



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 10 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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Thursday 10 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 62 and 77 to 90 and orders of the day 1 and 2, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Notice given.

The SPEAKER: A further notice?

Will Fowles: No. I did not hear you say ‘Introduction of bills’, because there was so much noise in the chamber, and I am seeking to introduce a bill. I was listening. I did not hear it. There was noise in the chamber. I am not even sure that your microphone was on.

The SPEAKER: I am sorry, member for Ringwood, I cannot go back to introduction of bills. My apologies, but I did actually say it.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, when you say you cannot go back, I think there is a discretion available to the Chair on this. There were a lot of people chatting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Ringwood, if you would like to come and speak to me afterwards on the introduction of bills, we will have a conversation about that. My apologies, member for Ringwood. This is not a point of order.

Will Fowles: I am seeking clarification on a ruling from the Chair.

The SPEAKER: This is not a point of order. I have advised you that I will have clarification on the question that you are asking me in my chambers when I have finished in the chair.

Further notice given.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, I move, by leave:

That I introduce a bill –

The SPEAKER: We have not quite got to motions by leave yet, member for Ringwood. We are in the middle of notices.

Will Fowles: I appreciate that, but I can move by leave at any time to move anything.

The SPEAKER: I ask you to resume your seat until I call for motions by leave.

Further notice given.***Documents*****Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee – Report 2024–25

Local Jobs First – Report 2025–26

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 – SR 120

Racing Act 1958 – SR 121.

*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) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended today to allow the Speaker to interrupt business at 4 pm and the member for Shepparton to make a valedictory statement for a maximum of 15 minutes.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Motions by leave**

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That I introduce a bill for an act to require the installation and maintenance of automated external defibrillators in certain buildings, places and vehicles and for other purposes.

Leave refused.

Will FOWLES: I move, by leave:

That we suspend so much of standing and sessional orders as to allow the Chair to once again call for the tabling of acts.

Leave refused.

Will FOWLES: I move, by leave:

That this house directs the Chair to return to the matter of tabling of bills.

Leave refused.

The SPEAKER: Following advice I have received from the Clerk, I will allow the introduction of a bill.

*Bills***Automated External Defibrillators (Public Access) Bill 2026***Introduction*

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:40): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to require the installation and maintenance of automated external defibrillators in certain buildings, places and vehicles and for other purposes.

I rise in support of this motion that the bill be introduced and debated. This is a procedural question. I am glad that we have the opportunity to debate it. The house is not being asked today to pass the bill. It is not being asked to endorse every provision or even to reach a final view on its merits. It is simply being asked to allow the bill to be introduced, made available to members and considered through the ordinary parliamentary process. That distinction matters, but members should also understand why this bill deserves the opportunity to be heard. The principle behind it is straightforward: automated external defibrillators save lives. We know this. Ambulance Victoria tells us that early defibrillation is critical, that anyone can use an AED and that every minute matters when someone suffers a cardiac arrest. Around 21 Victorians suffer a cardiac arrest every day. Ambulance Victoria's latest data shows that when patients are first shocked using a public AED 63 per cent survive. Where there is no bystander CPR or AED use, survival is just 7 per cent. That is not a marginal difference, it is the difference between someone going home to their family and never going home at all.

The problem is that an AED can only save a life if it is there when it is needed. A defibrillator locked away in a building across town is no help to somebody whose heart has stopped. A defibrillator that nobody can find is no help. A defibrillator that is inaccessible when a venue is full of people is no help at all. This bill responds to that practical reality. It would require AEDs to be installed where Victorians actually are: in schools and tertiary institutions, retirement villages and residential care facilities, caravan parks, large commercial buildings, theatres, concert halls, sporting venues and other designated places. These are places where Victorians learn, work, exercise, gather and live. They are places that can accommodate hundreds or thousands of people. They are places where sooner or later a cardiac arrest will occur. The bill would also require AEDs in key emergency services vehicles, putting life-saving equipment in the hands of people who may arrive before an ambulance. Cardiac arrest happens suddenly. It can happen to anyone of any age or level of fitness, often without warning – in fact perhaps typically without warning. When it happens, there is no time to wait until the defibrillator can be brought from somewhere else. The equipment must already be there.

To speakers following me in this debate: please do not insult the intelligence of this house by saying that the motions on the notice paper are more important than the debate on this bill. They are not, so please do not insult our intelligence. Get up, own the position, say ‘We’re the government. We get to do what we want’ – say that – but please do not pretend that the motions on the notice paper are more important than the installation of automated external defibrillators, which save lives. There is nothing on the notice paper that is a life-saving matter, and for that reason I think it is very, very important that we have this debate, that we consider this bill, that we do the work of this house in the name of Victorians.

An independent member representing a community is able to do more than just simply comment on proposals brought forward by the government. Non-government members can and should identify ideas that deserve to be considered by the house. This is one such idea. It is worthy of consideration. I know that members of the government and that members of the opposition are privately supportive of this measure, so why not at least have the debate rather than burning the day on sledge motions or other rubbish that is just there to run down the clock? Why not have a substantive debate about a matter that actually affects the lives of Victorians? There are genuinely life-saving measures contained within this bill, without anticipating debate, and they are important matters – matters that ought to be debated by the house.

I accept that the government has an important role in setting the legislative agenda, but it should not have an absolute monopoly on which ideas Parliament is permitted to examine. There can be no greater act of arrogance than simply saying the sole source of good ideas in this place belongs to members on the government benches. The other thing is that allowing this bill to be introduced does not bind the government to supporting it. It is simply the entry to the debate – a debate that this house should have, