry, but we need to, as civilians, speak up about what we have been told and what we know about. It is really, really important.

This bill implements the government's commitment to enable IBAC to follow the money. With my role on the Integrity and Oversight Committee I have had a lot to do with not only IBAC but all the integrity agencies, and they do incredible work. They work so hard. All of them do incredible work for our state and for our government. IBAC also do incredible work, but they can only work with the

powers that they have. This is going to broaden those powers and broaden the definition of 'corrupt conduct', and along with the work of the royal commission and also a special prosecutor, this will provide a holistic and comprehensive response to allegations of misconduct on government-funded construction projects, which I think all of us in this place agree is extremely important. I know in my community when people have spoken to me about this, they expect us to investigate this. They expect that of their government, and that is exactly what our Premier is doing. He is having a royal commission, he is going to have follow-the-money powers and he is going to dig deep into this, because this is what Victorians expect and this is what Victorians want for their state.

Under the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, conduct must meet certain requirements to constitute corrupt conduct, such as conduct that adversely affects the honest performance of a public officer or public body in their functions. This is misuse of information or material acquired in the course of their performance or conduct that involves recklessness or breaching public trust. I think we have spoken at length about public trust. People expect that their taxpayer dollar is being used properly, is being used correctly and is not wasted. We all expect that. I know I expect that. I am a taxpayer too, and I expect that from all money that is spent across all governments, whether it be state or federal. We want to make sure that it is not wasted and that it is spent properly and for the right reasons.

Currently conduct must also constitute a relevant offence before IBAC can commence an investigation. 'Relevant offence' is defined narrowly in the IBAC act as indictable offences or any of the common-law offences of attempting to pervert the course of justice, bribery of a public official, perverting the course of justice or misconduct in public office. These are all really important issues that we need to make sure are stamped out and do not continue on our building sites or in any public office. It is not just our building sites; it is in any form of government office. The current definition of 'corrupt conduct' limits IBAC from investigating these integrity-compromising behaviours that may not meet the threshold of a criminal offence. It gives them that opportunity to do so. To address these issues and give full effect to the government's commitment –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! The time has come for me to suspend debate.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Attorney-General

Absence

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy will answer questions for the portfolios of Attorney-General, planning and prevention of family violence.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The Auditor-General shows \$487 million in additional road maintenance funding this year, including the \$352 million recently announced, before funding drops to just \$225 million next year, a 73 per cent cut. Why is the government attempting to hoodwink Victorians with an election year road splurge before slashing funding once they have voted?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Nationals. The only cuts are the \$40 billion in cuts that the Liberals and Nationals are going to implement.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:03): The minister says fixing Victoria's roads is a priority. Why should Victorians believe him when the Auditor-General has revealed his commitment vanishes immediately after the election?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:04): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his supplementary question. The proof is in the pudding that we are investing actually \$352 million –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I could not hear the minister for roads' response. It is going to be very hard for me to take a point of order on what I could not hear.

James Newbury: However, I could hear it. On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be factual. I table, to assist, the VAGO report proving the cut.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Paul HAMER: We are investing another \$352 million this financial year to double the amount of potholes that we are going to fix and double the length of road that we are going to repair. That is double the amount of potholes that the Liberal–Nationals have promised in any one given year.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question, which relates specifically to the cut post election.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: government achievements

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:05): Our government believes in something very simple: that every decision we make should help working people, not make their lives more difficult or harder. That is why in the past few weeks we have announced we are doubling our road maintenance budget, removing half a million potholes, and putting more police on the beat. We have also announced a plan, for the first time in the 50 years since Medicare was created, to bring in free public dental, the first in the nation here in Victoria. This is the difference between a Labor government and a coalition Liberal–One Nation government. We know – and there are other reports out today on their cuts – that the so-called \$22 billion by freezing back office staff will actually be freezing front office staff, teachers, nurses and front lines, with waiting lists up, unemployment up and more people that need help and support not getting it. Under our government we will continue to invest in services – no cuts to schools, no cuts to hospitals, supporting the front line. Their figures do not add up, but their priorities are perfectly clear. The Liberal–One Nation coalition will cut jobs, they will cut services and they will hurt working families.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the use of a ministers statement in this way is just an abuse of the house's time.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: Attacking the opposition.

The SPEAKER: Is the Premier referring to reports? Is this publicly available information?

Ben CARROLL: Yes, it is.

The SPEAKER: I remind ministers – and I will only say this once today – that attacks on the opposition are not appropriate.

Ben CARROLL: I agree. Attacks on the opposition are not appropriate, but reports by the Australia Institute are essential reading for every single Victorian on the cuts they will introduce should they ever form office.

Road maintenance

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. The Premier claims that fixing Victoria's roads is his priority, but why wasn't it a priority when he cut road maintenance funding by 20 per cent as the minister for roads?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:08): I am the Premier now, and I am making sure we remove half a million potholes on the Western Highway, the Calder, the Princes and the Geelong highway. We will make sure we get on and fix roads. They have had 24 hours; they still will not match our promise on bringing road maintenance back in house.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals! Leader of the Opposition! I remind members at the table that they are not immune from being removed from the chamber.

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

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded his answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): Why did the Premier cut road maintenance funding by nearly \$200 million as the minister for roads?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:09): We doubled road maintenance funding. We are putting in a billion dollars. They privatised it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance on the requirement to be factual in this chamber. If I may put to you – I appreciate that every member is expected to be factual – VAGO says today that the Premier cut funding, which I am happy to table for the Premier.

The SPEAKER: There is an expectation that members will be factual.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, if the member for Brighton wants to continue to throw props around the chamber, it is unparliamentary. He should desist.

The SPEAKER: It is not appropriate to table documents during question time.

Ben CARROLL: VAGO says road maintenance needs more oversight. You cannot get any more oversight than bringing it back in house and holding contracts to account.

Ministers statements: economic policy

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:10): The Carroll Labor government is getting on and delivering a strong economy, creating jobs and investing in the services Victorian families rely on. Over the past 12 years, Victoria's economy has grown faster than any other state's. We are the only government on the east coast of Australia delivering an operating budget surplus this year. This is what responsible economic management looks like – growing the economy, creating jobs and delivering the services Victorians need, while maintaining a strong fiscal

position. But there are real risks to Victoria's economy and to Victorian families at this election. I note your earlier ruling, Speaker. We know that there are some who want to cut \$40 billion from the services that Victorians rely on. New independent analysis from the Australia Institute has examined a nasty plan to deliver \$22 billion in savings from a hiring freeze on back office public service roles and found it to be implausible. In fact the institute finds that a cut of this size would mean cutting more than 31,700 Victorian jobs, nearly half the Victorian public service. These are real jobs and real people delivering the services Victorians rely on. Cuts on that scale would definitely impact frontline services – our schools, our hospitals and our police. This independent analysis warns these cuts would push unemployment higher. Remember that unemployment was 6.7 per cent when the Liberals and Nationals were last in government. We may ask: who is planning \$40 billion in cuts to services, with more than 30,000 Victorian jobs gone and increasing unemployment?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland East is warned.

Colin BROOKS: Whose cuts would destroy the economy and hurt Victorian families across the state? Speaker, I respect your previous ruling, but they are all sitting over there.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. In 2021 the Premier said:

We are making our regional roads safer, stronger and more reliable for everyone ...

At the same time, as roads minister he cut the budget by almost \$200 million. If integrity is no longer optional, will the Premier admit he misled Victorians?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield is warned.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:13): You do not need to be a professor or a Rhodes scholar to know we need to do more on roads. That is why we have doubled the maintenance funding for our roads.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:13): If the Premier was really making regional roads safer, stronger and more reliable, why did resurfacing and rehabilitation fall by almost 20 per cent on his watch?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:13): I will tell you one thing: there are several reports out today. One exposes the \$40 billion of cuts. We are investing \$1.4 billion in roads this year.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, apart from it being embarrassing, the Premier is debating the question and has not gone near answering any question today.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, you know I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question. I do remind the Premier of the question.

Ben CARROLL: We are fixing our roads. It is a priority of ours with a comprehensive plan to make sure – half a million potholes, bringing road maintenance back inside, getting prisoners out to work and doing the support they need as well.

Ministers statements: police resources

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:14): Victorians know the difference between a Labor government who backs working people and the alternative, who have a plan for \$40 billion in cuts. That is cuts in frontline services and sacking 30,000 hardworking Victorians.

Victorians deserve to feel safe in their homes and in their local communities. They deserve a government who puts safety first, and only one party in this place can say they have recruited more than 3000 new frontline police officers. Only one party can say with confidence that they will back the thousands of locals here in Victoria who are putting their hand up to serve. But what do we hear from the alternative? With nearly 6000 local applications on hand right now those opposite would rather sideline locals for a sham plan to import officers from overseas. It is a plan that they know just will not work. Today it has been revealed that their plan is a complete hoax. You cannot make \$40 billion worth of cuts –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly defying your earlier ruling and ignoring the 1500 police vacancies he still presides over.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals will make his points of order in the correct manner.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, in *Rulings from the Chair* Speaker Maddigan makes it very clear that a minister can canvass other policies that may affect government business, which is what the minister is doing.

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

Paul EDBROOKE: We have the largest police force in the country, backed by a record \$5 billion investment in Victoria Police. They say they have a plan for double squads. Well, news flash, we are already delivering double squads, and we are recruiting 400 police reservists to get more cops out from behind desks and back on the beat. Almost 100 have already been deployed, with a double squad of reservists graduating next week. That is the Labor difference. We will always, always fight for working people. Victorians cannot afford the real risk of a Liberal–One Nation deviant government. We have employed –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister should be sat down.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The minister will come back to his ministers statement without attacking the opposition, if he can.

Paul EDBROOKE: We are proud on this side of the house to have employed more than 3000 new police. Those opposite did not provide a single new police officer in their last term of government.

Annabelle Cleeland interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Euroa is warned.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Why has the percentage of the road network in poor or very poor condition grown to almost half, up from 39 per cent in 2021?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:18): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his question. The Premier and I have been quite clear that the condition of our road network is not acceptable, and that is why last week we set out a plan to fix the way that we fix our roads, bringing road maintenance back in house, with more transparency, more accountability, more local knowledge and more hands on deck.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals! I remind members that when they ask a question it might be respectful to hear the answer.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:19): The Auditor-General has revealed that the department has repeatedly said it requires more funding to stop the decline of our roads and prevent the maintenance backlog increasing. When will the backlog be cleared?

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast is warned.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:19): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his supplementary question. Work is already underway. Crews are out on the ground at the moment implementing our extra \$352 million –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this was, on relevance, a very simple question that just asked when.

The SPEAKER: I believe the minister was answering the question and he was being relevant.

Paul HAMER: For the benefit of the member for Brighton, the \$352 million, combined with the \$1.04 billion that we announced in the budget, is being expended as we speak. Crews are out on the ground, fixing potholes. Five hundred thousand potholes we will be fixing this financial year, and we are doubling the amount of roads that we will repair this year. We are not waiting for four years to fix half the number of potholes; we are getting on and doing it now.

Ministers statements: homelessness

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Seniors) (14:20): Human dignity starts with having a roof over your head, and that is exactly why I was pleased today to announce the Carroll Labor government's six-point plan to address rough sleeping and homelessness. Our government will establish by-name lists throughout the state so that we can find out who the rough sleepers are and where they are and tailor services to ensure that we are meeting each individual's needs. We will increase the number of assertive outreach teams from eight to 18, covering the whole of Victoria. These teams will gain the trust of rough sleepers and get them housed. We will appoint a team of complex care coordinators to make sure that rough sleepers get the specialist support that they need. We will build more supported housing and create more accommodation for young people who are homeless, and we will prevent returns to homelessness with expanded social housing tenancy supports.

Every rough sleeper is a human being, and our plan is about seeing each individual rough sleeper, addressing their complex needs and case-managing them into housing. What we have announced today, combined with the more than 15,000 new social homes that we are building, will ensure that homelessness in our state becomes rare and brief. The Mornington Peninsula has the largest number of rough sleepers outside of the CBD. The Mornington Peninsula also has a large volume of properties listed on short-stay platforms. There is nothing wrong with this, but it does contribute to a lack of affordable housing. That is why Victoria has a short-stay levy, the proceeds of which are invested in more social housing, and it is from the levy proceeds that we will build supported housing on the Mornington Peninsula and house rough sleepers. This is the levy that those opposite have vowed to abolish – part of their \$40 billion black hole. That is the choice in November: Labor putting roofs over the heads of Victorians and the Liberals bending to One Nation.

Community safety

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:22): My question is to the Premier. A Werribee father was slashed across the face by a youth offender who was on multiple counts of bail under his government's weak bail laws. This was despite assaulting two police officers and committing other serious offences. Will the Premier apologise for failing to keep Victorians safe?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:23): First and foremost, my thoughts are with the victims of this terrible incident. The police minister and I met with the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police yesterday – every resource he needs. We will do everything we can to fight crime, and we will prevent crime as well.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question asked whether the Premier was sorry and would say sorry.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question. He was being relevant.

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask you not to question my rulings, member for Brighton.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:23): How many more Victorians must be attacked by repeat offenders before the Premier admits Labor’s catch-and-release bail system is failing to keep Victorians safe?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:24): I have made it very clear that community safety is non-negotiable. For every Victorian, no matter where they shop, where they live or where they work, safety is our number one priority.

Ministers statements: education system

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Education, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Women and Gender Equality) (14:24): Victoria has the best teachers, the best principals and the best education support staff in the nation, so it is only appropriate that they be the best paid in the nation too, because when we back our teachers, we are backing Victorian students. This year, for the second year running, Victorian students topped the nation in NAPLAN results. And now, in breaking news, Victorian students have beaten Canada, the Netherlands and Finland in science, reading and maths in the latest Programme for International Student Assessment results, and we are the best-performing state in Australia.

That does not happen by accident; it happens because we support students to learn. We support them to learn through things like breakfast clubs, through dedicated tutoring for students who need that little bit of additional help and through things like school-based mental health supports too. It is because we mandate best practice, including explicit instruction, and of course through phonics as well. But all this is at stake because, when those opposite promise \$40 billion in cuts, they are promising to close schools.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Surrey Hills knows that she should not be using the ministers statement in the way that she has to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I will not uphold that point of order, mainly because you did not refer to the minister by her correct title.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: The shadow minister for prayer rooms should know very well to use correct titles. When those opposite promise \$40 billion in cuts, not only do they promise to close schools, they promise to cut student supports and they promise to sack education support staff too. The Australia Institute’s report verifies this. This report makes it clear that the Liberals’ plan is impossible without sacking frontline workers. This is not a hiring freeze, it is an ice age. Labor will always back our teachers, we will back the principals, we will back the support staff and we will back the right of every Victorian student to a great education. Only Labor backs education and educators.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren North will leave the chamber for an hour and a half. Other members are reminded that it is not appropriate to shout down anyone who is on their feet.

Member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

Constituency questions

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:28): (1808) I have a question for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Can the minister provide details of the planned response to improve the conditions on Mount Buller Road following the recent and devastating fatality where a fallen tree took the life of Talae Rodden and seriously injured his mother Sally? Road users have long been concerned about fallen timber, build-up of debris in the roadside drains and gutters, potential drainage and erosion issues and trees located above the road corridor that pose a risk to motorists. Mount Buller Road users want to know what the government is going to do. They want a comprehensive assessment, including inspections of roadside vegetation, unstable trees, drainage systems, geotechnical risks and timber accumulation within road reserves. They want to know what works or funding are planned to address any identified risks and improve safety for road users. It is a busy road in snow season. It is subject to ice, high winds, heavy rainfall, poor visibility and of course snow. It traverses steep terrain, including known geotechnical and landslide-prone areas.

The SPEAKER: Member for Eildon, you at the outset requested an action. I suggest that you rephrase your question to ‘What is the government going to do?’

Cindy McLEISH: What is the government’s planned response to improve the conditions on Mount Buller Road?

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:29): (1809) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. How is the Labor government continuing to make public transport more accessible, affordable and convenient for the Glen Waverley district? Reliable public transport is essential for my local community, helping people to get to work, school and appointments and around our suburbs. We are making public transport more affordable with free travel for under-18s, half-price fares locked in until the end of the year and free weekend travel for eligible concession card holders. We are also making public transport more convenient, with simple tap-and-go ticketing now available across trains, trams and buses. The Metro Tunnel is also making it quicker for people in Melbourne’s east to get to the city, universities and hospitals. And with the Suburban Rail Loop progressing, we are investing in the future of our public transport network. I look forward to the minister’s response.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:30): (1810) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health on behalf of Shane from Maffra, and the information I seek is: when will we see improvements to the public surgery waitlists? Shane broke his hip in a car accident on 25 September last year. We are two weeks off a year on, and he is still waiting for surgery. He is a category 2 patient, so he should have received surgery within 90 days, but he has been left sitting at home on painkillers. After months he finally received a call to say surgery would take place, but it was cancelled. Then it was rescheduled. It was meant to occur this week, but on Monday he received a call to say that it had been cancelled again. His doctor is now concerned about deteriorating blood flow to his leg. Let that sink in: one year living at home with a broken hip. Victorians deserve better, Shane deserves better and the government must explain why people like Shane are being left behind.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:31): (1811) My question is for the Minister for Health. The virtual emergency department is helping Victorians get the care they need when they need it. It is the first of its kind in Australia. Victorians can access 24/7 video calls with qualified doctors and nurses anywhere at any time for the urgent health care they need. No referral, no appointment, not even a Medicare card is needed to use this service. The virtual ED now averages more than 1000 patients each and every single day, which is why last year we tripled its size and made it permanent. Labor has

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also built 12 hospitals, upgraded dozens more across the state and increased our healthcare workforce by 50 per cent. Only Labor backs our healthcare system and working Victorians. You will never see us preside over \$40 billion in cuts to health services or privatise our hospitals. With free dental clinics up next, we are expanding access to health care for even more Victorians. My question to the minister is this: how is the virtual ED delivering better access to health care for folks in Laverton?

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:32): (1812) For years this Labor government has neglected dangerous Yarra Valley roads. Warburton Highway in Seville East is notoriously dangerous in the vicinity particularly of Douthie and Sunnyside roads through to Peters Road. Together with the community, for years we have advocated for road safety upgrades, yet this Labor government and its Department of Transport and Planning continue to fail to invest in the vital safety upgrades needed to make Warburton Highway, Seville East, safer for local motorists and pedestrians, especially the schoolchildren crossing the road from the bus stops. My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety on behalf of Seville East, Seville, Gruyere and Wandin residents: why has the Carroll Labor government failed to upgrade the dangerous stretch of Warburton Highway, Seville East, to make it safer for residents and tourists? Despite VicRoads undertaking a review in 2019 – seven years ago – the Labor government has done nothing and the road remains dangerous. Meanwhile, they have prioritised inner-city Big Build projects, wasting \$15 billion on corruption, criminals and bikie gangs. Thanks to our first responders, Seville CFA and Wandin CFA brigades, for their tremendous work.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:33): (1813) My question is to our Deputy Premier in her capacity as Minister for Education. Bethal Primary School is an outstanding community school in Meadow Heights, with staff deeply committed to students and families. Led by principal Dave Warren, this commitment is reflected in Bethal's remarkable NAPLAN results over the past three years, launching itself from the bottom 10 per cent among comparable schools to the top 10 per cent last year. I popped into Bethal last week to see the works well underway on the \$10.5 million comprehensive upgrade that I secured for the school community when I was elected. These works are so important to ensure that students at this fantastic school have the learning facilities that they deserve. Deputy Premier, when will Bethal students and staff be able to enjoy the benefits of this major investment in their school?

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:34): (1814) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Yarra Park is a state heritage-listed public park in my electorate. It is a peaceful recreational space for local residents, but it is also known as the Melbourne Cricket Club's car park. This often means residents are unable to use the park for large chunks of the year, and they have to deal with the damage and the clean-up after games. This disruption was only ever meant to be temporary and on certain days, but now Melbourne Cricket Club's proposed master plan risks turning the park into a permanent, commercialised festival and parking zone with permanent infrastructure installed that was never meant to be included. Community consultation on this proposal was also sorely lacking, with a broken online survey meaning residents could not register their deep dissatisfaction with this plan. The master plan and its overlay will also remove local residents from any consultation regarding the park's future going forward. My question is: will the minister agree to pause and revise the master plan so that residents can have a proper say in the future of their beloved Yarra Park?

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:35): (1815) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. How is the government working to deliver more regular outbound Hurstbridge line services during the weekday evening peak so Fairfield, Alphington and Westgarth locals have more frequent options to get home from the city? Good public transport is vital to a sustainable inner north. People

choose to live here because they can jump on a train and get into the city easily for work, study and everything in between, but we need more regular services on the way home. The evening peak has a 20-minute gap for outbound trains. The express does not stop in our suburbs. If you miss the 5:11 from Flinders to Fairfield, you are waiting until 5:31 to get on a train. If you miss that, you are on the 5:51. Our government has invested significantly in the Hurstbridge line. Extra Sunday services have started, and we welcome more services coming next year. As part of this, we want more regular weekday peak-hour trains for our locals, making the commute home from the city easier and more reliable.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (14:36): (1816) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts. How much is being spent to accommodate 30 public housing residents at the 5-star Kinson hotel on St Kilda Road? I understand that approximately 30 rooms at the Kinson are being subleased for short-term accommodation for housing tenants. Local residents have raised serious concerns with me about ongoing antisocial and threatening behaviour associated with some of these individuals staying at the hotel, and the owners corporation have confirmed that since February of this year there have been 31 breach notices issued in relation to noise disturbances, threats, intimidating behaviour, damage to common property, rubbish dumping and illicit activity. Locals allege that an Uber driver had a knife pulled on him and that an individual reportedly on bail returned to the hotel with a machete and threatened staff. Just yesterday another person wrote to me saying that their luggage was stolen from across the road, and despite repeated reports to police that their AirTag showed the luggage to be in the hotel, it still has not been retrieved. Locals are afraid to walk on that side of the street.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:37): (1817) My constituency question is for the Minister for Children and concerns recent funding to support accessible kindergartens announced under the Building Blocks inclusion grants. Minister, how will this funding benefit early childhood providers, educators and families in my electorate of Narre Warren South? Kinders are where our youngest Victorians get their very best start in life, through play, learning and exploration. I was pleased recently to learn that Coral Drive Kindergarten and Lynbrook kinder in my electorate will receive funds for equipment and building upgrades. The Building Blocks inclusion grant recognises the importance of supporting all kids to participate through inclusive and accessible environments. It builds on the state Labor government's excellent free three- and four-year-old kinder program, which saves families up to \$2700 per child every year. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Minister for Major Events, Minister for Medical Research, Minister for Racing, Minister for Economic Development) (14:38): I am pleased to make a contribution on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. I think I might just go, in the first instance, to the second-reading speech. There are a couple of elements there that I want to place on the record again. The bill – just taking from that second-reading speech from the Premier, who introduced the bill yesterday – brings forward the implementation of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's recommendation to lower the threshold of behaviour that meets the definition of 'corrupt conduct' under the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, to address the broader limitations with IBAC's jurisdiction identified by IBAC and the IOC and to ensure the bill gives full effect to the government's commitment to empower IBAC to consider the unlawful and unethical use of public funds on major infrastructure projects.

Currently, under the IBAC act, conduct must constitute a relevant offence before IBAC can commence an investigation. 'Relevant offence' is currently defined in the IBAC act as an indictable offence against an act or any of the common-law offences of attempting to pervert the course of justice, bribery of a public official, perverting the course of justice or misconduct in public office. The key element that needs to be addressed there is that both IBAC and the IOC highlighted that this definition limits IBAC in investigating other integrity-compromising behaviours that do not involve a relevant offence. For example, IBAC cannot investigate serious misconduct in isolation, nor can it examine broader governance or systemic failures, unless the conduct meets the threshold for a relevant offence.

Finally, the element I want to just conclude with on that is that to address this issue, the bill makes amendments to lower the threshold of behaviour that can be considered corrupt conduct to capture a broader range of criminal conduct and other integrity-compromising behaviour. This goes into some more detail of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report into the adequacy of the legislative framework for IBAC, where the committee made 31 recommendations with respect to IBAC's legislative framework and the broader integrity structures that IBAC operates within, 29 of which were directed to the government. Of these, the government response supports 21 of the recommendations in principle and places eight under review. The two remaining recommendations, 19 and 31, were directed to IBAC, so it is appropriate that IBAC responds to those as it sees fit.

Central to the government's response is the creation of a time-limited expert reference group, which will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Members on that group will include the Victorian Ombudsman, IBAC, Integrity Oversight Victoria, Victoria Police and other members that may be added to the group. The purpose of that group is to consider the legal and operational implications of the recommendations the government has supported in principle, provide advice to the Special Minister of State on their proposed implementation and assess the feasibility of those recommendations currently under review. This recognises that our integrity framework is complex and involves a number of agencies – it is quite the ecosystem – and has a defined remit under legislation. It is about ensuring that there are no unintended consequences of implementing the committee's recommendations. I want to acknowledge a member for Western Metropolitan in the other place, the Special Minister of State, for her work in relation to bringing a range of this work to the Parliament and the work that she has done in oversighting this bill.

I want to go to a couple of elements that have been raised by those opposite and place on the record some responses to those matters, particularly around the transitional provisions on which the opposition has either been deliberately misleading or simply does not understand. I would say it is a little bit of column A and a little bit of column B. If IBAC receives a new complaint or new evidence regarding conduct that has occurred, they can consider historic conduct from finalised, referred or dismissed matters as part of a new investigation using their new powers. It is quite simple: if the royal commission refers them new evidence, they can use it to begin a new investigation and consider conduct they may have already looked at in that investigation. Further, if IBAC receive a new complaint or notification, they can investigate that. If IBAC are yet to assess a complaint or notification they already have, they can investigate that. If IBAC get notification of new conduct related to a dismissed or referred complaint, they can investigate that. If IBAC are currently investigating something, the new powers apply. It is quite a significant remit in regard to these matters.

I hope that provides some clarity for those opposite. I might add that in my time in this place I recall when they had a minister responsible for IBAC and they had a minister responsible for the establishment of an anti-corruption commission, and said person had to resign their commission. I find I am not likely to take much advice from those opposite when it comes to these matters given their past history in relation to these policy areas.

In relation to the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria, I think there are some other alignments here that are important. That is a complex reform, and we have worked closely in consultation with IBAC in the short timeframe that we have had to deliver a bill that can effectively operationalise these major changes to IBAC's

jurisdiction. If there is more work that we can do, we will do it. But let us not forget we have instituted a royal commission into the exact matters that those opposite are describing. A royal commission is the highest and most serious accountability forum that we can have, and the royal commission will investigate allegations of crime, of corruption and of serious misconduct on government-funded construction sites, particularly, I am sure, white-collar crime that may have occurred, which will be interesting to those opposite. They will also be able to make referrals to IBAC and to Victoria Police as appropriate. I quote from a statement made by the Premier at the time in July:

Whether in business, politics or the union movement, there will be zero tolerance for those who misuse their positions.

It is why his first act as Premier was to call a royal commission into the construction sector and to strengthen IBAC by giving them follow-the-money powers this term, not in 2027. The Premier has my full support in relation to those matters and making sure that they were absolute, non-negotiable priorities for the new government. There was a further statement from the Premier in relation to the royal commission into Victoria's construction industry on 20 August, where he made the point that:

... Victorians deserve the truth. They deserve to know how organised crime found its way onto our building sites, who allowed it to happen, and how we make sure it never happens again. Nothing less than a Royal Commission, with full coercive powers and public hearings, will get us there.

They are the statements that the new Premier made. He has my absolute support and the support of this side of the house in relation to those matters. They are fundamental to integrity. I can say very clearly in the Ivanhoe electorate there is nothing less than the expectation from my constituents that those matters are addressed in full, and they have welcomed, when I have been out in my community, the government's actions on these matters. There is no obfuscation, there is no delay. These matters have also been welcomed by many stakeholders in the community who have backed in the royal commission, the terms of reference of the royal commission and the appointment of the royal commissioner.

Further, with regard to the terms of reference, the Premier said they are matters of course:

... for the Commissioner to decide whose actions and whose knowledge are relevant to the matters under investigation.

Not the government –

and not the Premier –

... The Commissioner. If he wants to hear from Ministers, former Ministers, senior officials, union leaders or company executives, he has the power to call them.

The commission will also be funded at the starting point of a budget of up to some \$50 million, and the Premier has asked that there be a report within 12 months. We should not have to wait years for answers so that action can be taken quickly, swiftly and immediately and those who need to be held accountable are held to account. Not only that, but of course some additional powers for IBAC that were touched on at the time the Premier made those announcements were the changes to expand IBAC's jurisdiction. That legislation, which was a commitment to draft back in August, last month, has seen us come to this position today, where that legislation is before the Parliament. The Premier made some further comments in regard to those matters when he said on 8 September that:

Victorians rightly expect public money to be spent properly and for their state to be led with transparency.

We cannot allow corruption to slip through the cracks.

We also need to make sure that the overwhelming thousands of Victorian workers who commit themselves every day to build the infrastructure that supports our communities are also protected and supported in their daily working lives. This royal commission will also make sure that occurs, and these additional powers for IBAC are supported by the government.

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:48): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:49): I rise to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. What Victorians would expect when they hear that a bill is before the house to establish a special prosecutor is that the bill would enable the creation of both the role and the powers associated with it. That is what I think every Victorian would expect. What this bill does is create the special prosecutor as a position in Victoria, but it does not draft the powers that are attached to that special prosecutor, because, as the government have admitted, they will do that in tranche 2 of the legislation. As the government has said, this bill creates an office. It is much like everything this government does on integrity: hollow. It creates an office, a position that exists, but then we shall wait six months if the government is elected – and I do hope Victorians see otherwise – for a second bill that will create additional powers and functions for the special prosecutor and provide for information sharing, investigation and prosecutorial powers.

I put and submit to the chamber at the commencement of this contribution that we have a bill before us that creates a special prosecutor without prosecutorial powers. This bill does not provide a special prosecutor with prosecutorial powers. The only reason that this bill could have passed through the government process to be in the chamber before us today without someone along the road saying, 'Maybe the special prosecutor needs prosecutorial powers,' is because someone, when that question was asked along the way, answered the question with, 'But we need to do something before the election.'

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: Speaker, the minister at the table just swore across the table at me.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I did not hear.

Vicki Ward interjected.

James NEWBURY: You may deny it, but you just did it.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton to continue.

James NEWBURY: Speaker, I have just raised the issue with you.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear it, member for Brighton, so I cannot make a ruling.

James NEWBURY: Speaker, I am very, very disappointed.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, you did not ask for a withdrawal.

James NEWBURY: I ask for a withdrawal.

Vicki Ward interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton to continue.

James NEWBURY: The special prosecutorial bill that is before us is without prosecutorial powers. You do not have to take my word for it. You can look at the minister's second-reading speech, which I have here, which says that it will not be until early 2027 before prosecutorial powers are enabled. How can it be that we have a bill before us that creates a special prosecutor without any powers for at least six months? I do hope, as I said, the good people of Victoria see otherwise and change the government in November. But how can it be that the minister in their speech to this chamber has said that they have rushed this bill – my words – so quickly that they have created a position, an office, which I presume is going to be paid, without any powers attached to it, so without prosecutorial powers? I think any Victorian would presume a special prosecutor can prosecute; it is in the name. No, they cannot. The minister has said so in their speech.

I would put, before we even begin debate on this bill, that like with everything that comes from this government on integrity, it is all hollow. It is all about being able to put out a media release, hold a press conference and say, 'I have done something.' Well, the minister in the speech on this bill admits that the underlying function, the power that enables a prosecutor to prosecute, is not enabled by this bill. I think every Victorian would expect a prosecutor to have prosecutorial powers. Otherwise, what are they? A special nothing. They are called a special prosecutor; you would expect them to have the power to prosecute. But no, we do not have that.

When it comes to funding, I would like to put something on the record and to the Premier's office. In relation to this bill, we met with the government, including with the Premier's office, and we enabled an immediate introduction on the bill. In good faith we did that. In the briefing on this bill one of the questions I asked was about the cost of the special prosecutor, which is not an unreasonable question. The Premier's private office said to me that we would be provided with a funding envelope, a figure of the cost. I asked a follow-up question: 'Do you give me a commitment that before this bill is debated you will provide the funding amount for the special prosecutor to me?' I was given an ironclad commitment that I would be. I was then sent an email saying that the special prosecutor will be funded, which is a clear breach of the promise. I say to the Premier directly: the Premier's office provided a guarantee to me in an opportunity where we considered this bill in good faith, and we would expect that that guarantee was lived up to, especially on a matter of integrity. The Premier's personal office, at one of the highest levels, broke that promise. I would say to the Premier: when you give a commitment and you do so on integrity, you should live up to it, and that has not occurred in this case. We do not know how much the special prosecutor will cost. We do not know the funding envelope. What we do know, because of the speech in relation to this bill, is that the prosecutor will not have prosecutorial powers. That is something we do know because the minister outlined that in the speech. But the commitment of how much the cost of operating the office will be, despite a commitment given, was not provided.

I do want to note that the opposition will not be opposing the bill. As I said earlier, we assisted in facilitating both this and the IBAC reform that came to the chamber yesterday and was debated further today in fact. I put to the government that we would be supportive of those bills passing through the house sooner. The government said that they did not want to pass those bills through the house sooner. We put the position that these are very serious reforms, and we felt they should be in the Council at the latest by Thursday. The government has taken a different view and has seen the view to be that these bills do not need to be rushed and can take extra time to be debated, so there is no rush in the government's mind. Perhaps it is because, in relation to the special prosecutor bill, all this bill does is creates a special prosecutor without prosecutorial powers. Perhaps there is no need when all we are doing is creating an office which is going to cost an amount of money, which the government will not provide publicly, without prosecutorial powers. Again I say we would have been more than happy to facilitate speedy passage through the house and movement into the Council.

We do have a concern, and the concern aligns with one of the concerns we had with the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, which is why under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated. What we are

seeking to amend, which is aligned with the IBAC amendment of yesterday, is the removal of the public interest immunity. In relation to the IBAC legislation, that executive privilege, as many would understand it to be, or Crown privilege, as people who have been here longer would understand it, allows a minister, a former minister, a Premier or a former Premier to claim privilege on information or documents they may hold. In relation to the IBAC legislation we moved an amendment yesterday which would seek to remove that privilege. I suspect over the coming couple of weeks before these bills are considered in the Council there will be some public debate over this issue as to whether or not a minister, a former minister, a Premier or a former Premier should have the right to simply say, 'No, I don't want to cooperate with IBAC. No, I don't want to cooperate with a royal commission.'

The difference between the amendment that was circulated just now and the amendment that was circulated yesterday is yesterday's removed that immunity as it related to an IBAC investigation, and what this amendment does is remove that immunity as it relates to the royal commission, because we are dealing with the Inquiries Act 2014. Our amendment today aligns with yesterday's amendment, and we would be seeking to remove that executive immunity in relation to a royal commission. I do not think any Victorian would believe that it is reasonable for a minister, former minister, Premier or former Premier to deny the right of access to certain information or documents. I do not think many Victorians would know that immunity exists whereby, for example, former Premier Daniel Andrews could simply say to a royal commissioner who asked for a document or information, 'I won't give you that document because I don't have to,' and there is no process by which they have to provide an explanation for that declining of information. They simply can say no. The act as it currently stands says they can do that.

For the house's background, because this will be where the debate gets interesting on this amendment, Labor agrees with me. I can see the Labor members wondering, 'Really? How could that possibly be? I don't agree with the member for Brighton ever.' But the Labor government agrees publicly with the removal of executive immunity. In fact after the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, this Labor government committed to removing the immunity by May 2022. When was that? That was four years ago. Four years ago the government committed – having already by that time committed – to removing the immunity in response to a previous royal commission. So over five years ago, 5½ years ago, this government committed to accepting a finding of that royal commission. If you look on the Victorian government website right now, you will see in the government's response that commitment being agreed to being delivered by May 2022. It is on the government's current website, to help everybody who is watching. You can google it, and you can find that the government committed to doing that by May 2022. By May 2022 the government committed to removing that executive privilege. You would ask yourself, 'Well, who was the Premier at that time?' Former Premier Daniel Andrews. I do not want to be unkind, but I can certainly understand, perhaps, why that commitment to a royal commission has not yet been lived up to, considering who was Premier.

I hear members asking, 'But no-one in recent times could have possibly used the public interest immunity, because no-one in executive government would decline the executive immunity, would they?' Well, can I say to you, the last person to use public interest immunity was former Premier Daniel Andrews. After his commitment to remove that immunity in 2023, former Premier Daniel Andrews used his executive privilege when it came to – I am sure the house will not be surprised to hear – the Commonwealth Games. When it came to the Commonwealth Games, he used his executive privilege, and he used his privilege not on a particular request that was put to him. He used it before any request was put to him. He claimed executive privilege on the issue, full stop. He did not wait to hear what he was going to be asked, he did not wait to hear what document he may be asked to provide. He simply claimed entire executive privilege when it came to the Commonwealth Games, which frankly I do not think would surprise any Victorian.

But this debate matters, because the amendment we have circulated today is in line with a commitment given by this Labor government five years ago, that they promised to have implemented four years ago. This amendment is in line with a commitment they have not only previously made publicly but

that is currently on the Victorian government website as to be delivered by May 2022. The government is either going to vote for the amendment in line with their commitment which is public and which is in response to a royal commission or they are not. Every Victorian can assume that if the government votes against this amendment, what they are saying is that when it comes to the royal commission that has been created, they want ministers and former ministers, premiers and former premiers, to have the right to say no to the royal commission when it comes knocking. That is the only possible reason you could want the executive privilege, the public interest immunity, to exist in the Inquiries Act. We as a coalition have a strong view that when it comes to our chief anti-corruption agency, IBAC, and when it comes to the royal commission, if they come and ask for a document and a former minister or a former premier has that document, we would expect that it be provided.

This is not a frivolous request. I understand public interest immunity may need to exist in many other circumstances, but when it comes to the chief integrity agency and a royal commission, I do not think any Victorian would think it is reasonable for a minister, former minister, premier or former premier to say no when those bodies come knocking at the door. This is why we not only proposed it in relation to IBAC but we are proposing it in relation to this bill, because we believe that in those two circumstances specifically it is only reasonable that that power not exist for a former member of this place, a member of the executive, to hide what they know from an anti-corruption body. The privilege, though it should exist in some circumstances, is effectively, when it comes to an integrity agency's request, hiding information from that integrity agency. That is the only possible way you could see it. I presume that is why the Labor government committed to removing it, and I agree with them. I agree with their public commitment that that they will remove it, which is on their website, because it should not exist.

We are here with this bill because we have seen, and every Victorian has seen, the most outrageous corruption occur in Victoria, perhaps the worst corruption scandal we have seen in Australia's history, a minimum \$15 billion corruption. This bill and the IBAC legislation yesterday are acts from a dying government, from an end-of-days government, because they know they have been caught. It has been a long, long process to get here, and in both the legislation yesterday and the legislation today it is disappointing to see that though there is action, it is partly hollow action.

Although we will not oppose it – as I said earlier, we will support both yesterday's and today's legislation – it is worth noting that this bill has been so rushed. The minister themselves in the second-reading speech admitted that the special prosecutor bill will not have prosecutorial powers for an estimated six months, I would suspect. I mean, can you believe that the special prosecutor is being created without prosecutorial powers? What is it? What is it going to do? I will admit the bill enables information sharing. It enables the creation of the office, and it does allow information sharing – for example, with the royal commission. But as the Premier himself said, this special prosecutor is being created to enable prosecutorial action to occur, and for the bill to not enable that I think says everything about the hollowness of action when it comes to the corruption on the Big Build. And on the corruption on the Big Build, there are a number of points I want to make.

We know from public reports and the good work of many in the media, but specifically Nick McKenzie, that this government had known for a long time about the corruption that was occurring on government worksites. We know of warnings in early 2022, four years ago, and that the former Premier, who was at the time infrastructure minister with responsibility for these projects, was warned about labour hire firm Marda Dandhi, and those issues have been raised in this chamber and publicly, and those allegations were put to her. We also know of allegations that were put to the now Attorney-General in a meeting on the Big Build site. So there were very senior ministers in this government – and this is all on the public record – who had very specific corruption allegations put to them, very serious allegations in terms of both union behaviour but also behaviour in relation to crime. You would think that especially as a senior minister, but any minister – and you would hope even a member of the backbench – if any instance is put to you, if someone pulls you aside and says that crimes A, B, C, D and E are occurring when you are on that site, you would do something about that.

We saw famously when it came to the Attorney that when asked in relation to crimes and matters that were put to her on the government worksite, she initially publicly suggested that those allegations were put to police and then was forced to make a clarifying statement admitting that was not true. Those allegations were not put by the Attorney to police. They were passed on internally. They were not put to police. We know that, because that was a breach of then Premier Jacinta Allan's edict that she had an expectation that where an allegation of criminal behaviour was put that would be referred to police. So for the Attorney to be forced to admit that that had not happened spoke volumes. But we also know when allegations were put to former Premier Jacinta Allan when she was the minister responsible, she wrote sometime later to IBAC in relation to those allegations. Although she wrote to IBAC in July 2024, almost two years after allegations were first raised with her, very swiftly I might say, in October of that same year – three months later – IBAC wrote back and said, 'We don't have the powers to investigate what you're referring to,' and those matters were referred to police.

You would think, at the time a senior minister or Premier with that information would have done something about that. We did not find out, as Victorians, about that response until this year. We found out this year that the former Premier was covering up the fact that she received a response saying IBAC could not do anything about it. The reason that referral matters is because, as the Premier has said, the special prosecutor, the royal commission and the IBAC legislation are all matters that are intertwined. Then Premier Allan's referral to IBAC cannot be investigated by IBAC despite the legislation introduced in this place yesterday because its retrospectivity blocks that sort of investigation other than when it is new. You would expect that if the current Premier wrote to an agency and said, 'Here is a former referral; I would seek your support on that referral,' IBAC would have the power to do so. They do not, despite it being a Premier's referral.

I do hope that this Parliament, across the chambers, takes the IBAC bill – and I suspect it will – and significantly enhances it, because we have an opportunity with the IBAC bill to enhance it, just as we have with this special prosecutor bill. Given the time perhaps we could have substantially enhanced it to give the special prosecutor prosecutorial powers, which would have been a novel idea, but given the time that would have been rather difficult to draft. However, one thing we can do as a Parliament is pick up the amendment that stops a member of the executive from claiming privilege and not passing on information they may have to the royal commission. That is what this amendment that I have put to the chamber will do: it will enable the royal commission to ask for information from ministers, former ministers, premiers and former premiers and they will be required to provide it, which every Victorian would expect. That position, I say again, is in line with the commitment given by this Labor government that was due to be completed in May 2022 – over four years ago. It will be an interesting debate on the amendment as to whether their public commitment to a royal commission finding is one that they live up to or whether they support the amendment outright, which is what I put to them.

I will finish on the point that I began with and say when it comes to integrity the government is always hollow, and this bill is proof of that. The minister, in his own speech, said that this bill does not enable the basic functionality of the special prosecutor other than the creation of the office because the prosecutorial powers will not be enabled for at least six months. We do not oppose the bill; we will support that creation, but we do note that, like everything else, with integrity this government is hollow.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:19): This bill is part of the Carroll government's commitment to integrity and to acting on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major construction projects in Victoria. The Premier's first act on assuming office was to call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. Victorians deserve to know how organised crime found its way onto our building sites, who allowed it to happen and how we make sure it never happens again. The royal commission, which was established on 20 August 2026, will give Victorians those answers.

This bill is a very important part of this integrity process. The bill will provide important new resources and powers to the royal commission. It will create the office of the special prosecutor to work alongside the commission to refer individuals to authorities for prosecution or regulatory action. It will also

provide the commission with new powers to compel the production of information and witness statements – not just documents – and attendance to give evidence at hearings.

I am disappointed in some of the points put forward by the member for Brighton seeking to trivialise the significance of the reforms that we are bringing before the Parliament today. He might think, ‘Oh, free kick here, we can give a kick to the government and further undermine Victorians’ opinions of parliamentary processes or integrity processes’ – that quick win. But in the long run what it does do is denigrate the opinion, if you like, or the perception of all integrity processes when you seek to get that quick win and brush over in such a disrespectful manner the critical elements that are being established as part of these reforms. Sometimes you need to think a couple of steps ahead rather than of the quick win or quick grab on your social media to undermine integrity agencies more broadly and the critical work that is being undertaken and the reforms that are being brought about today. For instance, the special prosecutor will have the authority to refer individuals to law enforcement agencies in real time. You would not know that if you had just listened to what the member for Brighton put before the chamber. He drove a tractor over the nuanced elements of this legislation. That is actually disrespecting not only those who have drafted the legislation but the intention that underpins its seriousness in terms of our commitment to delivering on these integrity elements that are very important to all members of the government and, more broadly, to Victorians across the state.

The further limb to that and a fundamental omission on the part of the member for Brighton was to reflect in an appropriate way on why there are two tranches to these reforms. I am going to speak to that, because I think Victorians deserve to know. They deserve to know the truth. This is phase 1 of the establishment of the special prosecutor. A re-elected Carroll government will introduce legislation to specify further powers and functions of the special prosecutor. Why are there two tranches? It is not a hollow element; there is actually a very solid rationale as to why these reforms are being delivered in two tranches, and I will explain it right here.

It is essential that any additional powers and functions are developed carefully and in consultation with the commission, with Victoria Police, with IBAC, with the Office of Public Prosecutions and with others to ensure they do not prejudice or unduly interfere with their existing powers and functions. If the member for Brighton actually gives credence to these processes – to the work of Victoria Police, to the work of IBAC, to the OPP – then surely he would have given consideration to these important elements that are underpinning the process in terms of having two tranches to these reforms. It is extremely disappointing that he did not bother to do that or, rather, he deliberately omitted these important elements in the reforms. But I am pleased to say I am happy to speak to these, because Victorians deserve to know. They deserve to know the truth. The intervening period will enable the appropriate model of interaction between the different entities to be designed based on the commission’s specific operating model. Ergo we want the royal commission to achieve the outcomes that I think all Victorians deserve in the long run. I am trying to simplify this because we know that we are dealing with extremely complex matters. That is why I was so disappointed with the member for Brighton, because it is much easier to slash and burn and to undermine and to trivialise rather than to actually speak to the truth of the reforms that are being brought about.

In the meantime the special prosecutor will have a significant role in assisting the work of the commission as an expert, dedicated and embedded resource. So instead of just dismissing it as, ‘Oh, it’s just a little appointment that doesn’t really do anything,’ which was the inference of the member for Brighton, I think it is really important that we be factual and actually represent this position and the authority which the special prosecutor will have, and moreover, the purpose behind the two tranches to the reforms, also not dismissing the importance of the functions et cetera and the consultation that is required to ensure that the royal commission can achieve the outcomes that we want it to achieve.

I know that I am perhaps labouring this point to some extent, but I think it would be very sad for Victorians to think that this bill and the reforms being brought about were merely ceremonial. Because that was the impression I had, that it was merely a ceremonial piece, when in fact it is a very important

part of the work that will help support the best possible outcomes in terms of both the inquisitorial element, which will be the royal commission, and the prosecutorial element, which will be that of the special prosecutor, noting the two tranches and noting that even within the first tranche there are important elements in terms of the authority that the special prosecutor will have and their ability to be able to fulfil the functions of that role.

Another important element that I alluded to at the outset is the power to compel production of information. Clause 4 of the bill gives Victorian royal commissions new powers to compel the production of information and witness statements. This will broaden the existing powers under the Inquiries Act 2014. Currently Victorian royal commissions can compel the production of documents and the attendance of an individual to give evidence at a hearing, but this does not enable them to compel the production of information that does not exist in documentary form or is not readily identifiable across a multitude of documents in advance of calling an individual to give evidence at a formal hearing. The new power will enable the construction royal commission and future royal commissions to compel a person via written notice to give information or a statement in writing before a specified time and in a specified manner. This is intended to include information created from a person's knowledge, in addition to information held in documents. These new powers will assist the royal commission to target its efforts and avoid unnecessary cost and delay, if I round out that proposition, by obtaining specific information without needing to call for or trawl through vast document searches, obtaining relevant information from an individual in circumstances where no relevant documents exist and identifying who has what information relevant to the commission's inquiry before convening formal hearings by requiring a witness statement.

This is another very important element to the reforms and will help with the royal commission in terms of ensuring that it will have the ability to obtain thorough and fulsome evidence in a targeted and efficient manner. It is also a pity that the member for Brighton neglected to speak to that element of the reforms as well, but I am happy to, because I believe Victorians deserve to know the truth and they deserve to know why we are putting forward these important reforms before the chamber today.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:29): Acting Speaker O'Keeffe, it is a delight to see you in the chair, and what a great representative you have been for your community. I rise today to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026, a bill that finally acknowledges what Victorians have known for years: that our integrity system has been too weak, too constrained and too easily avoided. This bill is a direct response to the failures that have plagued major construction projects in this state – failures of governance, failures of transparency and failures of accountability. While the opposition support the bill, we do so with a clear understanding of its limitations and with a firm commitment to strengthening it through the member for Brighton's amendments. Integrity is not a slogan. It is not a press release. It is not a political shield. Integrity is a system, and that system must be strong enough to withstand pressure and politics, and Labor has failed that test time and time again. The new Premier Carroll stood up on day one and said, 'Integrity will not be optional.' Well, this tells me two things: (1) integrity was clearly optional under his two predecessors and (2) he is desperate to distance himself from the past two Labor premiers. If Premier Carroll wants to prove to Victorians that he is the new broom –

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am sorry but the member has been here long enough to know that appropriate titles should be used.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): Correct titles, please.

Tim McCURDY: Premier Carroll?

Danny Pearson: No.

Tim McCURDY: Somebody else, obviously.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): Would you let us know what you are referring to?

Danny Pearson: He is the Premier. You refer to him as Premier.

Tim McCURDY: So he is not Premier Carroll, he is the Premier. What happened to Premier Allan and Premier Andrews?

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, just so we are clear, for the member's benefit – I know he has been here since 2010 – correct titles are to be used. So the former Premier is the member for Bendigo East. She remains the member for Bendigo East. She should be referred to as the member for Bendigo East. The Premier is the Premier – full stop. He should know this now after 16 years.

Tim McCURDY: Thank you for raising that. Where is the member for Bendigo East? I have not seen her for a few weeks. She has got a job to do, and we are paying for it. Where is she? They are very quick to say when someone from our side is not here. The same thing goes on your side; we have just got to have the same standards. The current Premier stood up on day one and said, 'Integrity isn't optional', and as I said before, clearly it was optional under his two predecessors, the two former premiers.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Tim McCURDY: Labor premiers. As I say, he is desperate to distance himself from those past Labor premiers. If the new Premier wants to prove to Victorians that he is the new broom to sweep Victoria clean, he could start by accepting our amendment today that has been put forward by the member for Brighton. We know that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026 earlier this week has demonstrated that by not allowing IBAC to look back on recent premiers' decisions it reeks of yet another Labor cover-up. Victorians are tired of the waste and the corruption, and it was this Premier's opportunity to show he is different and he does want the change that Victorians yearn for. But sadly, after 12 years of waste, corruption and secrecy, nothing is changing.

Victorians know that strengthening the royal commission powers is way overdue and necessary. Clause 4 of the bill amends section 17 of the Inquiries Act 2014 to allow a royal commission to compel written information or written statements. This is sensible and overdue reform. For too long, royal commissions have been forced to rely on oral evidence or document production alone. In complex matters, especially those involving layered contracting, obscure governance structures and sophisticated legal arrangements, written statements are essential. They allow investigators to test evidence, identify inconsistencies and build a consistent factual record. This reform strengthens the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria's ability to uncover the truth, and the opposition supports it. We also recognise that this is a new power and it will be meaningless if witnesses can simply refuse to comply by invoking the public interest immunity. That is why the opposition will move the amendment circulated by the member for Brighton to repeal section 18(2)(c), removing public interest immunity as a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with a royal commission requirement. This is not radical and it is not controversial; it is just the direct implementation of recommendation 91 of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants. It is what integrity experts have been calling for, and it is what Victorians expect. If the government is serious about strengthening royal commissions, it will support our amendment; if not, Victorians can draw their own conclusions, which I think they already have.

We know that when establishing a special prosecutor independence matters. We look for clarity and accountability. The bill also establishes detailed arrangements for the disclosure, transfer and provision of information between the royal commission, the special prosecutor and other appropriate bodies. This is essential. Integrity systems fail when information is siloed. They fail when agencies do not communicate between one another. They fail when evidence is lost, delayed or trapped behind legal barriers. Victoria cannot afford another four years of the same disgraceful behaviour that has plagued the current government. These provisions ensure that evidence can move efficiently and lawfully

between the bodies, they ensure that action is taken where required and they ensure that documents are returned and accounted for. The opposition supports these provisions because they are practical, they are necessary and they will strengthen the functioning of the construction royal commission.

I want to touch on the fact that the bill provides for a two-year appointment for the special prosecutor, extendable in 12-month increments. It also repeals the special prosecutor's provision six months after the royal commission's final report is tabled. These are sensible safeguards. They ensure the office exists long enough to complete its work but not so long that it becomes a permanent bureaucracy. The extension of Freedom of Information Act 1982 exemptions to special prosecutor documents is also appropriate, and we know that sensitive prosecution material must be protected while investigations are ongoing, and the opposition supports those provisions.

However, we also know that this legislation lacks important measures, and that is why we will move that amendment. A targeted, principled, integrity-focused amendment, as I say, was tabled by the member for Brighton earlier today. We will amend the Inquiries Act 2014 to remove public interest immunity as a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with the royal commission requirement. This includes repealing section 18(2)(c) and making consequential amendments. We know this reform is essential. In fact the Carroll government knows it is essential, but we will find out this week if anything has changed and whether they support our amendment. There is all the bluff and bluster about how this new government is not like the old, tired, corrupt administrations, but it appears to be the same horse with a different jockey. I think the outcome will be the same.

Public interest immunity has been used and misused to shield cabinet documents, contracting material and sensitive information from scrutiny. It has also been used to frustrate investigations. It has been used to delay accountability. We all know about Operation Richmond and various other things like that. It has been used to prevent royal commissions from accessing the very documents they need to uncover the truth. As I said earlier, recommendation 91 of the police informants royal commission made this clear. The government accepted that recommendation on principle; now it must accept it in practice. We will see what the reality of that turns out to be. Our amendment ensures that the new written information power cannot be resisted on the basis of public interest immunity and ensures that the special prosecutor can access the material that they need.

If we want Victoria to be transparent again and get out of this secrecy that we have had for the last 12 years, we need to do better and we need to look further. That is why I implore the government to look seriously at this amendment and seriously consider that this will help with transparency and will actually help the prosecutor to do their job better to make sure that the royal commission gets the results that we need, not just hiding people from what they do not want to see but actually getting to the bottom of everything so we can see what actually went wrong so we can ensure that it never happens again.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:39): I also rise to speak on this legislation, the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. Of course this is, as previous speakers have said, legislation that is complementary to the royal commission that has been established to investigate allegations of criminal and corrupt behaviour on government building projects. As we know, a royal commission conducts an inquiry. They investigate matters and then, following those investigations, they come up with recommendations and findings, but they do not actually then take the next step, which is acting on those findings and recommendations, particularly if they are of a law enforcement nature. So as contained in this bill, the office of the special prosecutor will be set up. They will be, if you like, the arm that connects the police and other law enforcement agencies with the commission. The expectation is that this would fast-track or act on findings in a real-time situation rather than just waiting for the royal commission to issue its final report.

Victorians have been shocked about the allegations of organised crime, extortion and corruption that have been made against various organisations and individuals that have been working on building sites on government projects. Of course none of us condone that sort of behaviour, and we all want to make

sure that we get to the bottom of it. Victorians need answers, and that is why the Premier, as soon as he became Premier, announced that there would be a royal commission into the Big Build projects.

I just have a little bit more about the actual office of the special prosecutor, and then I will go into a few other matters around the Big Build projects and also address some of the issues around the opposition's very cynical and sort of disingenuous political stunt in terms of the amendment that they are looking to make. But first, in terms of the legislation that we are debating today, as I said earlier, this would set up the office of the special prosecutor, who would then be working alongside the royal commission. In order to do this there had to be legislation, one, to actually set up this office, because it is a new thing; but also to outline some of the powers, the allocation of some resources to this office in order for it to become established and some of the parameters around which it must operate – for example, the ability for special prosecutor office and the royal commission to share information but also ensure that the sharing of that information means that the special prosecutor's office also has the same obligations when it comes to confidentiality and any other purposes or uses of that information.

Before I address the amendment that the opposition is talking about, I also just want to acknowledge the many very committed and highly skilled workers who have worked on our nation-building projects in Victoria, workers that really should be proud of and are proud of the work that they have done, the contributions they have made and the skills that they have put into these amazing projects, and you can look at the Metro Tunnel or the West Gate Tunnel and even the Thomastown area, where we have got the Keon Park level crossing removal. There were some incredibly difficult challenges there because of the substation that was nearby and all the overhead wires. They had to navigate all the utilities in order to come up with the design and build that level crossing and the new station. It really was incredibly skilled work, and it showed the commitment and the dedication of lots and lots of different people. To name a few, there were members of the ETU, members of the AMWU, members of the plumbers union and the AWU and also of course all the engineers, administrative staff and so on who go into making these great projects become a reality.

While we are talking about royal commissions and investigating wrongdoing, it is also really important to acknowledge the incredible work that has been done by workers on those jobs who have had nothing to do with the allegations that have been made and who also can feel proud that they have contributed so much to the state. These projects are not just about building things, they are also about making it easier for Victorians – easier to get around, which is the purpose of level crossing removals, and also allowing more trains and services so people can get around, whether by public transport or on the road.

Then we look at the building of the Northern Health mental health hospital, the huge expansion at the Northern Hospital and the soon-to-be-coming construction of the bigger and better emergency department. We have had the Epping Road duplication. All of these things not only make it quicker for people to get around and easier but they increase productivity because people are not on the road for so long getting from home to work. Also, it is better for trucks, which are getting places quicker and that is a huge increase in efficiency for them. There is nothing more important and vital for the whole of Australia and the world at this point than to have increases in productivity to ensure that we can have good, strong economic growth and ensure that people are in jobs.

These projects were not just about building nation-building infrastructure, they also provided training for many, many apprentices in the various trades. They have also given back to the community. I know many of the tennis clubs and the schools around these projects also benefited from them, whether it was some resources provided to them to do a garden or to have some concreting done for a driveway that was near the road. All of these things were benefits on top of the actual project that we all see.

The metal industry is quite strong still in the northern suburbs, and all the steel and metal manufacturing and structural steel that was being used had to be Australian or Victorian-made to go on these projects, keeping all of these small businesses in work. I will give a shout-out to Hi-Lux Technical Services, which is a fantastic business. He gets offended if I say 'small' because it is not small – dozens of people work there, lots of apprentices. He does a lot of the traffic signalling and the

flashing electronic signs that we see on our roads telling us what speed we have to go and providing warnings. I hope they continue to do work for the Department of Transport and Planning.

But just quickly – I got too carried away with all the fantastic building projects in the electorate of Thomastown – in terms of the amendment that the opposition want to make, it really is just smoke and mirrors because when we are talking about public interest immunity, this is pretty standard. The provision in this legislation is pretty stock standard. It all comes down to public interest, whether it is in the public interest to provide documents or not provide documents. That is a very standard part of legislation. And to say that that ought to be changed just to make a political statement or to try and somehow make out that the government is trying to do something wrong or underhanded is just a complete falsehood.

We should ignore this sort of trivialisation of legislation like this, which is so important to get to the bottom of wrongdoing and illegal activity. We cannot really be sidetracked or going down rabbit holes that the opposition is trying to put up when in fact what this legislation covers is all about the public interest. These are very standard benchmarks and requirements and the legislation really needs to be passed as soon as we can so that we can get on with business and really find out what has been going on. I have to just say, in terms of the projects in Thomastown, they have always been on budget and they have also been delivered on time.

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (15:48): The establishment of a special prosecutor to assist the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria is important because people involved in corrupting \$15 billion of taxpayer money should go to jail. There should be an office that can work independently with the commission, receive material from it and ensure relevant information can be provided to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulators and other bodies capable of taking further action. This bill provides that the special prosecutor is not subject to any direction of Premier Carroll or any other ministers in the performance of their functions. It establishes information-sharing arrangements, confidentiality obligations and an offence for unauthorised disclosure.

But the title the government has chosen disguises an extraordinary limitation of Labor's bill. It establishes an office called the special prosecutor, but the bill confers no prosecutorial powers on that office. It does not confer any power to commence or conduct criminal prosecution. Instead, proposed section 52K(2) gives the special prosecutor the function of working with the commission to provide relevant information to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulators and other bodies so that entities can consider whether to take action. Labor is asking this Parliament to create a special prosecutor without giving the special prosecutor the power to prosecute. Even the government's own announcement concedes that the office will only be equipped with additional powers next year. The government is legislating the title now but promising action later. Victorians were promised an office that would ensure wrongdoing uncovered by the royal commission is acted on, but what this bill actually creates today is an administrative information-sharing mechanism and an office carrying a prosecutorial title.

But perhaps the most important issue in this debate is what the bill leaves untouched. Clause 4 creates new powers for a royal commission to compel a person by written notice to provide written information or a written statement. The government says in the very purpose of the bill that this is strengthening a royal commission's power to require information. However, section 18 of the Inquiries Act 2014 still provides that public interest immunity can be a reasonable excuse for refusing to comply with a royal commission notice. Public interest according to whom? The same politicians subject to a potential investigation?

The government is creating a new information-gathering power that cannot prosecute while leaving in place a statutory barrier that a Victorian royal commission told it to remove almost six years ago, one that Labor has promised to remove but never has. The issue was examined exhaustively by the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants. Its final report records that Victoria Police and other law enforcement agencies made thousands of public interest immunity claims. The

commission concluded that the operation of the PII under the Inquiries Act seriously hindered its work and had a detrimental impact on its ability to inquire into matters that were relevant to its terms of reference. The commission therefore made recommendation 91, and I suggest that members opposite reread it. It recommended that the Victorian government amend the Inquiries Act within 18 months to remove the ability to refuse to provide information to a royal commission on the basis of public interest immunity. That time expired on 31 May 2022. The Labor government knew exactly what was required. It said it was on track to introduce amendments into the Parliament by that time, being 31 May 2022, but unsurprisingly it missed its own deadline. By the end of 2022 the government was still saying it would continue to pursue amendments to the Inquiries Act. Those amendments, again, did not come. Rather than implement recommendation 91 through the legislation the commission expressly called for, the government moved towards whole-of-government administrative guidance on public interest immunity claims.

Bureaucratic guidance cannot repeal a section of the legislation, it cannot remove a statutory reasonable excuse and it cannot deliver the legislative reform that the royal commission recommended and the Labor government itself said it was on track to introduce. That failure matters more than ever because Victoria has another royal commission, and this bill's stated purpose includes strengthening information-gathering powers. It is not enough to create an independent special prosecutor which, again, cannot prosecute if the commission can still be denied material by reliance on a statutory public interest immunity excuse. Independence after evidence is obtained is valuable, but the question today is whether that evidence can be obtained at all. That is why the coalition is moving its amendment. Where clause 4 expands the royal commission's powers to compel information, we seek to remove public interest immunity as an excuse for refusing or failing to comply with a royal commission requirement, including by repealing section 18(2)(c) and making the necessary consequential changes.

A royal commission cannot investigate what it cannot see. It cannot uncover what is being wilfully hidden behind Crown privilege. Nobody is suggesting that sensitive information should be simply thrown into the public domain. That is not what recommendation 91 required, and it is not what our amendment seeks to do. The recommendation and our amendment are directed at removing public interest immunity as a basis for refusing to give information, answer a question or produce a document to a royal commission. Crown privilege should not be allowed to become a brick wall between a royal commission and the evidence it has been established to examine. That is particularly important in the context of the construction royal commission, where the conduct and decisions of this Labor government itself will be under scrutiny. If the inquiry reaches briefings, communications or decisions that are politically damaging, the Labor government should not be able to seek refuge behind a statutory public interest immunity claim to keep relevant material from the commission. The whole purpose of the royal commission is to follow the evidence wherever it may lead, including to ministers, departments, agencies and cabinet itself. By leaving section 18(2)(c) untouched, the Labor government is preserving a mechanism that could be used to frustrate any scrutiny of it.

After failing for years to implement recommendation 91, it is entirely reasonable to ask why it still wants that protection available now. I think everyone in this house and in the community knows why: the government cannot credibly establish a royal commission at the eleventh hour, bring forward legislation to strengthen its coercive powers, create a special prosecutor who cannot prosecute, act on the information it uncovers and at the same time preserve a mechanism capable of preventing the commission from obtaining the required evidence in the first place.

The amendment is years overdue. Recommendation 91 was made in 2020; the Premier was at the cabinet table. Perhaps he does not recall, and given the public interest immunity provisions that they are fighting for we may never know. Recommendation 91's implementation deadline expired in 2022. The Labor government publicly said it was on track to legislate but then missed its own deadline. Now, in 2026, it brings a bill expressly designed to strengthen the royal commission's information-gathering powers but leaves section 18(2)(c) untouched. The coalition supports a special prosecutor that is genuinely capable of assisting the construction royal commission. We support the flow of relevant

information from the commission to enforcement and integrity agencies. We support proper confidentiality protections and genuine operational independence, but those mechanisms only have value if they can get to the evidence in the first place.

Labor have had nearly six years to implement recommendation 91, and it has been more than four years since the deadline set by the commission and that they agreed to themselves. It should not take an opposition amendment six years later to finish the work that this Labor government told Victorians it would do and was on track to do in 2022. If the Labor government is serious about a royal commission with real powers, it should support our amendment, remove the statutory public interest immunity barrier, give the commission access to the materials it needs and allow the inquiry to follow the evidence without fear or favour. That is the reform the royal commission recommended but is a reform Labor has failed to deliver. It is a mechanism that they now want to preserve so this corrupt Labor government can use its powers to cover up its own conduct. This Parliament should now finish the job, abolish the public interest immunity excuse and allow the commission to do the work the Victorian community expects us to do. To do otherwise would be an utter disgrace, but we all know integrity remains optional under this Premier and this Labor government.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (15:57): I rise today, with the couple of minutes that I think I have before the dazzling matter of public importance from the member for Gippsland South, to support the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026 that is before the house. The bill is a part of the Carroll government's commitment to integrity and commitment to act on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major construction projects in Victoria as part of the Big Build. We are acting to clean up our major construction sector and make it very clear that integrity is non-negotiable. Calling a royal commission was the Premier's first act when he came into office, and Victorians deserve to know the answers to how organised crime has made its way onto building sites and the guarantee that it will not happen again. Calling for that royal commission will do that. Through its broad and expansive terms of reference, the commission will go deep to identify the nature and extent of corruption and criminal conduct, preventing future serious misconduct in the major construction sector.

This bill introduces amendments to the Inquiries Act 2014 to establish the office of the special prosecutor to work in conjunction with the construction royal commission. The bill itself will provide important new resources and powers to the royal commission and will create that office of the special prosecutor to work alongside the commission and refer individuals to authorities for prosecution or for regulatory action. It will also provide the commission with new powers to compel the production of information as well as witness statements – including documents but not just documents – and attendance to give evidence at hearings. I think, on that, I may leave it there and come back a bit later.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Road maintenance

The SPEAKER (16:01): This is the last matter of public importance of the 60th Parliament; there will be a grievance debate next sitting week. This is my last MPI. I have accepted a statement from the member for Gippsland South proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house notes the poor condition of Victorian roads and the impact on Victorian motorists of damage to their vehicles, reduced freight efficiency and diminished productivity and calls for a return to a genuine preventative maintenance program to arrest the decline of one of the state's biggest assets.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:02): Thank you, Speaker, for introducing us on your last MPI. There will be some others that are coming here for their last MPI too. I am pretty confident I will be back here. One of the reasons that I will be back here and many on that side will not be is the appalling state of our roads under this Labor government, and they all know it. They are all sitting there smiling at the moment, but have a look at them in question time. In question time they were

down in the dumps. They were absolutely very, very sad because of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report tabled today, *Maintaining State Roads*. It is a page-turner. I hope they have all had a read of it because they should understand, they should know about and they should be apologising to their electorates for just what an appalling job this government has done when it comes to our roads. Those opposite know it because they are hearing it from their constituents every day, I am sure, just as we are here in the opposition. Our roads are in crisis; there is no doubt about that.

The Auditor-General has come out with a report that most Victorians will say is not a surprise, but they will be surprised by some of the statistics. With the latest figures available, 2024, the Auditor-General has highlighted that now 48 per cent of the road network is in poor or very poor condition. Those opposite have gone quiet on that. They do not want to caterwaul, they do not want to throw something at the opposition now, because they know and they are embarrassed about how poorly they have performed under this government when it comes to the roads. That 48 per cent of the network being in poor or very poor condition – it has not got better, it has got worse. It was 39 per cent in 2021. Under this government it has got worse; the road performance has got worse. It is interesting to note too that there is a drive in this state at the moment from a certain sector to pretend that the government is not the government, to pretend that in fact what has been happening for the last couple of years has been done by something else. Indeed I would like to read to the house a line from a political document that has been circulating a little bit recently. It begins:

Victorians want change. They want problems fixed. They want a fair go at work and in their community. So do I ...

says this intro. I said to the member for Kew, 'Leader of the Opposition, are these your words?' and she said, 'No, I didn't say that.' I looked at it again and I thought, 'No, they're not my words.' And I discovered that the person who wants change is the Premier. The Premier of the state is the person saying he wants change – the bloke who has been here for the last 12 years. The bloke who has been here for the last 12 years on the government benches, who has been the Premier for the last month, who was the Deputy Premier for the last three years, who has been a minister since I think 2017 or 2019, says he wants change because things are no good. Well, why are they no good? They are no good because of the Labor government.

I will go a step further on this particular MPI when it comes to roads. I mentioned that 39 per cent of the roads were in poor or very poor condition in 2021. Does anyone remember who the roads minister was in 2021? Does anyone remember?

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Does the member for Macedon remember? The member for Macedon has got a bit to say. Could she tell me who the minister for roads was in 2021?

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, through the Chair. You do not respond to interjections.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am asking a question, Speaker. I think I am entitled to ask the member for Macedon. Speaker, I know you know who the minister for roads was in 2021. It was the current Premier. At that point, 39 per cent of roads were in poor or very poor condition. What has happened since that bloke told us they were going to fix regional roads in particular? It has gotten worse. We now have 48 per cent of roads across the state – not just in rural and regional Victoria but right across the state – in poor or very poor condition. That is an indictment of the Premier of this state. It is an indictment of the member for Bendigo East. I saw the member for Williamstown today grinning like a Cheshire cat before question time began because she knew she did not have to cop the questions on roads. We will let the member Kalkallo off because she only had the job for two or three months – very happy to give that job up. We have had three ministers for roads in four months, and the poor old member for Box Hill has now picked up the gig. Apparently he is a civil engineer. He must be appalled at what he has picked up, because he has got such a bad job.

We heard a number of other things from the Auditor-General today. We heard that the department has advised the government that funding is insufficient to maintain or improve the condition of state roads. Funding is insufficient – that is not a great surprise. But there are a number of things that the Auditor-General said. The gap between the number of defects recorded and the number of defects repaired more than doubled between January 2025 and June 2026. In 18 months what was fixed versus what was recorded doubled the other way around – half of what was recorded actually got fixed. It highlights just how badly things are going. And we have got a Premier that has come in and said – what has he said? Integrity is not negotiable.

A member: No. It is no longer optional.

Danny O'BRIEN: Integrity is no longer optional, because it was completely optional for the previous 12 years. That is what we understand that to mean. Integrity is supposedly no longer optional, but the Auditor-General has found that the department's performance statements that it runs in the budget that tackle roughness, rutting and cracking – now, they are important, but the Auditor-General highlighted today that the department has more meaningful information, such as data on the remaining useful life of roads, pavement condition, defect growth and repairs and the maintenance backlog, which would 'improve transparency if made accessible to the public.' But this government, this Premier, who says integrity is no longer optional, has not provided any of that data. Indeed I can go further on the issue of defect growth because I have had an FOI in with the government for something like six months trying to get access to the number of defects that have been recorded by the government. And have I got the answer to that? No, I have not. We have had to go to the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, OVIC, and we still have not got an answer on that.

We have got the Auditor-General saying today that maintenance needs are accumulating faster than they are being addressed. That sums it up: the maintenance issues are accumulating faster than they are being addressed. All of this ties in together because, again, the Auditor-General has highlighted that the department asked for more money and the government has not given it. The Auditor goes on further:

The department has advised the government that funding levels have not been sufficient to maintain and improve the network, and that maintenance is increasingly focused on reactive and safety-critical repairs rather than preventative works.

Now there is that work, and I hear the Leader of the Opposition saying, 'Mmm', because she is sick of the Leader of the Nationals talking about preventative maintenance, because that is exactly what we are committed to doing. The Liberals and Nationals have committed \$5 billion to address the state of our roads over four years. That is a 25 per cent increase on what is currently being spent. If you look at the average over the past four years, it is actually a \$450 million a year increase, and we know that that is what is needed. But it is not about filling potholes. I am indebted to the member for South-West Coast on this issue, who spoke to me about it as we were finalising our policy. She said, 'Don't just talk about filling potholes. People are bloody sick of the government filling potholes' – because what happens? They blow out again.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Exactly, member for Lowan. Just like the budget, they blow out again, and within a couple of weeks after a drop of rain or a few trucks going over, the potholes are back again. So we are not committed to filling potholes, we are committed to eliminating potholes. On that I just want to touch on the government's commitment of a few weeks ago, when the government said that they are going to eliminate 500,000 potholes by January. They have never done more than 200,000 in a year, and they are expecting Victorians to believe that they are going to do half a million in the next six months.

Jess Wilson interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: The Leader of the Opposition is right: it is an election. They think, 'We can just promise whatever we like.' Five hundred thousand potholes fixed by this government is not to be believed. On the point raised by the Leader of the Opposition just now about it being an election, I would like to highlight another thing that the Auditor-General found today – on page 21 of the Auditor-General's report. I am giving details for those opposite because I am pretty sure none of them will have actually read this; they have probably buried it deep down in their psyche somewhere and do not ever want to talk about it again. The Auditor-General has got something that we have not been able to find – a little bit like taxes that no-one knew about, the much-vaunted tax on public transport that no-one knew about and that apparently even the Premier did not know about, despite being the minister, being in cabinet and being on the budget review committee. This is yet another thing where the Auditor-General has got information that the Parliament and the people of Victoria are not privy to, and that is what the funding for roads maintenance in the coming years is going to be. He has highlighted on page 21 that what has been received in output funding and asset funding for 2026 is \$336 million in output funding and an additional \$150 million in asset funding. So you wonder what it will be for 2027–28. It would have to be more, wouldn't you think? You would think it would have to be more.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: But it is actually not, member for Gippsland East. It is not. In fact it is –

The SPEAKER: Member for Gippsland East! Members who are not in their allocated seats will not interject, and they will be removed from the chamber.

Danny O'BRIEN: I appreciate your assistance, Speaker, because I was just getting to the crescendo of an important point: a \$260 million cut next year. The government is saying, 'We're going to spend all this money. We're going to fix 500,000 potholes before the election, basically. And then if we get re-elected, we're going to cut the road maintenance budget again. We are going to cut it again.' That is what this Labor government has said, and they have been caught out for the second time in the last couple of weeks by the Auditor-General, and it is a credit to him and his team that they are actually finding some of this information that is not available to the Victorian public. Because people will go to the election and there might be some few who believe – I doubt there would be many, because no-one actually believes this government when it comes to roads, but you never know; there might be someone who has just arrived here who says, 'Hey, the government's going to spend \$352 million and remove 500,000 potholes in six months. That's good. I like the sound of that, because the roads are pretty crap. They're pretty bad. Someone must've done a really bad job on these roads.'

We will tell this person who has just arrived in the state that, yes, the people that did a really bad job on these roads are the people who are now trying to convince you that they are someone else, trying to convince you that they are a different team and that the Premier is not Daniel Andrews, he is not Jacinta Allan – he is not even Ben Carroll. He is the Leader of the Opposition, it seems, because he is not responsible for anything that has gone on in the last 12 years, including the state of our roads. This is from a bloke who not only was the Deputy Premier for the last three years but actually had a stint of about 2½ years as the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, during which he cut nearly \$200 million from the roads maintenance budget. Do not believe it from me – I heard the Leader of the House during question time say, 'Lies. No facts, no facts' – once again, the Auditor-General, not me, a \$200 million reduction. There it is, a \$200 million reduction. I will not use a prop, though, Speaker. It was a \$200 million reduction when the now Premier was the minister for roads. That is why we have got this report today that highlights that 48 per cent of our roads in this state are now classed as poor or very poor, and that is an indictment of this Labor government.

The Nationals and Liberals have got a plan. We have got a \$5 billion plan to get back to doing the preventative maintenance, to make sure that we stop the potholes from forming in the first place. It is dull, it is boring, it is grading roadsides, it is cleaning out table drains, but it is the basics, and it is the

basics of what a government should be doing for this state – not a government that wasted \$15 billion on corruption on the Big Build. A government that we will lead will actually do the basics and fix our roads, unlike this lot, which has led to them being poor or very poor.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (16:17): I love the fact that I am following the member for Gippsland South. It has been one of the pleasures of the 60th Parliament for me to sit as the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee chair and listen to the member for Gippsland South every year – well, kind of twice a year. He does it twice a year; he talks about roads. All of his questions are about roads. We get muddled up and befuddled about budget numbers and how it is calculated time and time again, to the point where in the end he gets nothing on the minister that he has been seeking. It is lovely to follow him on the last MPI, and we are doing it on roads here in Victoria.

The member for Gippsland South made just a slight error. I do not want to be someone to just go on and correct the record, but he talked about the action that a Liberal–National coalition government will take. But the reality of that is it will not be a Liberal–National coalition that might make government this November, it will be a One Nation–Liberal coalition. I have to say it would be even funnier if we saw the member for Kew join the One Nation candidate for – what is he running in? – Pakenham jump into his orange ute to go out and check out some potholes. We know she loves going out there, standing roadside, pointing at different things on the road. I would love to see her doing it next to the orange ute. If he is sitting next to her in Parliament when we return in December – whenever it is – it will give me a great deal of pleasure to know that she will be sitting next to him there in that orange ute.

This matter on this paper talks about roads and road maintenance, but the truth of the matter is that this matter is not just about roads, it is about who Victorians can rely on to pay for them. I wonder how the member for Gippsland South can square away increasing spending on road maintenance with their policy to strip \$40 billion from the state budget. Forty billion dollars is not an insignificant amount of money; it is an extraordinary amount of money. Those opposite have failed at every turn to talk about where and what they will cut as part of that \$40 billion.

The member for Gippsland South also talked about a little page-turner that was released today. There is also another little page-turner, and I must admit this is the stuff that requires highlighters to highlight the horror that is written in this report. The Australia Institute has released a report, *Victorian Opposition Fiscal Strategy: An Assessment*, and what a damning assessment it is. I am going to read out from the first page here because it is absolutely unbelievable. It says here:

This paper assesses the Victorian Opposition's fiscal strategy, which aims for a surplus by 2032 ... It finds the centrepiece measure – \$22 billion in savings from a public sector “back office” hiring freeze – unachievable. Such savings would require elimination of around 31,700 jobs ...

That is extraordinary – over 31,000 jobs. My question to the opposition will be: who are you expecting to do all of this work? Who are you expecting to do all of this road maintenance if you are about to sack over 31,000 public servants? That is extraordinary. I have a little bit of a laugh about the member for Kew and the One Nation candidate for Pakenham jumping in his orange ute to go and fill in potholes; that may be in the end how she goes and gets things done. Over 31,000 Victorians having their jobs completely ripped away from them is just extraordinary. It goes on to say that this could push up unemployment towards 5.4 per cent, which is just mind-boggling. The member for Gippsland South – I think it was in the *Age* today – refused to commit to what the department was requesting, which is the \$3 billion, I think it was, a year in funding that it needs to fix up and maintain roads. He refused to commit to that. He did not say that in his contribution just now, but he would not commit to that; he cannot commit to that.

When we talk about what Labor is doing to address the potholes and road maintenance here in this state, it is extraordinary. We know on this side of the house there is a positive story to tell, and there has been work happening over the past four years. I hear in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee about the work that is happening and that we are undertaking in relation to road maintenance. The Carroll Labor government has just announced a further \$352 million to be spent on

doubling the amount of potholes we are removing; that is taking them from 250,000 to over 500,000 this year. That is work that is not happening tomorrow; that is work that is happening right now. It is immediate – not months from now, not in the distant future but right now, and it needs to happen right now. That is more than double the amount of potholes that those opposite were saying that they could remove in a given year; in fact that is more than double in reality, because they will not be able to deliver that if they cut funding here. They will cut it here, there and everywhere. That is their \$40 billion in cuts.

We are not stopping there with increased road maintenance funding. We have announced that a re-elected Carroll Labor government in November will develop a plan to bring state road maintenance programs back in house. That is essentially what we need to do. We will make it easier for Victorians to report potholes and see what repairs we are making and when, and I think it is really important that Victorians understand that work is being done to fix potholes and that they are able to see it, they are able to go ahead and identify it and report it and we are able to go on and fix it. We will make everyone accountable, and that is really important. We will make everyone accountable, whether it is us or councils, including through compensation, and we will use local knowledge and let local teams prioritise local repairs. All of these things will lead to more efficient repairs and safer roads for everyone. That is what Victorians want, and we will do all of that whilst continuing to invest in the infrastructure projects that our communities need.

As a westie I was so happy to see that a number of those road projects that we have just announced and we have committed to delivering if re-elected in November, I am very proud to say, are in Melbourne's west. I know the member for Point Cook is over the moon to tell folks that we will be continuing to improve Point Cook Road, with \$195 million to duplicate it from Central Avenue to Dunnings Road after we finish works on the Central Avenue intersection. That is something his community and even my community, as a neighbour of his, have been wanting for a very long time, and our government has a plan to do it. It is also something that a lot of folks in my community will benefit from, because they drive into Point Cook from this road.

My very good friend – and a new dad – the member for Werribee is really happy to tell his community about how we will continue to make progress on Ballan Road in his electorate. Ballan Road has been a constant bugbear of his constituents, of my constituents, and we are going to commit \$83 million to upgrade the intersection of Ballan Road and Bolton Road, building on the works to remove the roundabout there and fully duplicate that section of Ballan and Bolton roads. His community is over the moon about that. I remember being out in Werribee with the member during his by-election – gosh, it feels like a long time ago, he has been working so hard – last year, and this was something that folks raised a lot with us. Well, the member for Werribee has been listening and so has our government, and we have got a plan for the next step.

I also saw yesterday, from my friend – I have got lots of them in Wyndham – the member for Tarneit, that we have committed to a \$90 million upgrade of the Hogans Road and Derrimut Road intersection in Hoppers Crossing. Being the previous member for Tarneit, I know just what an annoying intersection this has been for locals for a very long time. So whether it is locals in Hoppers Crossing, whether it is people in Williams Landing and in Truganina, everyone knows this intersection, and they have wanted it upgraded for a very, very long time – me included. So this is tremendous news. My colleagues in Brimbank and Melton, I know, are absolutely over the moon with the \$170 million committed to upgrading Taylors Road, which is another horrendous road. That has been a big priority for Brimbank City Council, and it is one that our government has now committed to.

None of these roads that we have announced are in my patch of Laverton, but the Laverton people are out and about, and they are driving on these roads each and every single day. And I mention them because I know that road upgrades do not just benefit the people who live in this electorate or that electorate, they benefit everyone – including me – who drives there almost on a weekly basis. Folks in Truganina drive on these roads to get to work, to go shopping or to visit friends and family. Folks in Sunshine and Albion, Ardeer and Braybrook drive on Taylors Road. Folks in Laverton drive on

Point Cook Road. These are welcome investments and ones that my colleagues have long been advocating for.

There is more. I am just waiting to get to the big one, which I know every westie –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I know. I have done Point Cook, member for Point Cook. You were not here. I said you were over the moon. But there is more. The big mighty one that we announced was the Western Freeway. How many of us drive on the Western Freeway? This was announced on the weekend: an additional \$550 million to upgrade the Western Freeway between Melton and Caroline Springs, including the Hopkins Road interchange, which will be a big one for folks in Truganina and Tarnait who travel to Melton and back. And do you know what else is interesting about these projects? They are fully costed and they are fully funded. We have found the money for this. This funding is coming from more than \$2 billion in descopeing from the Suburban Rail Loop works, which is, I think, a really good thing.

Let us talk about the fiscal strategy of those opposite, because if they are intending to do all this work on roads, they need to be able to pay for it. But all we know from them is their \$40 billion in cuts. I have just talked about the Australia Institute telling us they are going to chop over 31,000 jobs. I cannot wait to get out on the doors this Friday and this weekend and tell folks that, because I have doorknocked a lot of people who have been public servants, and the first thing they raise with me is the fear of losing their job. They will lose their job under a Liberal–One Nation coalition government. This report confirms it. These people are more than just back office staff, by the way, and the 31,700 jobs are more than half the size of the Victorian public service, and it does not include external public entities. What we know is that no doubt that would include cuts to the Department of Transport and Planning, cuts to staff that they will need to deliver and carry out road upgrades and maintenance. There is no pledge from those opposite not to cut those jobs.

If we go ahead and we dissect these numbers a bit more, that is at least 1500 workers across regional Victoria. As I continue to crunch the numbers – I know the member for Gippsland South and Gippsland East have left, but that is 230 workers in their patch. I wonder what the members for Gippsland South and Gippsland East think about that, that jobs are being slashed in their regions. Will slashing over 31,000 jobs make our roads in the regions safer? Will they? No, I do not think so. These cuts would mean that these road projects I have just mentioned for Melbourne's west – this is what westies need to know – will not see the light of day. They will never, ever happen under a Liberal–One Nation government. They will not have the staff and they will not have the funding. They will never, ever be done. But let us just be clear: these cuts are not limited to transport and roads, are they? We know that.

I will pivot to energy because just today I read in a separate report that the opposition's plan to cancel renewable energy projects in regional Victoria, like the VNI project and Western Renewables Link, would see Victorians pay at least \$100 more for electricity a year. Victoria currently has the lowest wholesale electricity costs in the country because of the work that we have done in this space. This has not happened by accident. This is 12 years of hard, continuous work that means we have the lowest wholesale electricity costs in the country. They plan for cuts to the energy transition, including gutting the State Electricity Commission and stifling investments in renewables, and this will see wholesale prices increase by 40 per cent.

This is a typical MPI topic from the member for Gippsland South, but I think what the member for Gippsland South has not acknowledged is how they will pay for it and who will do the work. The report that has been released today emphatically points out that the fiscal strategy of the opposition is an absolute failure; it is a furphy. It is something that is going to hurt working people, hurt working Victorians and slash jobs, including slashing jobs in the regions, driving up unemployment towards

5.4 per cent, which is just what people will get if a One Nation–Liberal coalition is elected this November.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (16:32): Here is a newsflash: the Auditor-General determined today through their report that our roads are in a very crappy condition. I think ‘very poor’ was the term that he used, but I know people in my electorate who would use much stronger language than that and would absolutely know this. It is no surprise whatsoever to see now that 48 per cent of our roads – nearly half – are in poor or very poor condition. The Auditor-General does these reports every now and again, every eight or so years, and one of the things that they have referenced at the front of the report is the issues with having roads in poor condition: increasing travel times, the cost of operating a vehicle and the risk of accidents. We see this – all of us see this, government members see this. Government members drive over these pothole-ridden surfaces. I know – I was heading to Macedon not so long ago, driving up the Calder. I cannot believe that the former Premier was ignoring the issues on the Calder – the litter was one thing, but the potholes were extraordinary – and did nothing about it. She turned a blind eye as she was chauffeur-driven up the Calder Highway. But there is an impact on people. By delaying maintenance or diverting funding, the problem gets worse. The longer you leave it, the worse it gets.

Not so long ago I was in Kinglake. I was on the Healesville-to-Whittlesea road, and there was a series of about seven or eight little potholes. If they are not attended to – and they were not – they will grow and grow and grow. We get huge potholes and craters, and people complain to me all of the time. It has an impact on people because they do get punctures, and they do need to go and get them fixed. It costs a lot of money, and in a cost-of-living crisis, which we are in now, people do not have spare cash to get a new tyre or fix a rim every two or three months when they hit a pothole. On these roads, in these conditions, it is difficult to see at some points – at dusk, at night, in the wet and in forested areas, like in my electorate. As you drive around corners at dusk or as it gets dark, you cannot actually see the potholes. If there is water on the road, you do not always know that there is a 60-centimetre-deep crater that your car may be about to hit.

Victoria has a growing population, and with that growing population come more cars on the road. People are out and about a lot more, and that does more damage to our roads. There is more traffic on the roads, more cars and more freight. We have caravans and we have horse floats. All of these things are on the roads. And the trucks, the more and more they drive over those little potholes, they become bigger and bigger. It is not just the Auditor-General talking about the roads; it is everybody – everywhere I go, every event I attend. Every day in the office we have emails, comments on Facebook or somebody ringing the office to complain about the roads. It is not just in my electorate. I know my colleagues have these issues all of the time, and I know government members have this all of the time. ABC radio and ABC TV cover the pothole situations. It is not just talkback on AM at all. FM stations cover this as well. People out there everywhere are talking about issues with our roads. They are telling me about the potholes, the crumbling surfaces and shoulders – no shoulders – and the wire rope barriers that have got trees 1 metre wide and 1½ metres high growing out of the middle of the road. Tell me that is not going to be a problem. I have never seen anything from the government to say what they are going to do about this. There are white lines that are faded – the white lines on the Black Spur, for example, which is a pretty testy road at the best of times – and white lines to the side covered with leaves, litter and debris. In fact it was the police who alerted me to that because people have to travel closer to the middle of the road because they cannot see where it falls away. There are broken or missing cat’s eyes. This is what people tell me all the time.

We knew this and, guess what, it turns out the Auditor-General found the same thing. To think now that half the network – 48 per cent of the network – is in poor condition or very poor condition. These are the 2024 figures, up from 39 per cent in 2021. In 2021 39 per cent of the roads were rated as poor or very poor, and now it is 48 per cent. Well, no-one in my electorate will be even remotely surprised to hear that. The roads in very poor condition for their remaining useful life jumped from 26 per cent in 2021 to 37 per cent. These are enormous jumps. The Victorian Auditor-General’s Office report was

tabled today. This is not something that we are making up; this is something that the Auditor-General can hold his hand on his heart about. We can all hold our hands on our hearts, as can members of the government and as should members of the government. Eighty-two per cent of state roads are in regional Victoria – makes sense – and the worst performing state region is Loddon Mallee, but Hume is not far behind. In fact in Hume we have got nearly 48 per cent that are rated very poor or poor – 48 per cent. In Loddon Mallee it was 54 per cent. These are extraordinary numbers.

The government are now saying that they have been listening – seriously. The government have been in office for such a long time and have let this get out of hand. They have not managed the road maintenance at all. The backlog is blowing out. The gap between defects identified and defects fixed has more than doubled between January 2025 and June 2026 – that is on page 8. The asset renewal ratio basically says that if you have a ratio of one, that indicates that the investment matches the depreciation and is enough to preserve the asset's current condition. That is if it is one. Well, it is not one, it is 0.16. That is such a staggeringly low number. It is extraordinary that the roads have been left to get into this condition. I know that is the case in my electorate – it does not matter where you go, if you are in Hoddles Creek or Healesville, Homewood, Flowerdale down to Hurstbridge, St Andrews to Hurstbridge or to Kangaroo Ground, Boorolite or Bonnie Doon. And I will tell you what, a young person from Boorolite, which is just out of Mansfield, was talking to me earlier today to say the age of one of their trucks at the brigade is 40 years old. I cannot imagine that driving that 40-year-old truck on those pothole-ridden roads around Mansfield will do the truck any good. It is pretty remarkable that they are having to drive vehicles like that already.

One of the things I will pick up is something that the member for Laverton mentioned before. I heard a lovely quote: 'This hasn't happened by accident' and '12 years of continuous work'. She was trying to spin something to say it was good. Well, nor has the road condition happened by accident. It is 12 years of continuous neglect, and that is not good enough. People in country Victoria need good roads. People from the city are visiting our regions – more and more people are getting out into the regions to see all of the wonderful things that we have to offer in the Mansfield and Murrindindi areas and into the Yarra Ranges or even parts of Nillumbik. As they get further out, they realise our roads are in a poor state.

The coalition is fair dinkum about tackling these roads. The Liberals and the Nationals have a very clear plan for managing the state-owned road assets. Not only that, we are prepared, as we were the last time we were in government, to help out the smaller councils in the country areas with our country roads and bridges program, which is \$1.5 million per council per year for that four-year term, so that they too can work on the smaller roads and the bridges that pretty well break their budget. I know a lot cannot get done because they have been underfunded. The government has not looked after some of the small councils anywhere near enough, and the situation is pretty dire. We have this plan about removing potholes, getting asset maintenance back on track and making life better not just for country Victorians but also for those in the city who visit our areas. I know those in the city have potholes in their roads because I have driven on them coming to Parliament.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:42): I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to make a contribution on this matter of public importance. Just listening to the previous member's reflections and appreciation for the Auditor-General, it is good to know that the member appreciates the work of the Auditor-General. It is very important. There was a Premier that was pretty determined to sack the Auditor-General at one point in time; I am not quite sure which side of the house they were from. But let me just say that this government, at each and every opportunity, remains committed to supporting Victorians, and I have the opportunity this afternoon to correct the record and make some reflections on this government's support for Victorians and local communities right across the state. For more than 12 years that significant and sustained investment in transport, in health and in education has been making for a better and fairer state, as opposed to the doom and gloom and fear and division that we see from the characters on the other side.

What we have seen in recent times are the announcements from the Premier and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, which I do want to cover, some of the significant and important announcements that have been made. There is more than \$352 million to double the number of potholes to be fixed from 250,000 to more than 500,000; the bringing of the state maintenance program into government, something that is very important and has recently been announced; and, as others have done, and I think the member for Laverton did this really well, canvassing all of those investments that the government has made to provide for projects that are going to make a difference to local communities, particularly in growth areas and particularly within regional Victoria, which I know is a deep passion of yours, Speaker. There is more than \$550 million for the Western Freeway upgrade, and if we are re-elected, more projects around Point Cook Road, Taylors Road, Somerton Road, Hallam Road and all of the work that is done through the north and the west and in Geelong as well. These are serious and significant projects, and we remain committed to delivering them.

What you can do is focus on those things, the problems that are before us and the investments that we need to make. Or you can do what those opposite do, which is come in here and play cheap political games. That does not achieve much at all. The announcements that have been made will make a genuine and tangible difference on the ground, certainly in my electorate, which is also a growth corridor. As you know, that significant project of the duplication of Sunbury Road from Bulla-Diggers Rest Road all the way through to Powlett Street has made a genuine and sustained difference to my local community, and it is a project that I am really, really pleased that we have been able to deliver. In the period between 2010 and 2014 there were no local road projects delivered. I do not think that will come as a surprise to anyone on this side of the house.

The other point I did want to make is that whilst this focus from our government remains on actual projects, on real delivery and on plans for supporting population growth, those opposite have been drafting up what are savage plans to strip more than \$40 billion from our schools, our hospitals, our public services and our public service. You might think that as a member on this side of the house I might be putting a little bit of mayo on this and I might be sort of pumping this up. I would say: do not take it from me. I would refer to the independent report –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Josh BULL: Indeed. As I said before, you are now happy with the work of the Auditor-General, but there is also another report that I want to refer to, if I could, from the Australia Institute. This report, which has been out in the public domain today, talks about what will occur if these \$40 billion of cuts are implemented. This is a really serious matter, and what we have seen time and time again is a real concern from local communities. I heard the member for Laverton speak about this in relation to some of her doorknocking: the significant and important damage that this back office hiring freeze would cause. We are talking somewhere in the order of more than 31,000 jobs, pushing the unemployment rate to more than 5.4 per cent.

Compare and contrast that to that list of just roads projects that have recently been announced but most importantly the government's plan for economic growth – growing the economy, stabilising debt, growing the economy as a proportion of gross state product and making a financial plan that keeps people employed and delivering so many of those services that growing populations need as we evolve through what is a really complex time for the state and the nation. The choice could not be clearer. Victorians are going to go to the November election with the choice that looks at the fear and division of a coalition Liberal–One Nation circus or this side of the house, which is focused on schools and roads and hospitals and services. This is the opportunity that we bring to the table.

I know that some of the members are still pretty excited about the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, and I will go back to my point earlier that it certainly was not any Premier on this side of the house that wanted to, at one point in our Victorian history, get rid of the Auditor-General – sack the Auditor-General.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Josh BULL: That is very complimentary. I was born then, but that is okay. I am going to take the compliment. I have not been told that for a while, but that is okay. I am going to take up the interjection. I am just going to cut that one out. I like that. What we remain focused on is making sure we are supporting Victorians to be their best and making sure that we are investing in all of those services that I mentioned before, not bringing forward what will be a 30,000-plus cut to jobs within our state, driving up unemployment to over 5 per cent.

We remain focused on delivering the services that Victorians need. That stands in stark contrast to what we are now seeing. There is a vast difference between getting out, talking to local communities, investing in the services and the opportunities that local communities and people right across our state need and indeed deserve and bringing forward a program of cuts and chaos and fear and division. That is what we are now seeing from those opposite. The report that I referred to earlier is one, I am sure, of many that are to come.

Members interjecting.

Josh BULL: I think what we are going to see over the course of weeks and the next couple of months, member for Point Cook, will be a whole series of analyses that are going to show Victorians what will happen should that \$40 billion of cuts come into play.

We remain focused on delivering for every single Victorian, and I want to acknowledge the work that has been done, particularly within the space of many of those commitments that were announced over the past couple of weeks. Again I point out that from what we are seeing in these reports and the report today from the Australia Institute, the damage that will be done will be significant and long lasting. Indeed, speaking to people in my local community, that is something they are very concerned about, and we will make sure that we have every opportunity to explain that clearly from now all the way through until November. That is our focus. It remains our focus today, and it will remain our focus every single day that we are in government.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (16:52): Road safety is not a luxury. Safe, reliable roads are one of the most basic responsibilities of a government, and after more than a decade in office, Labor has comprehensively failed in that responsibility. Across South-West Coast, people are not simply driving on bad roads anymore. They are driving on roads that are crumbling beneath them. They dodge potholes, they blow tyres, they smash rims. They wait beside dangerous roads for assistance. Freight operators lose time and productivity. Families pay repair bills they should not have incurred and cannot afford. Today the Victorian Auditor-General has exposed what regional Victorians have been saying for years: Victoria's roads are deteriorating faster than the government is fixing them. Now, these are not my words, these are the Auditor-General's words in this document that has been handed down to the Parliament today.

The examination by the Auditor-General has found that one of Victoria's biggest and most important assets has been left in a state of disrepair. So what are the facts that the Auditor-General has found? He has found that for years Labor told Victorians it was spending record amounts and doing a wonderful job of maintaining our roads. But today the spin is exposed. The department warned the government that the funding was insufficient to maintain or improve the roads condition. They were told that the proportion of roads in poor and very poor condition was increasing, and the approach that the government has been taking to road maintenance has been too reactive instead of preventative. The report also shows that the condition of the roads is getting worse, not better, with the proportion of roads rated poor or very poor increasing by almost 10 per cent. Roads rated very poor on 'remaining useful life' have increased by more than 10 per cent also. The evidence shows that the gap between defects identified and defects fixed more than doubled from January 2025 to June 2026. It further notes that the quality inspectors were inconsistent, that required inspections were missed and that on

some projects only one in four contractors had provided the required methodology for prioritising maintenance work. The findings are an indictment of Labor. They are the facts.

Labor did not have a pothole problem. It created a maintenance crisis, and now, less than three months before an election, Premier Ben Carroll has suddenly discovered potholes. After years of regional Victorians pleading for action, the Premier announces 500 pothole repairs and admits finally that the condition of our roads is not good enough. That is the understatement of the decade. The Premier is not suddenly talking about roads because Labor has discovered preventative maintenance. He is talking about roads because their condition has become so appalling that he cannot pretend otherwise any longer. This is not a road maintenance strategy, it is a political rescue mission, and Ben Carroll cannot pretend he is some innocent bystander or a newcomer cleaning up somebody else's mess.

Paul Mercurio: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to ask the member to use correct titles for sitting members.

The SPEAKER: I remind the member to use correct titles.

Roma BRITNELL: The Premier Ben Carroll cannot pretend he is an innocent newcomer cleaning up somebody else's mess. He sat at the cabinet table. He was Deputy Premier.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is defying your ruling regarding using correct titles.

The SPEAKER: It is the Premier, member for South-West Coast.

Roma BRITNELL: He was the deputy.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: No, he is not my mate. You are quite correct. Thank you for that interjection and that clarification. He was the Deputy Premier, and he was the Deputy Premier under former Premier Jacinta Allan. Importantly, he was also the roads minister.

Members interjecting.

Roma BRITNELL: The correct title is former Premier.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Former Premier is a correct title. Member for Bendigo East would be a correct title. I appreciate the member following the rules.

Roma BRITNELL: The point is the Premier, who is our current Premier, is no innocent bystander. He was directly responsible for ripping \$200 million out of the annual roads budget when he was the minister for roads and he now is trying to say that suddenly he is the man who will save us from the declining road situation. Spare us. He now has promised \$350 million this year, before Christmas, to fix the situation. Funny that there is an election in less than three months. But, guess what, what happens next year? That has been identified as well. There is only going to be \$225 million to fix the roads after the election, for the following year. Something is wrong with that maths, but people in South-West Coast are not fools.

This government has outsourced enormous amounts of road maintenance, yet it has failed to ensure contractors are properly supervised and held accountable for the quality of work. And that is not an attack on the workers doing the job. I have spoken to contractors who know exactly what is wrong. They know when a treatment will not last. They know a foundation that needs rebuilding, and they know water is getting under the pavement. But when government contracts prescribe cheap, short-term treatment, that is what gets delivered. The failure is not the bloke operating the grader, and let us talk about graders because we have got hardly any. That is why we are seeing the water held against the road and undermining the foundation.

We, as Liberals, have made a commitment to fix the roads properly. We will not be filling potholes only, which is what this government's strategy is. We will eliminate potholes.

A member interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: It is a significant difference, my colleague points out, because potholes just get repaired over and over again. That is like saying you have fixed the roof by putting heaps more buckets under the roof when it is raining. Our commitment is \$5 billion over four years to repair the roads properly, a 25 per cent increase that starts with the foundation and eliminates potholes. We will return to preventative maintenance. We will rebuild foundation and restore the shoulders. We will clear the drains, and we will grade the roadside vegetation, removing vegetation, and we will return to 10 per cent renewing of roads and resealing.

This is a government that says it will bring everything back in-house for efficiency but just last week finalised a contract to privatise the spray-sealing contracts and line-marking contracts. This is a government that just has no idea that a stitch in time saves nine. Labor's approach has been to wait for a hole and play whack-a-mole with potholes, and now the Premier boasts about how many potholes he will patch. It is just a tragedy that we have to see the government getting so close to understanding that they are about to lose their seats, rather than actually recognising their role is to care for Victorians who are driving on these unsafe roads, destroying their cars, fearing for their lives and wondering how they can get to work in the dark when they are a dairy farmer or a nurse who has no choice but to navigate these dangerous roads that we are subjected to.

Labor spent years telling Victorians how much money they were spending, but they have been deceiving Victorians. We will make a very different system. We do not need a system that is based on fools trying to fool us. We need a system where contractors are properly supervised. We will be making sure taxpayers get what they pay for. We will put a system in place that fixes foundations, keeps water out and maintains the asset before it fails, because the cheapest pothole repair is the pothole that proper maintenance prevents from forming in the first place. After more than a decade of Labor's neglect, Victorians deserve roads that are not merely patched for an election; they deserve roads that are built, maintained and repaired properly for the next generation. And as every dairy farmer can tell you, the way to fix a pothole is to make sure you build a proper road from the foundation up and repair it properly, not to actually try to think you can ever successfully repair a pothole. That is a quick fix for a safety reason, and I do not deny the importance of that, but that is not how we will be addressing our approach to the roads here in Victoria if we are given the great honour of being elected to govern in November and give Victorians a fresh start.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (17:02): I will follow on from, I would say, the confused member for South-West Coast, because she spent a lot of time talking about dairy farmers' responsibility in road maintenance and their quality and understanding of how to fix roads. I thought we left that up to traffic engineers and those people who were professionally –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: The member for South-West Coast, the intellectual giant of those opposite, is ready to inform many on this side of the house on how road maintenance is done. Look, I will leave that up to traffic engineers and managers – those people whose job it is to do so. To quote the member for Mordialloc, they were spine-tingling this afternoon. This is their last MPI for this term of government, for the 60th Parliament, and this is what they are delivering up. The member for Gippsland South sort of ran out of puff about halfway through his speech. He tried to keep going, but he could not. He was done. And the MP for Eildon is always a shining light amongst those opposite. 'Ready to govern' – that is where they are at. I felt like this was actually a series of valedictory speeches that I have been hearing from those opposite. The valedictory speeches, one after another, were bemoaning the ineffectual nature of their time in politics, and they are ready to walk out the door, which many of them will, particularly those Nationals.

The Nationals will not exist post this election. They will be one of those figments of political imagination in the next Parliament, because One Nation are likely to just decimate them. I expect one or two of them will remain. I hope to see the urbane member for Gippsland South again, but his valedictory says he is probably thinking otherwise, particularly with the recent announcements of their colleagues in One Nation in the community that he represents and those adjoining it who have considered that nuclear is the way to get back into power. It did not go well in the federal election. It was not particularly helpful for them, but again they are re-plugging this well: 'How do we get nuclear power in? This is a really great idea. Everyone's going to pay. Oh, wait, no-one's going to pay for it.' It is going to be the public purse – that is who pays for nuclear power, because we know it is impossible to do and no-one is willing to finance it. They are talking about nuclear power plants on the backs of utes now. This is a new one for me.

They have gone from the big power plant that no-one is going to fund – except for the public purse, should they get into power together with One Nation. By the way I think One Nation will be the opposition – the Libs are just going to be some crossbench losers – and will just do as they please. They have gone from the big nuclear power plant, our Homer Simpson-style affair, and now they are going to modular. They might do that. It has not really been shown to work anywhere at all, and again, it would be funded by the public purse. Now they are going to the back-of-the-ute style, so you will have these nuclear power plants on the back of a ute. Just drop them around. It is going to be a real joy to see these things across Victoria. It will not just be in Gippsland South, it will not just be in Morwell and it will not just be in Traralgon, in all those places; it will be wherever they drop their ute off. It is going to be really great stuff, inspiring things.

Inspiring is this policy where they go, 'Everything's terrible. There are potholes on every corner, and it's impossible to drive around our communities,' which is what they keep quoting. Then they say, 'But if only we spend 25 per cent more, that will fix it.' How much did the wind fall out of their sails when we announced that we were putting in more than 35 per cent more into the budget related to potholes for this year. They would have been crestfallen at that moment, the opposition, and crestfallen again when we called the royal commission. You can just see it is dragging them down. Instead of getting excited, ready to go, ready to govern – oh dear, they are just crestfallen over and over again.

But the member for Gippsland South in his valedictory today said a couple of good quotable quotes. I thought they were pretty good – 'We are not committed to filling potholes' was a quotable quote. I thought this was their main election strategy. It is that and nuclear, for the member for Gippsland South, the Leader of the Nationals. I could not believe it. He said, 'We're not committed to filling potholes,' and he said, 'We're going to cut road maintenance again' – another quotable quote from him. I am happy for him to correct me on *Hansard*, but they were his words, not mine.

The MP for Eildon had deep concerns about 40-year-old trucks on the roads. For those that are regular listeners, if they missed that occasion, the MP for Brighton I believe will add that into his book of quotable quotes, the wit and witticism of the member for Brighton that he publishes each year, his set of speeches, all the brilliance that he has presented to this Parliament on the public dime. Of course they are definitely on the public dime. But he could include a special addendum to this year's edition for the MP for Eildon's deep concerns about 40-year-old trucks on the road. I think that is an opportunity for him, so it is a freebie from me, member for Brighton. I am really happy to help.

The MP for South-West Coast got up, and it just made me wonder: where is their Andrew Hastie in this Parliament? Where is that person who is willing to stand up to One Nation, not cuddle up to One Nation? Where is that person who is willing to stand up to One Nation on their side? Because they have got to find their Andrew Hastie.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: The member for Polwarth reminds me that we are talking about roads. I think the road to nowhere it might be. I am happy to talk about roads in the area of Point Cook. I will

take you up on that, member for Polwarth. You are not going to be around for long, so I can certainly give you a few things on the way through. We just turned on the lights at Point Cook Road and Central Avenue. That was one of those big projects coming to fruition. I actually do not think your candidate for the Liberal Party remained a member of the Liberal Party for more than 5 minutes after the election. She had had it with you. But she said, 'You're never going to do it.' The lights are on at Point Cook Road and Central Avenue. I have been through there the last two days. I invite the member for Polwarth to join me anytime he would like to drive through that intersection, and it will be a quick experience for him, because unlike previously, having to wait there for a long time, now you can just go straight through. The improvements are ongoing at that intersection. There is still some more work to do, absolutely, at that site, and that will wrap up in the first quarter of next year. Then we are on to Central Avenue, and we are duplicating that. The member for Caulfield will be familiar with that intersection and that set of works.

Should we be elected we will be duplicating Point Cook Road from Central Avenue all the way through to Dunnings Road and getting on with that work that I actually say should have happened 30 years ago when it was Werribee council. They should have done those works then, but in the absence of them not doing them then, the best time to get on with it is now.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: The member for Polwarth is just trying to flex in this last opportunity for him at this time, because, member for Polwarth, the time is running out. The clock is ticking for some of those opposite. The reason for that is because they cannot work out how they are going to deal with their cuts. This report came out today from the Australia Institute: *Victorian Opposition Fiscal Strategy: An Assessment*. What does it say in that assessment? It would require the elimination of 31,700 jobs from our public service. There is only one goal they seek to beat after the next election should those opposite have the privilege and the honour of forming government. The only thing they are trying to beat is their unemployment rate. When Napthine left – you remember Napthine; he was here for a brief period of time – 6.7 per cent was the unemployment rate. This report says it would push it to 5.4 per cent, but I reckon that is lowballing it, because when you take the confidence out of the economy, when you start sacking wholesale staff across the public service, when people cannot go to their hospital and get treatment, when their local school is getting shut down, when their TAFE is getting shut down, that is a sure way to collapse the economy. They are setting us up for a recession in Victoria. What did the report say? It said:

... cost-of-living spending proposals are largely uncoded and would chiefly benefit higher-income households.

Who is shocked with this? The party that is supported by and supportive of One Nation, supportive of their benefactor Gina Rinehart and has not met a worker that they did not want to rip off will chiefly benefit higher income households. Nothing has changed for those opposite except where they will be sitting after this election.

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (17:12): I think we are meant to be talking about roads, but I am not sure what that contribution was. It was about 5 per cent about roads, but anyway. The condition of Victoria's roads has become one of the most persistent concerns raised with me by constituents across Nepean. It is one of the most basic, fundamental things that people expect their government to be able to deliver. It has been raised with me by families, tradespeople, small business operators and older members of our community who rely on a safe road network to get about their daily lives each and every day. Their frustration is not just that potholes exist, it is that the same roads have been deteriorating for years. The same problems are repeatedly reported, and the response amounts to little more than a temporary repair, if anything at all.

After almost 12 years of this tired Labor government the Premier has now been forced to acknowledge that the condition of Victoria's roads is not good enough. On that point there is no disagreement. As

my colleague pointed out earlier, 'not good enough' may be the understatement of the decade. Premier Carroll cannot speak about the condition of the road network as though –

Paul Mercurio: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we have been talking quite a bit today about correct titles. I would like to remind the member of Nepean to use correct titles.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member is correct on titles. Can we take the names out of it, member for Nepean.

Anthony MARSH: I think the member for Hastings is a bit upset that we no longer get to have beers, because we cannot drive on the roads to get to Hastings. You would think that they would want us to differentiate between former premiers and the current Premier, but I guess they realise the integrity bodies going forward will have no teeth and it will not make a difference. The Premier has recently inherited this problem, and the Premier was himself the Minister for Roads and Road Safety between 2020 and 2022. He has been a senior member of this Labor government throughout the period in which the conditions of our roads have been the worst that we have ever seen. When a government has been in office for almost 12 years, the condition of the assets it is responsible for maintaining is part of its record. It is actually its legacy. There comes a point in which responsibility cannot be shifted to weather or individual contractors, who they are meant to hold accountable, or to some newly discovered maintenance backlog. The buck stops with this Labor government and this save-the-furniture Premier.

This year the scale of the problem has become impossible to ignore. In August motorists on the Princes Freeway near Bunyip were left stranded after striking large potholes. Vehicles suffered damaged tyres and wheels. The following day motorists on the Calder Freeway near Gisborne were confronted with a similar scene. These are major arterial routes and freeways. People should reasonably expect them to be safe and properly maintained. Instead motorists are increasingly approaching damaged sections of road not knowing whether a patch of water is simply standing water or concealing a defect capable of writing off their vehicle and putting them at great risk. We saw the government's response to that reality in question time just today. The Auditor-General has now laid out in black and white what has happened to Victoria's roads. In 2021, 39 per cent of the state road network was rated poor or very poor. By 2024 it was 48 per cent. Forty-eight per cent were poor or very poor. The gap between defects identified and defects actually fixed more than doubled between January 2025 and June this year. Yet when the Premier and the ministers were asked simple questions about those findings today, they refused to answer them – the same evasive response I have seen since I joined this place.

These are not just our numbers; these are the Victorian Auditor-General's. Worse than that, today we saw that they sought to undermine the Auditor-General's findings. If this government cannot even acknowledge the independent evidence about what has happened to our roads under its own watch, what hope is there that it will actually fix the problem? By the end of August the government was announcing that it intended to fix 500,000 potholes. That figure itself is an admission of the condition into which they have allowed our road network to fall. The Victorian road network did not reach this crisis point overnight. It was the cumulative consequence of maintenance deferred, resurfacing delayed and defects addressed reactively rather than before they became serious.

This is also very evident in my electorate of Nepean. Our communities are heavily dependent on the road network. Public transport options are limited or non-existent, as the member for Hastings is well aware, across much of the peninsula. People rely on their cars to go to work, take children to school or reach medical services. The community has repeatedly raised the condition of Point Nepean Road, Boneo Road, Frankston-Flinders Road, Bittern-Dromana Road and the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, among others. Eastbourne Road in Rosebud is another example, and one I know particularly well. During the Nepean by-election I struck a pothole in Eastbourne Road and blew a tyre. When I took it for repair, I was informed that my rim was destroyed and I was faced with an unexpected bill of almost \$3500. To put salt in the wound, when I was driving into Parliament just recently I struck another pothole in the dark and rain on Moorooduc Highway – another \$1200 repair bill. These events

were costly and inconvenient, but what bothered me most was that there was nothing unusual about my own experience. A damaged tyre or wheel can mean an unexpected bill of hundreds if not thousands of dollars. For a tradesperson or a small business owner, it can also mean lost work. For an older resident travelling to an appointment, it can mean being stranded on the side of the road. Those are costs borne by ordinary Victorians when basic maintenance is not done properly.

It was partly out of frustration that I launched Labor's Road to Ruin in July. The concept was straightforward: a member of the public can identify a pothole, upload a photograph and have the location recorded. It began on the peninsula and has since expanded across Victoria. I did this myself because I wanted people to have a transparent way of recording what they were encountering on our roads. Then at the end of August, this copycat Premier announced that if re-elected, his government would establish a taxpayer-funded website allowing Victorians to photograph potholes, request repairs and track repairs – what a novel idea; I wonder where he read that. That announcement rather neatly illustrates the problem with this government's approach. Victoria does not lack mechanisms where people can report road defects. The department already receives reports, other reporting platforms exist, and the Road to Ruin website is available statewide. In fact those opposite might like to know that residents in 33 Labor-held electorates have already used the Road to Ruin website to report potholes: Niddrie, Dandenong, Box Hill, Carrum, Macedon, Ivanhoe and Bentleigh, just to name a few. This is not a Nepean problem. It is not even a problem just in non-Labor-held seats. It is a problem across the entire state, including in their own backyard.

Speaking of potholes, I have also become somewhat of an expert in – or perhaps a victim of – the VicRoads reporting system myself. In the course of reporting potholes to the department, the VicRoads website has crashed more times than I care to remember. Three of those crashes occurred just in the last two sitting days while I was trying to report potholes on behalf of my residents, and I am very happy to table some photos and screenshots of that if the Parliament would like to see them. Perhaps the government might like to investigate that, although according to the notice on the website they have got their best people working on it. There you go. Perhaps the Premier has engaged some prisoners to run IT as well.

Before the Premier spends taxpayers money on building another pothole reporting website, perhaps he could get working on the one that they already have, because the issue is not that this tired Labor government does not know where the potholes are, the issue is whether the potholes are repaired properly, whether the underlying road is maintained and whether the same section is allowed to fail again. That is why I wrote to the Premier last week. I should note that I did receive a response from the Premier's office. It acknowledged my email and informed me that I might get a response within eight to 10 weeks if I am lucky. I live in hope, Premier. The Premier had spoken publicly about respecting taxpayers money, so I asked him to disclose what the proposed new website would cost before the government committed taxpayer money to it. I also made a very simple offer: he could use the one I have already made. I would far rather see that money directed into the roads themselves, as I am sure all Victorians would. In my local electorate, it could be put into resurfacing Eastbourne Road, put into Boneo Road or put into Point Nepean Road, because the problem is not a digital one, it is a physical one, and it is one with this tired Labor government.

A website cannot restore failed roads, it cannot clear drainage and it cannot repair shoulders or resurface an arterial road. Those things require a government that treats road maintenance as a serious responsibility rather than an issue that they have only just rediscovered when the deterioration has become impossible to ignore or there is an election around the corner. For too long the approach has been excessively reactive. Anyone responsible for maintaining an asset understands that early intervention matters. Once water penetrates a failing surface, the pavement begins to break apart and drainage problems are left unresolved, the eventual repair becomes more difficult and more costly.

Road maintenance is not especially glamorous, and resurfacing does not attract the same attention as a new infrastructure project. But it is one of the essential disciplines of a competent government, and today's Auditor-General's report could not illustrate that more clearly. We are now seeing this tired

Labor government, in an attempt to compensate for years of deterioration, make a sudden escalation in announcements. That is why the Liberals and Nationals have set out a different approach. We have committed \$5 billion over four years to repair Victoria's road network and restore a proper program of preventative maintenance.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:22): I do note that the opposition are talking a very big game when it comes to roads. But do you know what they are really good at? Cutting. That is what they are good at. They have already proposed \$40 billion worth of cuts. So how are you going to deliver all these road repairs et cetera if you are going to slash and burn the economy and also put 30,000 jobs just down the drain, just like that? They would do it. They are good for it. Because last time they were in government, they promised that there would be no cuts to the public service, full stop. Then they cut \$250 million per year from the public service.

Anthony Marsh: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Albert Park, like many before her, does not seem to realise we are talking about roads in this debate, so it would be good if she came back to the topic.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your point of order is relevance? I am sure the member for Albert Park was going to be relevant to the MPI very, very soon.

Nina TAYLOR: I take your guidance, absolutely. It was merely to note that if you are going to talk a big game, you had better live up to it. I just do not have confidence they will, because last time 4128 public sector jobs were cut and not replaced between 2011 and 2013. They cut a billion dollars from our health system and went to war with our nurses and ambos. They cut \$1.2 billion from our TAFEs, closing 22 campuses and sacking over 3000 staff.

I also heard the member opposite sort of mocking prisoners doing any kind of – oh, actually he thought that they might be running the IT system. I thought that was in poor taste, because we know that part of rehabilitation has been to enable certain prisoners who have been on low-level offences and are close to their time out of incarceration to develop skills such as weeding and roadside maintenance. I did think that offhand comment was fairly below the bar. But they are laughing because rehabilitation is not important to those opposite. Mocking and being so patronising in this situation is actually quite disrespectful.

But anyway, coming back to that topic of roads, I am very happy to speak to that. We know that fixing roads is this government's priority. The Carroll Labor government announced a further \$352 million to double the number of potholes we are removing from 250,000 to 500,000. We want to fix also – I want to add a further limb to that – the condition of our roads. That is why a re-elected Carroll Labor government will develop a plan to bring state road maintenance programs back in-house; let you report potholes and see what repairs we are making and when; make everyone accountable, including government, including through compensation; and use local knowledge and let local teams prioritise local repairs. Surely those opposite would be in favour of that. That seems an infinitely practical and appropriate mechanism in terms of the overall good maintenance of our roads. Also, as I was speaking to earlier, it includes getting minimum-security prisoners on the job as part of supporting overall processes as well.

I should say there are a number of major road upgrades. I will only speak to a couple of those because I suspect others in the chamber have already alluded to those. We are also investing, for instance, \$550 million to widen the Western Freeway and upgrade key interchanges. No doubt that is going to make a massive difference for Victorians who live in those areas. But it is interesting, because when we are talking about cuts that those opposite would most certainly live up to – I am absolutely confident that they would deliver on those cuts – what would they impact? They would impact Victorians on so many levels – frontline services without a doubt, whether it is in health, in education or in our police force as well – because you cannot slash and burn \$40 billion worth without that outcome. We saw that report earlier today – and I am happy to provide it for Hansard – from the

Australia Institute that the net effect would be 30,000 less public sector workers. I know those opposite often will refer to public sector workers merely as waste – they are just waste and they do not see them as human beings – but actually they work really hard and perform many important roles. If you are talking about service delivery, and certainly building and maintaining roads is about service delivery, then having the human beings in place to deliver on those services is relevant.

This is why I was discussing cuts from the outset, because you cannot on the one hand say ‘Please, please, please do X, Y and Z to the roads’ but also say ‘We’re going to slash and burn the actual numbers of people who work and help with maintenance and other things and deliver these services.’ So that was the origin. That was the genesis of that argument, because I think it actually makes sense, hopefully not only in my head but in broader terms. I think Victorians would get that as well, because let us face it, many public sector workers are Victorians. They are fellow Victorians working and helping to serve the community. So seeing them as the other, as some strange entity out there, might emotionally help one distance oneself from these kinds of cuts, but the reality is that they are mums and dads, they are our neighbours and they are people who we interact with every day of the week. Therefore seeing them as human beings and fellow Victorians, not some waste or some pest that we should rid from Victoria, is probably not unhelpful as well. This is why I was raising that argument. I hope that that goes some way to backing in the various contentions that I have put before the chamber today.

But I think the other thing that is quite interesting when we are talking about how we manage money, whenever we are looking at maintenance, whether it is road maintenance or otherwise, we have to think about the investments – things like energy. Energy is one of the major costs, certainly, but because we have invested in state-owned energy, this has given certainty to the market and helped to accelerate the investment in renewables. We know that renewable energy is actually the cheapest form of energy and also the most expedient to implement. We know that since the inception of the Victorian energy upgrades program, something like 2.4 million Victorian households have embraced this and we know literally thousands of businesses as well. So when you are talking about how money is managed and the investments that a state makes and thinking about, ‘Okay. Well, they’re talking a big game about roads et cetera,’ there is not only the slashing and burning. If they are going to, for instance, go all the way with One Nation on nuclear, that will cost an absolute bomb, pardon the pun, because that will require taxpayer funds and many, many, many, many years to substantiate.

I was actually on a nuclear inquiry a few years ago, and actually I think it was NuScale that was wanting to set up small modular reactors and roll them out, but it was a little bit embarrassing because halfway through that inquiry they had to pull it.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker: relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It has been a wideranging debate, and I think the member has drawn a line between her arguments and the debate, but I encourage her to stick maybe a little closer to the MPI than what she just was.

Nina TAYLOR: Fair enough. It is duly noted, but I was just talking about when we are being realistic about how a government spends money and what money it has available. If you are going to invest billions and billions of dollars in nuclear energy that cannot be delivered for maybe 20 or 30 years, if that –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I do understand that you said relevance was a reasonable point of order. We are still talking about nuclear and something, I do not know, but not roads.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member did draw a line earlier between the spending and the topic, and I encourage the member, without telling the member what to say, to maybe be a little more relevant to the MPI in question.

Nina TAYLOR: These are discussions that the Leader of the Opposition can have with One Nation, because that is the only way they would be able to get to government, so they would have to negotiate these kinds of expenses.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, perhaps she does not know what a road is.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not think that was actually a point of order in the end.

Nina TAYLOR: I think that comment says more about the member for South-West Coast than it does about me.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (17:32): I am very pleased to speak on this matter of public importance today, because there is nothing more important in Polwarth today than the appalling, absolutely atrocious state of the roads. The MPI today is:

That this house notes the poor condition of Victorian roads and the impact on Victorian motorists –
and I will just add in there businesses, farmers and transport operators –
of damage to their vehicles, reduced freight efficiency and diminished productivity and calls for a return to a genuine preventative maintenance program to arrest the decline of one of the state's biggest –
and most needed –
assets.

The roads in this region in Victoria and throughout Polwarth are just terrible. In my own family, my wife again smashed a windscreen just yesterday, the second one in a month. It comes on top of the fantastic Polwarth campaign express trailer, which is rocketing all around Polwarth whenever it can, having its axle broken only a fortnight ago because of the numerous potholes. One might think it a conspiracy on behalf of this government to shut down good campaigning on behalf of the member for Polwarth now and to try and keep him trapped in Colac. But no, even the state of the roads is not going to stop me getting out and about around the various highways and byways of Polwarth. Of course those potentially fantastic road networks – the Hamilton Highway, the Princes Highway, the Great Ocean Road, the Cobden-Stonyford Road – that bring all of the fantastic Western Star butter through to the city and fresh milk for the Woolworths supermarkets are important roads, but they are costing Victorian people on the shelves of the supermarkets and making it cost more to get grain that we make our bread out of. It is costing more to get our lamb chops from the massive processing facility in Colac to the supermarkets so we can celebrate things like Australia Day. All these things are costing Victorians more because the cost of freight is going through the roof because transport operators are just wearing the cost of this terrible road situation.

The Auditor-General has an important function and plays a really important role, and last sitting week the Auditor-General told us something we did not know. The Auditor-General told us last week, a fortnight ago, that Victorians were paying a secret tax on public transport. That was a really crucial role from the Auditor-General, putting light on the dark, murky financial state that we live in here in Victoria. This week the Auditor-General has come out with another report, a fine publication, the *Maintaining State Roads* report. That is a really important document, but, guess what, it did not tell us one thing we did not already know. I will quote its main finding:

The overall condition of Victoria's state roads is deteriorating.

There it is, from the Auditor-General. It is not just the member for Polwarth or the member for South-West Coast or anyone else in western Victoria talking about the parlous state – it is a fact. The Auditor-General goes on to say:

The department ... met its publicly reported performance targets in recent years, but the targets give no meaningful insight into road condition or the effectiveness of road maintenance.

Every single farmer or anyone who knows diddly squat about road maintenance and road conditions will tell you that this government has completely underperformed. Anyone who knows anything about roads will tell you it is about road surface, it is about keeping the water off and it is about keeping the roadsides clear. The roads are designed for vehicular movement, not water flow. That is something this government has completely abandoned its knowledge of. Quite simply, what we are seeing now is a wholesale destruction of one of the most important assets. We have seen destruction of all sorts of things under this government, including the Commonwealth Games that we could no longer afford. We have seen the abandonment of the Torquay hospital – all sorts of things that this government promises. Since the Roman times, since the Romans conquered the world, you needed good roads. Well, Victoria is not going to conquer very much when we are down to 40 kilometres an hour on our highways and byways. In fact, since I have been in this place we have opened the Princes Highway West, a duplicated road that for huge swathes now is down to 80 kilometres an hour. That was built as a 110 kilometre-an-hour road, and it is so dangerous and in such poor condition that that no longer is possible.

Not only has the Auditor-General been researching the parlous state of our roads, but I have also taken the opportunity to do a bit of budget analysis myself. The government has been big on the fact that they are going to eliminate potholes. They are giving an extra \$300 million this year to eliminate 500,000 potholes. Quite frankly, no-one is out counting the frigging potholes. Quite seriously, you would get to 500,000 potholes just in my own electorate. It is a pointless measure. People want smooth, safe surfaces. They want white lines that you can see in the rain. They want wire rope barriers that are not all busted to bits on the sides of the road. We already forked out \$1 billion for those over the last few years; you would think you could look after that asset.

Every element of the road network is in decay. Why is it in decay? Well, one of the previous speakers on our side pointed to the fact that you must replace or have a plan to replace road surfaces on a rolling budget about every 10 years. That is the standard we have always had in Victoria. Way back in 2021–22, at the start of the COVID era, we were replacing our road surfaces at around the 14-year mark, so every 14 years. That is underperforming by four years, but it is within cooee. Do you know what that has blown out to now? I will just run through the last six years of this government. We went from 14 years, then we jumped to 20 years and then lo and behold in the year 2023–24 we spent so little on road maintenance that at that rate, if the government had continued its 2023–24 road replacement, we would have been at 416 years. That means this government had some harebrained idea we could put some tarmac down in country Victoria and it would last 416 years before they had to replace it again. That is preposterously insane. However, the government is copping a little bit of flak because of the hard work of the opposition and those raising regularly the state of our roads. They have improved it from 416 years. It is now only about 60 to 65 years. Can you imagine that we are wanting road laid today to last 60 years without any preventative maintenance?

If you need evidence of a broken, busted state unable to look after its basic infrastructure, then that is the sole indicator. It is evidenced here in the Auditor-General's report. It is a fact from the government's own budget. This is not misleading data; this is how parlous it has become. Why is that road replacement so important, particularly for rural and regional Victorians? Because when you have a heart attack or a stroke in a community like mine you have to travel for over an hour – in some parts of my electorate two hours – in an ambulance on roads that are not fit to transport people safely. It is not fair that ambulances are less safe. It is not fair that transport operators trying to compete with transport coming from other states have twice the repair and maintenance bills and costs of any other transport operator. These issues are really important to country people.

The lack of maintenance and care for the roads is simply not good enough, which is why, in conclusion, I raise the point that under a fresh start with the Liberal–Nationals there is a solution, there is an end in sight, there is a plan – something this government has not had for 12 years: a real plan to improve roads. We will fund considerably more – 25 per cent more than what this government has committed under its record funding. We will commit more and guarantee to the community that that will be spent.

We will better resource our local shires. In my own municipality we are talking in excess of \$6 million over the next term to the local councils to fix those local roads and fix those local bridges. That will make a difference to my community. We will have the main state roads, the main highways and byways and the local council roads improved. It is part of a plan that says 'Roads in country Victoria matter. Roads in country Victoria are important', and a Liberal–National government will respect that and return the funding that is required to keep a first-class, First World road system in place. It will be safer for our communities. It will transport the things that we produce and manufacture in the regions to market more successfully. It will mean visitors and tourists can make choices. It will mean that people will not be scared to take basic drives on the roads in country Victoria.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (17:42): It is a pleasure to speak about this particular topic today, about roads, being a regional member of Parliament here in this place too and someone who does travel a lot around Victoria and actually has farmland in the member for Polwarth's electorate. Travelling around in my community, roads are certainly an important issue that is raised with me. I am really pleased to be able to speak to this.

In addition, it was a privilege to sit on and chair the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry only a few years ago on road users and vulnerable road users post COVID. I am going to talk a little bit about that and what the statistics were and what the evidence was showing. It was a real privilege to be on that committee, because it certainly gave me an understanding around road trauma, police, first responders and some expert witnesses. Also we heard about the impact that obviously road trauma has on our community. It is probably an inquiry that I will not forget and one that I learned a lot from. I have become very passionate about road safety ever since that inquiry.

When we talk about roads and we are talking about safety, we often talk about traffic, congestion, potholes – I have heard it today – travel times, upgrades, but ultimately I want to talk about people because I think that that is what we are here about, being a service to our communities. We are talking about real people – people who are driving their kids to school, people who are cyclists on our roads, people who maybe have learner drivers in their family. I have got one of those now, so I am learning a lot about being a patient – what would I call myself? – supervisor alongside a learner driver. It is about real people. We want to make sure that those people get to go home safely every time that they are on our roads. I believe that this conversation needs to be a lot bigger than just bitumen. It is about how we drive on our roads. It is the way that we design our roads and enforce our laws.

Talking a little bit about that inquiry that we were conducting, we certainly heard from experts that post COVID people were making some choices on our road that were quite risky – more people deliberately running red lights, more people drink and drug driving, more people making decisions to take risks on our roads, more speeding. Even though we would expect our road toll to go down post COVID and there were less people on the road, what we were finding was that did not happen because of the risk-taking that was actually involved on our roads, and that was very concerning. It was a bit of a shock to everyone, but we were also seeing more people not wearing seatbelts in their cars, even some people putting the seatbelt behind them and clicking it in so the car did not beep at them anymore but sitting on the seatbelt, which is absolutely an incredible behaviour. But those are choices that people were making.

I particularly want to talk about that inquiry. We made some recommendations in that inquiry and education was certainly a big part of it. We can tell people to slow down, we can tell people not to be on their phones, we can tell people to be safer around pedestrians and cyclists, but it is also very clearly about how we design our roads and our infrastructure, which then influences the way people behave on our roads. It influences the way that people might slow down in certain areas because they can see they are entering a shopping strip. We have designs in the Bellarine community where we have now installed wombat crossings, which are not for wombats, as zebra crossings are not for zebras. They are raised pedestrian crossings. That has helped slow down particularly busy intersections in my community to ensure that students in particular can get to school and to sporting fields and recreation. I see young people and older people using those wombat crossings now that were not previously there.

They are able to navigate intersections safely. I do get a little bit of feedback from communities, from drivers particularly, saying that they do not like the wombat crossings. Well, you only have to slow down. That person that is cycling or a child that is walking across is a road user as well. They are allowed to be there. They are allowed to be safely crossing our road infrastructure. I tell people they need to be patient and slow down at these intersections because that is the point of them.

The design of our roads is a really important component. We have talked about in this place and others have argued on both sides here about maintaining our roads and the condition of our roads, and I know that is a very important part of this conversation. As I have said, I am a regional member of Parliament and it is certainly essential to my communities. We have farming communities as well on the Bellarine, and many will have tractors out on their roads. We understand this is really important, and that is why this government has continued to invest in road upgrades and maintenance. We have had billions of dollars each budget for road maintenance, and we have announced further money, \$352 million, for road maintenance, which will be doubling the amount of potholes that we can be working on. That is about priorities, that is about things that matter.

I just want to also point out, though, that in my community they are really good at reporting potholes. We have had some pretty awful wet weather and potholes have opened up, but they are so good at reporting and our maintenance crews have been coming out the next day and they have been filling those potholes and resurfacing them, and we are making sure that we are getting on to it immediately. I would like to thank my community for reporting as soon as they see a hazard on our roads, which is fantastic. I tell people to do that. Otherwise, how does the maintenance crew know where to go?

We need to make sure that we invest also in these bigger road investments so we can futureproof this state. We know that there is more traffic on our roads. The Bellarine particularly is growing. We know that the roads are taking more traffic. We need to invest in futureproofing this state, and we do that. This side of the house knows how to do infrastructure, knows how to build our roads, and we certainly get on with that and prioritise that.

We recently announced, on the Bellarine link, that under a new Carroll Labor government we will start the work on stage 1 of the Bellarine link, an absolutely incredible project that will reduce traffic and how it moves around Geelong city, but also help those growing suburbs. Potentially stage 2 will link up to the Bellarine, which then would take our trucks and our larger traffic from the Bellarine over around Geelong.

We have also announced recently that under a Carroll Labor government we will upgrade Murradoc Road in the Bellarine. This is a really busy part of Murradoc Road, where we now see Coles, Aldi, KFC, banks and industrial estates, where people are going to do most of their shopping. That is a really important part of the Bellarine that needs some safety upgrades, because it used to be quite a back road. It is no longer that, and we need to make sure that that is safe. And I am not just talking about cars – it is about making sure pedestrians and cyclists can get around the area and that part of the road.

Recognising that we are about to go to an election, it is about priorities and it is about asking the question about which government into the future is going to be able to do the things that it says that it will do. We have to be absolutely honest with Victorians about what it is that we can deliver. We are being told that the opposition can deliver a \$5 billion roads plan – that they can rebuild and they can fix roads – but they also say that they want to find savings of tens of billions of dollars. Now, an independent analysis – we have talked about this today – by the Australia Institute, who have looked at the numbers, has said that that cannot happen, that this is going to be a simple question of priorities. But also, do the figures stack up? Obviously it has been made clear in this report that they do not.

I know Victorians and the people of Bellarine deserve more than just a list of promises. They actually need to know that it can happen. You cannot promise billions of dollars in savings but then promise the world. You cannot promise that you are going to be able to simultaneously put new roads in when you are also saying you are going to reduce the amount of spend in our budget. Here is where the

credibility of the opposition comes into question: you cannot cut billions and then spend billions and somehow have some money left over. That is not a financial plan, that is actually just a promise that relies on Victorians not looking at the money.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (17:52): I would like to continue from the contribution by the member for Bellarine, because when you are talking about being honest with Victorians, when you are talking about lacking credibility about what you say and what you actually do, we have had a marvellous document tabled in the Parliament today that would be exhibit A, VAGO's *Maintaining State Roads* report, which provides an absolutely damning report on Labor's cuts to the road asset management budget over 12 long years. Member for Bellarine, this is where the credibility question lies – with the Labor government, who have forgotten that if they are going to stand in this place and say, 'We're going to fix the roads. Look at the wonderful roads that you've got,' there are members of the Victorian community who are driving on these pothole-riddled roads every single day. They are people who have to use these roads. They cannot take a back road to avoid a pothole, because the back road is just as riddled with potholes as the normal route that they would go. It does not matter whether you are taking your kids to school, you are driving a school bus or you are driving a grain truck to get your produce from farm gate to market to feed Victorians and feed Australians, in the country we all have to deal with Labor's utter failure to manage Victoria's road network.

Let us talk about the most important thing of all: rural and regional Victoria have not got their fair share under a Labor government. They have never, ever delivered rural and regional Victoria their fair share. Eighty-two per cent of this state's road network is in rural and regional Victoria, yet Labor only delivers 70 per cent of the roads budget to this area – yet another example where Labor simply overlooks the people who live in rural and regional Victoria. That is what the Nationals will always stand for. We know that 25 per cent of the population live in rural and regional Victoria, so we deserve 25 per cent of the new infrastructure funding, and that is exactly what the Nationals will deliver.

We are sick of people like the Premier, who, when he was the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, stood in this place and said that there was a record investment in country road maintenance. At that very same time, at that point in time in June 2022, there had been an almost \$200 million cut to the roads budget. So when Labor members in this place raise issues about credibility and not delivering what you say, talk to your Premier, because when he was the minister for roads he promised things that were simply not true. It is the Auditor-General of Victoria who has uncovered this in the report that was tabled today. From the contributions by the Labor MPs in this place, including rural and regional MPs, I cannot believe they are collapsing and saying, 'Oh, the roads are great. Don't worry. If there's a pothole, we'll just fill it up.' It is blown out the next day, but no-one cares about that. You only care about the headline and the media release about the numbers that go in. Even then you are not honest about it. The Labor government is never honest with Victorians, but it is catching up with all of you. It is catching up with all of you, because there are mounting reports from authorities like the Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

But most importantly, rural and regional Victorians have had enough of being told what to think when their experience each and every day is very, very different. Rural and regional Victorians are sick of driving on terrible roads. We are sick of hearing about the near misses. I heard about a near miss – it was a hit actually, a collision last week where a four-wheel drive bounced on a pothole and sideswiped a school bus. These are people putting their lives at risk because the roads are so dangerous. They are critically dangerous. Every single day there is a near miss. I live in Horsham. When I travel to Melbourne every week I drive up the Western Highway. At the moment I count how many cars I see with their hazard lights on on the side of the highway because they have damaged their tyres or rims on the way through. Last Sunday it was four cars, for those who are making any notes about that.

We know that there is a critical problem when the condition of our roads in country Victoria is a cost-of-living issue. It is costing Victorians more and more every day, with their tyres being blown out and with fractured rims. There are people who have had critical issues where their cars are pulled over on the side of the road and they are missing appointments, they are missing funerals and they are missing

opportunities to go to the doctor and to get surgery. This has a flow-on effect. It is important to rural and regional people, and Labor have not got it right.

But most importantly, when the Premier was the minister for roads he lied to Victorians. He said it was a record investment into roads, and it was a \$200 million cut. It was a 25 per cent cut. That does not cut it. Nobody believes that this Premier is any different to the previous two premiers we have had under a Labor government. We all see through it.

It does not matter whether you are in my electorate, where we now have over 50 per cent of our roads in either poor or very poor condition; it does not matter whether you are travelling on the Henty Highway, the Hamilton Highway, the Glenelg Highway, the Western Highway, the Wimmera Highway or some of our key connecting roads like the Warracknabeal-Birchip Road, the Ararat to Glenthompson road or the Mortlake-Ararat Road – it does not matter where you are – our roads are simply dangerous. It is not fair on our local people. It is not fair on the police and ambulance services, the CFA and the SES crews who have to travel on these roads and particularly those emergency services who have to turn up when there has been a tragic accident.

The Nationals will invest \$5 billion into our state road network. The Nationals will invest \$288 million into our local roads through our country roads and bridges program. This means \$54 million for my electorate of Lowan alone. It does not matter if you are travelling on our state roads or our local roads, you deserve a safe road. That is exactly what the Nationals will deliver. We will make sure that we fix our roads. We will make them safe, but most importantly, we will ensure that people in rural and regional Victoria get their fair share of the roads funding in the state of Victoria.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (17:59): I have a little bit of time to talk about the MPI – fabulous. I have got a lot to say about my roads, because I have got incredible roads in Narre Warren North. In fact we have just recently redone the Princes Highway, as the member for Berwick would know because it has gone straight through parts of his electorate as well, and when re-elected next year we are going to be doing Hallam Road, which is going to be incredible because it is going to give us dual highway on both sides of that road. That is going to make a huge difference to our community and is something that we have asked for over the last few years, so we are very, very excited about that. I think the state of our roads in the south-east is really coming along quite great, isn't it, member for Cranbourne?

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, I would like to table the Victorian Auditor-General's *Maintaining State Roads* report today, which shows that that is –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, members are meant to be factual in this place, and that clearly is not being factual.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member of Narracan knows all members are expected to be factual at all times.

Belinda WILSON: I actually take that as quite offensive, member for Narracan. I was being factual about my electorate. We have got incredible roads, and the ones that need repairing are done at a very efficient rate when I speak to the minister's office. Minister Hamer is an incredible minister for roads, an engineer who is doing an incredible job making great changes – he is walking into the chamber – and we are very, very proud to have him as part of our group.

The SPEAKER: The time has come for me to interrupt business in accordance with the resolution of the house today for the members for Gippsland East and Malvern to make their valedictory statements. I remind visitors in the gallery that no photography or filming is allowed. You may note that I have taken out the no clapping, hugging and kissing notion.

Before we commence, can I acknowledge former member for Rodney Paul Weller and former member for Euroa Steph Ryan in the gallery today.

Members

Member for Gippsland East

Valedictory statement

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (18:02): It is a pleasure to rise and make my valedictory speech. As MPs, we are elected to fight for our communities, we are elected to represent them strongly and make sure they receive their fair share. That is our job. I have always believed that when an MP secures something for their electorate, they have not performed some extraordinary act of brilliance, as some may claim, they have simply done the job that they are elected to do. How we have performed as MPs, ministers or shadow ministers is not for us to judge ourselves; what we might regard as achievements today will be judged by future parliaments on whether they stand the test of time, so self-praise is no praise in my eyes. I want to use this time to talk about the people, the experiences I have had, a few of the things I will miss and a few of the things that I will not.

When I arrived here, there were a few things I did not quite understand fully. Silly me, I thought question time was the time you got answers; Parliament quickly taught me that a person can respond to a question with an extraordinary level of detail without approaching the vicinity of an answer. I will not miss the ministerial correspondence from opposition. I must admit some ministers are better than others in relation to this, but you write to a minister, then often you wait months for a response that is not an answer, so you write again. It is essentially a type of penpal arrangement without the friendship. Then occasionally you do get an answer, and it is the right answer, and faith is restored in the system temporarily – temporarily being the point.

I can say the overwhelming majority of people that I have dealt with inside and outside this place have been very decent and respectful. Then you have those whose confidence exceeds their intelligence. Often they are on social media, behind a fake or locked profile. We have what I call the WAF social media commentators. The ‘WA’ stands for ‘what about’; I will leave it up to members to work out what the ‘F’ stands for. They are the ones that, if you posted about a cure for cancer, would respond, ‘But what about you getting the grass cut by the local shire on the local road?’ I will give MPs a tip before I leave this place: get onto Facebook and open your settings and enter the phrase ‘what about’ in your keyword block list. That very much upsets the WAFs, I can tell you.

I will miss many of the interactions that I have had with my constituents, but I will not miss them all. Some have been frustrating, some have been funny and some have been both. I want to relay one story, and I have never forgotten this story. I was approached by a person who was straight out very aggressive initially in advising me that the wombat crossing signs on Metung Road were in the wrong place. I genuinely offered that if the wombats were not crossing there I would get the signs moved. This only enraged the woman, and she proceeded to shout that the wombats were in fact crossing between the signs. The problem was that they were on a bend where visibility was poor for drivers. The signs should be moved to the nearby straight stretch because, as she said, ‘Any idiot could tell that is a safer area for them to cross.’ While simultaneously looking around to see if one of my good mates was filming me in a set-up, I was reduced to explaining that wombats cannot read road signs. The conversation ended with her simply looking at me and asking me if I was stupid. On that count she may have been right, but she was not correct with the signs.

I will not miss the pothole complaints. I have had that many pothole complaints over a long period of time that I feel like I have developed a personal relationship with some of them. I could have invited a couple down to this valedictory. At times they get a quick fix, but within a week they are back. The approach that we have adopted with potholes reminds me a little bit of Homer Simpson fixing something with duct tape. We watching the telly know it will not last and he knows it will not last, but we sit back and admire the work. We need a new approach.

Some have said in their speeches that the toughest period in the job for them was COVID. For me it was the 2019–20 fires. Around 400 homes were lost, thousands were displaced and around 70 per cent of my electorate burnt. But it was in that time that the culture of our community was best on show. The acts of assistance and of generosity that I saw from people seeking no kudos at all put a lump in your throat and it energised you. Their resilience was just amazing.

That brings me to the first of the little whinges I want to have in this speech. My greatest concern is that from that we have not learned our lesson. Here we are just a few years later undertaking only a third of the fuel reduction burning the royal commission recommended to provide a basic level of safety. This is what some of the world's pre-eminent bushfire scientists told us we needed to do, and we have not listened. So when it happens again, and I will not be in this place, for God's sake, let us not have people coming in here and simply blaming climate change. I am certainly not a climate change denier, but when we fail to do what we are told is necessary, we cannot blame something else when the consequences we were warned about eventuate. We have had long, hot, dry summers and lightning storms for thousands of years – they are not new. The reality is simple: allow fuel loads to reach these levels and it can only end one way. There is no other outcome. The fuel reduction burning works. We saw that in 2020 when fires reached the areas and it stopped the fires in their tracks.

My second whinge is about the appalling decision to close the native timber industry. It makes no sense when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognises timber as our only carbon-storing building product – and should be our preferred building product – and that it should come, they say, from a mix of plantation and sustainably harvested native forest. Here we are as the thirst for hardwood grows because we are all told to use it, and we are importing it now from countries that have far less environmental oversight. It is stupidity at its finest, and I look forward to getting this industry back. Anyway, I just wanted to get those two issues in *Hansard* for the 39th and 43rd times, respectively, before I go.

Since announcing that I am leaving this place, a lot of people have asked me what has been the most rewarding. As I have said, we cut plenty of ribbons and we open lots of things, but my answer is simply 'When you can help someone'. We cannot solve everyone's problems, but we can help with a fair few as MPs; sometimes it is just as simple as listening. Those stories never make the newspaper or television, but they are basically the heart and soul of our jobs. Thankfully, I have had a staff that has been terrific in that area as well.

I said there will be no self-praise in this speech, but I do want to indulge myself a little. I want to mention what was my biggest win against the odds in the past 16 years, when the chances of success seemed absolutely hopeless. It was without doubt getting the member for Rowville into the Bairnsdale Secondary College hall of fame, which he thanked me for in his speech yesterday as being one of his proudest moments. But I need to provide the chamber with a bit of background. When a student at the Bairnsdale Secondary College, Speaker, his behaviour was at times much worse than he has exhibited when you have had to throw him out on multiple occasions. On this occasion many years ago, he plotted to blow up the suggestion box at the school reception. Despite detailed planning, student Wells underestimated the explosive's power. The plan was simply to blow the suggestion box off the wall, but he in fact blew out two walls. In an instant, there was nothing separating the reception from the staff room. Eyewitnesses at the school say the aftermath was reminiscent of the horrific footage we see on our TVs at night – people emerging through smoke and debris, covered in powder, with darkened faces and stunned looks of shock. It has become known locally as the 1974 Bairnsdale bombing – a very dark day in the town's history.

Members interjecting.

Tim BULL: 1975 Bairnsdale bombing. It was a dark day in the town's history that is still discussed in coffee shops and at community groups. On my election, the honourable member explained his pure bitterness at having been continually overlooked for the hall of fame, as a student who would become Treasurer and, very ironically, police minister, and he asked me to remedy this. I knew the magnitude

of the task before me. Providing funding for the new school certainly helped, but the pathway finally became clearer for the member and me when the final office staffer/survivor from 1974 passed away in 2012, 38 years after the event. That paved the way for his acceptance, and we achieved the result we were after. Colleagues, without doubt, that is my greatest achievement in this place against the odds.

On a slightly more serious note, to my staff: I have been incredibly fortunate. Gaynor has been with me since day one. Sixteen years is a long time to put up with anyone, let alone me, and she has been fantastic. Jess and Anthony have also been with me for a long time and have been terrific as well. We have made a very good team, each with their own skill set to handle the different issues. I acknowledge all the others who have been part of the office over the years, and I want to especially mention Ian Rowe. Rowey was a great staff member and a mate who we tragically lost to cancer a few years back – what a great fella. Although a long time ago now, I also want to thank my ministerial staffers and thank everyone who has worked with me and for me for being not only good staffers but also good friends.

I want to acknowledge the people that I have worked alongside. I have had three Nationals leaders: Peter Ryan, Peter Walsh and Danny O'Brien – just three; we do not change our leaders as often as some others do in this place. To all my Nats colleagues, some who are here today – some obviously in the chamber, some in the gallery – who have served alongside me over the years: many, many thanks. Taking nothing away from any other party, I think we have something very special in the Nats, a special camaraderie, and I have very much appreciated that. There have been plenty of laughs and plenty of great memories, and I cannot believe how gullible some of my colleagues have been – I am thinking about you in particular, Steph and Drummy. If anyone wants to have a good laugh and was not here in 2022, go and have a read of Steph's valedictory from then.

I also want to thank everyone from all sides for my time in Parliament. I have made some really good friendships on both sides of the chamber, and I look forward to those continuing. To my wife Kim and my children Daniel and Nikita, who are here tonight, thank you. Also to my son Lachlan, who will be – actually, that is bullshit, he will not be watching at all. To my son Lachlan, thanks. I have not always got things right, and I could have and should have been a little better at times. I know that you are probably not necessarily looking to spend a lot more time with me, but that is the challenge that you have ahead.

While I have been in this place I have lost both my parents. I miss them dearly. I hope somewhere they are looking down, and I consider myself very, very lucky to have had them both. I am the youngest and the smartest of their seven kids. We all get along very well, which can be strange in a family that big, but special thanks to my siblings, who have all stood on polling booths and helped out at different times and given great support.

I wish the very best to Gemma, who I hope will be my replacement in this place. She is an absolute ripper and will make a great MP if she gets the chance. To those members who have announced they are retiring with me at this election, I wish you all the very best with whatever comes next for you. To those who are retiring but just do not know it yet, I wish you well too. I especially want to mention my parliamentary colleagues Emma and Tim, who sits up there, and Bill, who are facing far greater battles than anything that happens in this chamber. The way you have faced your challenges is a credit to you and very inspiring.

For 16 years I have had the extraordinary privilege of representing the people of East Gippsland in this Parliament. It has been an extraordinary honour. I depart here knowing that I have not won every battle, but I have won a few, and I can say I have done my best. If you are ever in the best part of Victoria, call me or text me – those of you I like will have my mobile number – or call me for a coffee, a beer or a scotch. Better still, if you want a challenge, come and trek Kokoda with me in the coming years. Thank you all very much for your indulgence.

Members applauded.

Member for Malvern*Valedictory statement*

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (18:22): After 20 years in this place on my feet giving speeches, I finally get to my valedictory, and now I feel nervous. Maybe I am nervous because this is the last opportunity I have to use parliamentary privilege and I only have 15 minutes, but more likely any nerves are because I want to do justice to what this institution means to me. At a time when public faith in our institutions is falling I remain a staunch believer in parliamentary democracy. With all its flaws it is still the best way of ensuring that the will of the people determines how we are governed. A chamber of genuine debate and testing of opinions in full public view may sometimes be messy, but it is the price we must pay to hold accountable those who exercise power in our name. Each time I walk through the magnificent vestibule at the front of the building, first of all I remind myself how fortunate I am to be here, but I also see the quote in the mosaic tiles from the book of Proverbs:

Where no counsel is the people fall but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

That is a warning about concentrating power in too few hands, to which I will return later.

I know it is a privilege to even deliver a valedictory. Most MPs get taken out of this place by their party, by the electorate or by the Almighty, so I am pleased to be leaving on my own terms. It has been a difficult decision because I have genuinely loved this role and never taken for granted the responsibility that comes with it: to represent a community, to advocate for them, to be their champion. I will be forever grateful to the people of the Malvern electorate not just for electing me five times but for allowing me into their lives and for trusting me with their stories and their aspirations. To get to know the kids and parents at the junior sporting clubs, the veterans at the RSLs and the community groups like the Stonnington Toy Library has been a privilege. I think of the family with the special needs son who were asking for one extra year of education support but the bureaucracy would not listen or the young woman who was the victim of a VicRoads licensing stuff-up and getting her licence reinstated so she could continue driving and keep her job. They are two examples of thousands where my office and I have made a real difference, I hope, in people's lives.

Malvern may not have the glorious beaches of Nepean, the sweeping vistas of South-West Coast or the world-class golf courses of Sandringham, but we do have Chadstone shopping centre. More importantly, Malvern is full of decent, hardworking, community-minded people, and it has just been the privilege of my professional life to represent them here. I hope that Amelia Hamer, as the Liberal candidate, will have that opportunity going forward, and I wish her well and offer my full support.

I also thank the army of Malvern Liberal members and volunteers who preselected me, campaigned for me and supported me over the journey. As MPs we are the tip of the political spear, but it is our branches that provide the power behind it. I particularly acknowledge Warren Samuel, Greg Hannan and Mark Stretton, who served as chairmen of the Malvern Liberals; Julie Osborne and Stewart Stribling, who were my vice-chairs for 20 years; as well as my friends Sujay Capoor, Narelle Sheezel and Jack Cook, who managed my campaigns.

My friend the member for Gippsland East in his excellent contribution made the point that it is not for us to be talking about what we have achieved during our time here, and I will also leave that to the commentators and the historians. But I do want to note this: 2014 was my last year as Treasurer of this great state, and in 2014 Victoria's share of GST was 88 cents in the dollar. New South Wales got 98 cents, Queensland was \$1.08, and South Australia was \$1.28. It meant that we were subsidising other states to the tune of 12 cents for every dollar of GST raised here. Of course like any good Victorian Treasurer, I whinged. I whinged long and hard about it. Why should our GST be sent off to subsidise other states? It is our GST; it should stay here. I sang from the same hymn book as my good friend and predecessor the member for Rowville. But we all know what the deal is: under the grants commission formula, the economically strong states subsidise the weaker ones. Victoria had the strongest budget position, so we had to give the most. Where are we now? Today we do not get

88 cents in the dollar of GST, we get \$1.06. Victoria has gone from being an economically strong state to a mendicant one. Being subsidised by other states is not a sign of strength, it is a sign of weakness. Victoria should be a proud state, a leader. We should not need a begging bowl to be filled by the citizens of New South Wales or Queensland.

Economic strength is important because it enables us to fund the pillars of a strong society – good hospitals, safe streets, resourced schools, smooth roads. Running a balanced budget means that we pay our way. We raise today what we spend today. Massive debt means we are taking from the citizens of tomorrow – our children – to spend on ourselves today. We owe it to our children to end reckless borrowing so we do not mortgage their future any further.

The public often has the impression that the political disputes across the chamber must translate into personal animosity between MPs, but nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that while we often disagree on politics and policy, we are all motivated by wanting to make our state a better place and are prepared to put up our hands to do something about it, so that in itself gives us common ground. We are also humans in a workplace. It was a Labor MP who came to my aid one day in the parliamentary car park. I had taken a corner a little ambitiously and nudged a pole which had left bright yellow paint on my side panel. This MP taught me an old firefighter trick for removing the paint with toothpaste, which worked a treat. So I wish the Minister for Police just as much success in removing crime from our streets as removing yellow paint from my car.

It was a former Labor planning minister who sat down with me to discuss a really sensitive issue involving my electorate. We had two groups with very opposing views. The minister and I both thought that there was a sensible halfway house which would deliver the fairest outcome, but of course, as it often is in politics, you run the risk of pleasing nobody. So we worked out a solution: the minister would make the sensible decision, and if there was any local backlash, he would just blame me. The public never sees it in the theatrics of question time, but this is the type of cooperation which makes the system work.

A quick word on our press gallery. They play a vital role in keeping the public informed and keeping governments and oppositions on our toes. They do not get it right all the time any more than do we. But I have always valued their work and our interactions over the years. However, if you want any greater example of how one journalist can change the course of events, I give you Nick McKenzie. Without his exceptional work on the ‘Building bad’ series exposing corruption, bullying, criminality and rorting on the Big Build, Victoria would look very different. It is funny, when you see Nick McKenzie’s name and number flash up on your phone, it is like seeing a police car in your rear-vision mirror at the lights. You know you have not done anything wrong, but you are nervous anyway. And that is a testament to the impact that investigative journalism, at its best, represents.

If Parliament does not function effectively, then executive power is unchecked. During my time here we saw not just debate shut down but even Parliament itself. It was not that long ago when a Premier, a handful of ministers and an unelected health bureaucrat were literally confining us to our homes, closing our kids’ schools and keeping us separated from family and friends. I fear there are long-term mental health consequences flowing from those lockdowns that will, in particular, affect the generation of children who lived through it. Whether you agreed or disagreed with the measures taken – and people of good conscience can differ on that question – I hope that such power will never again be exercised without proper parliamentary scrutiny.

A valedictory speech can sometimes feel like the reading of a will and who gets what. Many years ago with Martin Pakula I was proud to co-found the Spring Street Blues, a group of Carlton-supporting MPs. Now I hand over the reins to my fellow Blue-bagger and member of the O’Brien faction, the Leader of the Nationals. Danny, I could not deliver a Carlton flag over 20 years here, so I hope that you have better luck than me. I am also proud to be co-chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Ireland with the Deputy Premier. Now, Gab is left, I am right; she is Sinn Féin, I am Fine Gael. But somehow it works well. My friend in the other place Mr Mulholland will hopefully step up in my absence.

A shout-out to my staff over the years: whether in my electorate office, my ministerial and Treasurer's offices or the opposition leader's office, I had – and have – such a talented crew of people who not only had my back but shared my passion for good public policy and making Melbourne and Victoria a better place. As an MP and a minister your staff are your ambassadors, and I thought I had the best diplomatic corps in Spring Street. Thank you for putting up with my grammar pedantry and my occasional grumpiness after a Carlton loss and for advising me on my fashion choices, even if that advice was not always accepted – and I do see Byron Hodgkinson and Luke Tobin in the gallery tonight. To my current staff Lucy Chua-Huggins, Mia Davies-Zimmerman and Tom Hall, my sincere thanks. To the three chiefs of staff I had – Darren Disney, Brett Hogan and Mitch Grayson – my enduring gratitude.

To all the parliamentary staff who make this place function despite the efforts of MPs who just get in the way, please know how much your efforts are genuinely appreciated. To our Clerk Bridget Noonan: thank you for your sage advice over the years. And, Speaker, to your assistant Tom Bennett, can I thank him for being the only person here with whom I can obsessively discuss the fortunes of our beloved Celtic Football Club?

Gabrielle Williams interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Sorry – you too, Gab. I have been blessed to share the past 20 years or so with many great colleagues in the Liberal and Nationals parliamentary parties, and I am even more fortunate that so many of them are great friends. If Parliament is a footy field – and it feels like that sometimes – we have run onto the ground together. We have shared the highs and lows and the bumps and bruises and we have given as good as we got. To my Liberal colleagues: you gave me the honour of leading you, and for that I will always be grateful. To my good friends who stayed the course during the difficult times, including my deputy the member for Eildon and the member for Sandringham, you will never know how much that meant. To premiers Ted Baillieu and Denis Napthine, who entrusted me to serve Victorians as a minister and Treasurer, thank you for the confidence that you showed in me. Being a minister is the most extraordinary responsibility, but it is also the most extraordinary opportunity to shape Victoria for the better, and I do hope that shortly some of my colleagues on this side will know what that is like, because Victoria does need a fresh start.

To the Leader of the Opposition: Jess, I am sorry, but I have not had a single moment of regret since announcing my decision to retire at the election. But the closest I have come has been seeing you flourish in what I know to be the worst job in politics. I know the member for Kew. I know she has the judgement, the intellect, the empathy, the energy and the vision to be a truly great leader of this state, and I hope that Victorians vote to give her that opportunity.

Can I thank my friends from outside politics who (a) have bothered to stay friends with me and (b) never hesitated to keep me grounded. I am very fortunate to have friends who happily remind me of their view that the title 'The Honourable' is ironic. To my golfing friends, aka the Mooseters, no longer will I be able to meet the challenge of having them nominate a silly word or phrase for me to use in *Hansard* or at a press conference – those days have been milked.

To those who have been my friends from the start of my political journey at the Melbourne Uni Liberal Club, including Rochelle Pattison, Katherine Forrest and Scott Ryan, who are here today, my gratitude. And to all those who have given me support, help or hope – some of whom are in the gallery today, including Michael Burke – my sincere thanks.

When I gave my maiden speech in this place 20 years ago, my daughter Eleanor was a toddler and my son Reagan was a baby in my wife Michelle's arms. Now my children are 22 and 20, university students making their way in the world and making Michelle and me proud every day. It is a measure of how much time has passed and why I have decided that now is the right time to depart. I am incredibly proud to be your dad. This job has produced some good times and some not-so-good times

for us as a family, but everything I have tried to do is so that you and your generation can inherit a better Victoria. I do not know if I have achieved that, but I have tried every day.

Michelle is not just a wonderful mum who was there when I could not be. She is a great wife and supports me as well as being a highly accomplished lawyer. She is so smart that she prefers to avoid the spotlight, which is why I often rolled out our two dogs, Bonny and Brandy, for media photo shoots back in the day, because every MP looks better next to a cute puppy. Michelle, I love you and thank you more than you could know for allowing me to serve and supporting me to do so while excelling in your own career.

To my brother Conor: I appreciate your advice and counsel over the years. Some of it I have even accepted. But you are a good and loyal brother, and I have loved having you in my corner.

To my mum Toni: thank you for every sacrifice that you made when I was young that gave me the opportunity to be standing here today. Bringing up two boys single-handed, especially me and my brother, must have been an ordeal, but I hope that you know how much I love you and appreciate all that you have done.

I have loved serving. I know I have done my best. I hope I have done some good. To our Parliament: in the words of Victoria's coat of arms, I wish you peace and I wish you prosperity.

Members applauded.

Bills

Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:41): I did need a little bit of a break, so I am very happy to return with 7½ minutes to go.

Brad Battin interjected.

Gary MAAS: Yes, indeed, member for Berwick. I am happy to continue in making my contribution in support of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. Where we left off in my last instalment was with the office of the special prosecutor. Importantly, a royal commission does not have the power to charge or prosecute anyone. It can compel evidence and make findings, but it cannot put people before a court. So this bill will provide the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria with a specialist, someone who is dedicated and embedded to work in real time so there is a resource there as evidence of misconduct may be uncovered.

The office of the special prosecutor will ensure the commission has access to all the information and evidence it needs to do that job and act on the findings as well. The special prosecutor will be independent of government, a critical aspect to public confidence in this body of work. Its functions are to work cooperatively with the royal commission to refer any information to Victoria Police, IBAC, the regulatory and licensing authorities and any other relevant Victorian, interstate, territory and Commonwealth body for investigatory, prosecutorial or regulatory action. This will be supported by a regulated flow of information between the office of the special prosecutor and the royal commission. The bill will commence on the day after it receives royal assent.

Together these reforms will enable the commission to carry out its duties in accordance with its objectives and the terms of reference. In terms of the power to compel production of information, the bill also broadens the Victorian royal commission to allow stronger powers to require people to provide information or written statements outside of hearings. Currently a royal commission can only require someone to hand over documents or give evidence at a hearing. This is an important aspect to

the bill that prohibits people from thinking they are above the law or cannot undergo scrutiny simply because information has not been documented. This clause is already present in Commonwealth royal commissions. It helps alleviate any unnecessary costs or delays and helps uncover important information that might otherwise not be explored, because we know that Victorians want to see this dealt with properly, thoroughly and quickly.

We are pulling all of our levers as a government to investigate and strengthen regulatory bodies so that they do have the powers that are needed to hold those who may be involved in corrupt activity to account. Our major construction works have been incredible landmarks of this state government, and they have made inroads into the growth and the connectivity across the state. This has been a really great thing in all of our communities. From roads and houses to our public transport network, it has been transformative for Victoria in that time. But we have to be clear: this kind of dodgy behaviour by some bad actors will not be tolerated on those building sites and in the construction sector, and that must be stamped out. That is why we are going hard on this and giving regulators the money, time and powers that they need. This builds on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, which has also been introduced in Parliament this week, giving IBAC the follow-the-money powers to trace public funds and amending the definition of 'corrupt conduct' so that IBAC can investigate. Once passed, these laws will come in with immediate effect.

To conclude, I will say that Victorians can be confident that the royal commission does have the scope and does have the resources as well as the powers that it needs to provide answers that Victorians truly deserve. It has been welcomed by integrity experts, stakeholders and some of our most hardened journalists, who are holding power to account. The only people really complaining about this royal commission so far are those opposite, who are saying that the terms of reference are too narrow or that it is not really serious or genuine. But let us take a look at a few of those points in the terms of reference, which permit the commission to look at the conduct of anyone that is engaged in corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct. It is any conduct that is corrupt, is criminal or that is undertaken for illegitimate purposes, and it is any other matters the commission considers relevant. The terms are extraordinarily broad in their scope, as they absolutely should be. It seems that the only ones that do not subscribe to that view are those who are seated opposite.

In addition to a budget of \$50 million, the government is also giving the commission even more powers and resources to complete that really significant work. A re-elected Carroll government will also legislate to give the special prosecutor further powers to ensure wrongdoers will face those consequences. While we are here actually taking action, trying to restore trust and confidence in our construction industry, there are those opposite who somehow just seem to always keep yelling from the bleachers, always continually opposing. This legislation will clean up our worksites. It will benefit workers, it will improve accountability for all Victorians and it will improve the daily conditions while restoring integrity and pride to an industry. I commend this bill to the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (18:49): I also rise this evening to address this bill, the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. I think it is absolutely extraordinary, frankly, to hear some of the contributions on this bill by members of the government. It is almost like in the last few days they have woken up to the fact that there are issues on Victorian government Big Build sites. It is almost like they have woken up and thought, 'Oh, gee, hold on, it's important for us to consider integrity when it comes to the spending of Victorian taxpayer money in this state on Big Build projects,' and it is extraordinary from this perspective.

It should be a fundamental tenet of anyone who has the great privilege to serve in this place to treat Victorian taxpayers money with respect. The issues that Labor's royal commission will, I hope, expose – should it get off the ground before the caretaker period and should the royal commission have the ability to expose the truth of some of the allegations that have been made, if that is actually allowed to occur – have not just happened in the last little while. Some of these allegations have been known for some time. Some of these allegations have been known for many years. I think that they are extraordinary allegations – allegations which really should have been looked at, considered and

mitigated much, much earlier than the current time. That would have been the right thing to do. That would have been the respectful thing to do. But in the instance of the present moment, that has not been the case, and that is a great, great shame.

On this side of the house we have already released a plan, not only for a fair dinkum royal commission, specifying a number of witnesses that should and would appear at a royal commission, but we took the lead on this some time ago. It is a great shame, again, that the Labor government has been somewhat dragged into it kicking and screaming and that it took the demise of one Premier and the elevation of another to read the tea leaves and to understand the sentiment of the Victorian people – that the fact that these allegations of \$15 billion of union corruption has been unearthed by the Queensland commission of inquiry is completely and utterly unacceptable. Now, it did take the leadership of the Crisafulli government in Queensland for these allegations to receive the profile that they have received. To the Premier in that state and to his government, a good government in Queensland, I am grateful, and I am sure my colleagues, certainly on this side of the house, are grateful. I am sure the majority of the Victorian people are grateful, because it is only because of that circumstance in which it took a Queensland government to reveal some of the corruption that has taken place on Victorian government building sites for this to be a live discussion now in this state.

I agree wholeheartedly with the proposed amendment moved by the member for Brighton to, as has been the case with the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, amend the Inquiries Act 2014, as the house is considering at the minute, in conjunction with clause 4 to remove public interest immunity as a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with a royal commission requirement, including by repealing section 18(2)(c) and making consequential amendments as required. This would ensure that new written information power cannot be resisted on that basis and would implement the substance of recommendation 91 of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants. Let me unearth that for those watching at home, and I am sure there are a multitude of them: that means that government ministers cannot simply hide behind a cabinet-in-confidence classification for information not to be made available and not to be considered. I think that is absolutely and utterly important.

The fact of the matter is this: the information or the suggestion or the allegation that there has been corruption on Victoria's Big Build has been there for some time. Set aside that fact for a moment; it has been known, and it has been known by many people. So if it has been known and it has been known by many people, as demonstrated through a recent senate estimates inquiry held federally in Canberra – evidence was given in that forum that there were in fact Victorian bureaucrats who understood that corruption had taken place on these Big Build sites here in Victoria – what has the executive arm of the government done about it?

If there was an opportunity for ministers to correct this circumstance, why didn't they? If there was a circumstance where ministers were not informed of these things that were known by others in the Victorian bureaucracy and certainly in the federal bureaucracy, then why weren't ministers informed? I think these are all valid questions that do deserve answers. Now of course we on this side support transparency and we support integrity. We do not think that that is a negotiable when it comes to the administration of public funds in this state, and it should never be a negotiable when it comes to the administration of public funds in this state, and for that reason we will support this bill. But I do commend the amendment proposed by the member for Brighton to the house and to the government especially in this particular circumstance. It is an indication from the opposition that we also intend to propose this amendment in the other place. Fair warning to those members of the other place that this amendment will also likely be coming their way for consideration.

I genuinely think, though, that the circumstance in Victoria is this. There is a saying, and I am sure you are familiar with it, Deputy Speaker: a fish rots from the head. My concern is this: no matter what band-aids this government apply at this point in time and no matter what handkerchief they propose to cover up the sins which are alleged to have been committed by them or by others, it is simply not good enough. I say that because I believe, and I am prepared to assert during the course of this debate, that

whatever has happened or not happened, whoever knew or did not know and whatever was done or could have been done or was not done to enable the circumstance where hardworking Victorian taxpayers money has been rorted in this state, fundamentally the circumstance that has enabled that has been a cultural circumstance built up and championed in many ways over the last 12 years of this Labor government. I think there is only one solution to this that will give Victorians an absolute assurance that the sunlight will again be shone on these circumstances, that the truth of the matter will be revealed and that those who have done wrong either by commission or omission will be brought to justice and will be held accountable. The only way to achieve that outcome is with a change of government on 28 November this year.

For this side of politics integrity is a non-negotiable. For my own part as the Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, the alternative Minister for Industrial Relations, I am quite proud of the work that we have done under the leadership of the former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Hawthorn, who initiated this work in the first place. The establishment of Construction Enforcement Victoria is a stated policy of ours – one that we are serious about and one about which we have actually brought forward legislation to this place and sought an opportunity to introduce, which was denied by the government. A change of government is coming and a fresh start is coming, and that is the only way that integrity will be restored in this state.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (18:59): I rise to support the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. It is a fairly simple proposition: if crime, corruption or misconduct has occurred on government-funded construction sites in Victoria, then Victorians deserve to know what happened, how it happened, who was responsible and what needs to change so that it cannot happen again. If wrongdoing is uncovered, then there must be consequences. The Premier's very first act on taking office was to call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt the member. She will have the call when the matter returns to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Police resources

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:00): (1829) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to give Victoria Police the powers and tools they are asking for to deal with repeat offenders, to keep our community safe. Crime is no longer something regional Victorians simply watch on the Melbourne news. It is happening in Warrnambool, Portland, Heywood and Terang, and people are frightened. Last week two males approximately 16 years of age entered Coles supermarket in Warrnambool. I am told they are well known to staff for regularly stealing and abusing workers, despite having been banned from the store. On this occasion, when they were asked to leave, the abuse escalated. A man in his 50s intervened. He was not looking for trouble. In fact he was a hero. He simply told them to stop abusing the staff, and what he got for that was attacked. It was captured on CCTV. I am told there was blood everywhere and the man was admitted to hospital with suspected broken bones. Police and an ambulance were called, and staff were visibly shaken. I am also told that only weeks earlier a staff member had a knife pulled on her. Staff say threatening and abusive behaviour is now occurring weekly.

Victoria Police are doing everything they can. Officers regularly walk through the supermarket and respond when called. The problem is not our police. The problem is a system that has tied their hands and created a culture in which repeat offenders believe there are no consequences. Under the youth justice framework overseen by this Victorian Labor government, police must consider a hierarchy of

responses: first time, no action; second time, a verbal warning; third offence, a formal youth caution; and fourth, and only then, progressing to criminal action. What message does it send our offenders if they can offend repeatedly, be arrested and then high-five each other as they leave the police station? Yes, these young men were released.

Victorians deserve better. Under a Jess Wilson Liberal government we will establish a specialist court of criminal appeal to ensure serious offenders are met with serious consequences to reflect community expectations. We will strengthen bail laws and restore the simple message that if you do the crime, you will do the time. We will recruit 3000 police, fill the 1500 current vacancies and keep police stations open. Shockingly and worryingly, there is only one police station between Geelong and the South Australian border open 24 hours a day, and that is in Warrnambool – only one. Our police cannot protect communities without the laws, resources and support they need. After more than a decade, Victoria needs a fresh start, and under the Liberals that is exactly what we will deliver.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members about titles.

Bemin Secondary College

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:03): (1830) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the stage 2 works at Bemin Secondary College. Only Labor backs families in Truganina. Only Labor is delivering world-class education facilities for each and every single child in Melbourne's west. We built Truganina's first high school, and now we are upgrading it. Bemin Secondary College is one of 121 schools that Labor has built here in Victoria. It is one of the 20 schools that we have built in Wyndham alone. Thanks to our government's decision to invest in and build an education precinct in Truganina's north, this school has not one but two campuses. That means more capacity for kids to receive that world-class education in modern facilities. Now we are getting on with delivering the next stage of works for this much-loved school in my electorate. Labor is investing a further \$37 million to deliver stage 2 of this local school. This means more classrooms and more learning facilities for our kids. It means a new arts and technology building, hardcourts for sports and a sports field for the junior campus – finally. That is what this investment means for students at Truganina. These are not trivial investments. They are not nice-to-haves. For students at Bemin these are the important features a school needs so they can receive the best education possible.

Investments like this are only possible because of our Labor government. We value education, we back in our schools time and time again and we understand the value of investments exactly like this one. We build schools. We upgrade schools. We do not close them. We make sure our students have breakfast. We make sure they do not go without. We back in our teachers with well-paid jobs. We do not sack them as part of a \$40 billion cut to the state budget. And we back in programs that help our kids thrive, which is why we have some of the best NAPLAN results in the country. It is because Victoria is the Education State. You do not get these outcomes through cuts to education, you get them through funding our schools, and that is exactly what our government has done and what we are doing with Bemin Secondary College.

Waste and recycling management

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:05): (1831) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is to address the growing rubbish and illegal dumping issue on major state highways, particularly on the Calder Highway between Mildura and Ouyen and also on the Sunraysia and Mallee highways. I have been contacted numerous times, particularly over the last couple of months, with regard to the amount of rubbish that is being left at roadside stops. A lot of these stops – in fact all of these – do not have toilet facilities, and it has got to the point where there is human waste and toilet paper being left on the side of the road at these stops, despite Mildura and Ouyen only being about an hour apart. They also contain huge amounts of what appears to be illegal dumping – mattresses and household waste. But also, the bins that are there are regular street bins; they are not adequate. We obviously need to address this problem sooner rather than later.

I did go for a drive on Friday night to check on the situation myself. It appeared bins had been emptied, but the clean-up had not occurred. It is unsanitary. It is unsafe. It is also a hazard when the winds start to blow, and in our neck of the woods in October the winds are fierce, so to have dirty toilet paper and rubbish flying around is highly unsafe for road users along that stretch of highway, where the speed limit is 110. Also, it just looks awful. So my adjournment matter is for the roads and road safety minister to address that growing issue of illegal roadside dumping and rubbish.

Northern Bay College

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:07): (1832) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action that I seek is an update on how works at Northern Bay College's Hendy campus are progressing. There was a fire in October 2024 which badly damaged the admin building and classrooms at this beautiful school, and while the fire was devastating, it truly brought out the best of our Corio community. The school community truly came together during this challenging time. Students were quickly relocated to another campus with no interruption to their learning. I want to thank the teachers, staff, parents, families and of course the incredible students at Hendy campus for everything they did to get through this as a community. I am really proud that this state Labor government is going to be rebuilding the buildings at Northern Bay College's Hendy campus. Labor backs our local schools, and I cannot wait to see this school rebuilt.

Mount Eliza Secondary College

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (19:08): (1833) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is that the minister commit funding towards the full redevelopment of Mount Eliza Secondary College, where the facilities are now mostly 51 years old. Mount Eliza Secondary College needs a comprehensive redevelopment to keep up with the needs of its students, parents, teachers and more. The school is one of only two public secondary schools within my electorate. Around 800 students rely on it as the school that they are able to access, yet large parts of the school grounds are chronically under-resourced, with dilapidated facilities and more. Most of the classrooms are over 50 years old and ageing visibly. Many fixtures have also been due for repair since at least 2000. The main school gym and drama centre are underequipped and underlit, providing only minimal opportunities for students, and it was not too long ago that parents and school community leaders expressed urgent concerns about the growing presence of black mould, peeling paint, falling plaster and much more lining the interiors of students' learning environments. This pattern of neglect is obviously unacceptable.

This is an issue that I have been conscious of and working to advocate for since I was actually first elected as a federal member of Parliament way back in 2016, and I have worked hand in hand with the school community in advocating for this school. I have firmly advocated in this regard for further improvements. Whether it was repeatedly raising this in Parliament, in my maiden speech, with ministers directly or in parliamentary speeches to this day, after years of community and political advocacy, the state finally allocated just short of \$500,000 to Mount Eliza Secondary College recently. This went to the refurbishment of student toilet facilities and crucial safety and wellbeing upgrades, but it did not go very far. We have also seen recently the construction of Mount Eliza Secondary College's new STEM facilities using federal funding, something that I advocated for when I was a federal MP. However, this is not sufficient to address many years of neglect and non-investment. The school needs a government willing to implement an actual plan. The Liberals and Nationals showed our commitment last election in May 2022 when we pledged \$2.5 million for a senior students learning centre, but this commitment was not matched at the time by the Labor government. Ex-student leaders Jimmy and Chelsea raised with me their concerns about the ageing facilities at the time and launched a petition, which gained nearly 900 signatures. Now the new school council have launched a new petition, which has garnered many hundreds of signatures already. They need a dedicated wellbeing facility. They need a senior learning and drama centre. They need a master plan for a redevelopment.

East Werribee precinct

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:11): (1834) My adjournment is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me in the East Werribee precinct, which is a priority precinct for our state. There has been a lot of investment already, but there is more to do. We have invested in Werribee Mercy Hospital duplicating the emergency department. We have contributed to the Wyndham law courts, which is the largest law courts complex outside the CBD, as well as the Wyndham police complex, which is also the largest police complex outside the CBD. We have upgraded the Hoppers Crossing station and removed three level crossings. We have built the Wyndham Tech School. We have upgraded just down the road the Werribee Open Range Zoo, and we have put the elephants there too with some of the most enormous pools I have ever seen in my life. Please do not go swimming there, punters. And finally, we have just this year opened the Ngurruga specialist school as well as Yurran P-9. Next year we will open the Yurran campus fully as well as the kinder onsite. So, Minister, we have more to do there, we have been investing a lot, and I look forward to you joining me.

Arts sector support

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (19:12): (1835) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries. Minister, last week more than 100 people from across the arts came together to discuss the state of the sector. These people define our collective identity and they bring colour and joy and deep connection to Victorians. Making and experiencing art in all its forms is part of what human beings need to live a decent life. If economics is your language, let me put it in this way: the arts employ more people than there are teachers in Victoria, they generate more income than the mining sector and they attract bigger audiences than the AFL. Our governments have a responsibility to fund the arts as a public good. But I have heard from across the sector that the arts in Victoria are in deep crisis. It is becoming harder to make work, let alone a living, and it is no surprise. The state government has cut key funding for the arts by 35 per cent in real terms in the last five years, and Victoria is now the second-last of all states and territories for per person expenditure on the arts and culture.

These cuts are not because Victoria cannot afford to fund the arts; budgets are about choices. Labor cut funding to arts organisations to just \$59 million over four years. The same government spent six times that upgrading the corporate building at the grand prix for lobbyists to watch the Formula One. Exhibiting spaces are shutting down all across Victoria, but do you know which exhibition the government spent \$30 million on? The Land Forces weapons expo. For the sum of \$130,000 the Victorian Labor government created a new taxpayer-funded part-time role for a weapons lobbyist for a former Labor MP. It is hard not to look at Labor defunding Writers Victoria for a similar amount and wonder if that is where the savings went. Melbourne used to be the cultural capital. Now it has declared itself the defence state.

The Greens want different choices. We want to tax the big corporations their fair share to pay for the things that we all need, because everyone deserves to have rich cultural experiences. That is why we are pushing for a living wage for artists, to increase and index funding to the arts, to protect our art spaces and venues, to keep live music alive and to protect artists from censorship and AI. Industry leaders are telling me that the Victorian Labor government has nothing to offer for the arts this election. The action that I seek is a concrete plan to make us once again the cultural capital.

Drug harm reduction

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (19:15): (1836) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and the action I seek is for the minister to prohibit registered tobacco retailers from selling nitrous oxide products, known as nangs. Members in this place will be aware that nitrous oxide is a medical analgesic, a legitimate one, but it is used recreationally and it is used recreationally a lot in Preston and Reservoir, and the public health evidence shows that there are significant risks attached with that use. To be clear, it is not by any means the most dangerous

recreational drug. But the coroner reported in 2025 on the tragic death of a 26-year-old man identified in the coroner's report as RBJ, who died in Elsternwick in 2023 from nitrous oxide suffocation. I might just quote from the coroner's report:

RBJ is remembered as a beautiful, caring and loving young man ...

...

RBJ loved computers and was great at building and programming them.

As someone who shares those or certainly shared those enthusiasms, I think of RBJ and the tragic case of his death and the effect it of course would have had on his family and loved ones.

I note the coroner's reporting of the risks of nitrous oxide in that case and the identification of 11 other cases this century where nitrous oxide has been associated with someone's passing. Eight of them have occurred in the last five years. In addition, I note the coroner's recommendation that our government look into stronger regulations of nitrous oxide, such as those found in South Australia or those that are due to commence in New South Wales as a result of some changes introduced by the Minns government in November of this year.

For a long time the challenge with regulating the retail sales of nitrous oxide has been that of course there are legitimate uses of it associated with food preparation, but we all know that the common model that we see is sold in convenience stores alongside legal tobacco, sometimes illegal tobacco, confectionery, energy drinks and sometimes vapes. We all know that model, and I think we do have an opportunity to disrupt that particular model and at least curtail some of the sales of nangs in those convenience stores through our important tobacco licensing reforms. We now have an enforcement regime. We have an inspection regime. We are building that out, and we thus have the opportunity to make it a condition of holding those tobacco licences that people do not sell nitrous oxide products. We will do that primarily, I think, because of the important health reasons that I have set out and the tragic case that I touched upon, but also for environmental and amenity reasons. The nitrous oxide canisters are hard to dispose of as well. But as I say, primarily for health reasons, I put forward this particular suggestion to the minister, and I thank him and his department for their consideration.

Winchelsea Primary School

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:18): (1837) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek from the minister is an immediate update on the condition and financial support coming the way of the Winchelsea Primary School. I have mentioned the Winchelsea Primary School a few times in this place. It is a great little school under the wonderful stewardship of principal Nick Keating and a wonderful and active parents group in a little community that is growing rapidly. The school, in the recent Department of Education condition report, is of the poorest quality in the state in terms of upkeep and maintenance at the school. It is a real shame. It is in part a historic building. It is well located and much loved by the community. Simple things such as safe fencing around it are needed.

The Winchelsea Primary School is located on the Princes Highway, which has dual lanes. There are four lanes of traffic and a set of traffic lights. It is one of the only schools I can think of in the state that does not have the 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zone at the front during active school times. The fencing around it does not keep the children in. In fact over half the schoolyard is out of bounds for the kids because it has only got very old low fencing. It is broken in parts. It is not secure. It is simply not good enough. Basic maintenance – painting, spouting, rat and possum infestation – are all issues rampant in this school. The fact is that the Surf Coast Shire has identified Winchelsea as an area of great growth. They are expecting to more than treble the size of the township over the coming decade. It will need more learning spaces. It will need more opportunities.

In fact, if good planning was afoot with the education department, they would look at the nearby community of Bannockburn and make similar arrangements for a future P-12 site. These are all items that have been put to the minister and the department by the school and the school community as

sensible, long-term planning, but in the short term, Minister, the school desperately needs its safety fencing around the property so that the children are safe from the highway. It desperately needs some painting and basic maintenance. It needs that care and attention, because with such a great principal and school community, they deserve what so many other students in the state have when they attend primary school every day. Into the future, Minister, we really want to hear what the department has planned for the future P-12 educational needs of the Winchelsea community.

Waste and recycling management

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (19:21): (1838) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Many of my constituents are increasingly frustrated and angered by the persistent problem of illegal dumping along arterial roads such as Somerton Road. A small number of offenders continue to use our shared public spaces as dumping grounds, causing environmental harm and significantly impacting both community amenity and the local environment. Last week the Premier and I announced that only the re-elected Carroll Labor government will duplicate Somerton Road from Greenvale to Roxburgh Park Drive, widening this vital arterial from two lanes to six lanes. So many residents have welcomed this great news, as this major upgrade will also eliminate many illegal dumping hotspots and improve lighting along Somerton Road, which will further diminish opportunities for the antisocial few who continue to dump their waste in our shared spaces. The action I seek from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety this evening is to inform me how the Department of Transport and Planning is working with other agencies like the EPA to combat illegal dumping along arterial roads like Somerton Road and to ensure that our roads are safe, well maintained and cleared of illegally dumped rubbish.

Responses

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:22): I would like to begin by acknowledging the concerns of the member for the South-West Coast, a good friend of mine. That member raised concerns about powers and tools police have at their disposal, particularly for youth crime. As I have previously said in this house, community safety is this government's top priority, and crime is generally down across Victoria by up to 3 per cent for general offences and 6 per cent for youth offending. More people are being jailed, not bailed, right now, but we know there is always more to do, whether it be in cities or regions, and that is why we are backing the Chief Commissioner of Police to do what he needs to do to ensure a plan for a safer Victoria through a new-look Victoria Police. Some of the things we have done in recent history include bringing on that adult time for violent crime, delivering Australia's toughest bail laws, backing the chief commissioner's plan to get more police out from behind desks onto streets, putting more than 3600 additional police onto our streets, recently committing \$170 million for a new organised crime command directly overseen by the chief commissioner and standing up the violence reduction unit as well. We have also seen aggravated burglary drop 22 per cent and general robbery down about 15 per cent.

We have also, in the recent few weeks, decided that we need to recruit additional reservists, so there will be 200 reservists recruited, bringing the total up to 400, and they will be filling station counters to get fully sworn officers out on the beat. We have also funded an additional 200 PSOs and changed their regulations so that those PSOs can be utilised by the chief commissioner in wider areas in shopping malls and street strips and stuff like that as well. We have doubled the academy intake, adding 650 recruits a year and taking trainee numbers to 1300 annually. We have backed up the regions, importantly, with a new academy at Mildura, which will soon be training up to 100 recruits a year, plus another academy in Gippsland as well.

Jade Benham interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I can hear the excitement in the member for Mildura's voice. There is also a campaign starting soon, for which I can give everyone in the house the hot tip: the Made for More campaign, plus online entrance exam exemptions and a shorter 25-week training program will soon

start. We know that there are over 9000 people who have applied to become police officers quite recently as well. With that, I think I have acquitted that question.

The member for Laverton raised an adjournment matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education about school upgrades. The member for Mildura raised an issue for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding illegal dumping. The member for Lara mentioned in her adjournment a school that was damaged by a fire, and I think I have heard about this school before. The school was damaged by fire. She has got an amazingly resilient school community who carried on, and the member for Lara wants an update on how we are supporting that community right now.

The member for Mornington had an adjournment for the Minister for Education regarding the amazing Mount Eliza Secondary College. The member for Point Cook had an adjournment matter for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts. I think that adjournment was to join the member at the East Werribee precinct, was it?

Mathew Hilakari: Yes.

Paul EDBROOKE: Fantastic. I do not mind if I would as well. The member for Richmond raised an issue for the Minister for Creative Industries. The member for Preston raised an issue for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation regarding nitrous oxide and some of the terrible circumstances surrounding misuse of nitrous oxide and abuse of it. The member for Polwarth had an adjournment matter for the Minister for Education regarding an update on Winchelsea Primary School. The member for Greenvale had an adjournment for the roads and road safety minister regarding illegal dumping on Somerton Road. I will refer those adjournments on to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stay classy, Victoria. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:27 pm.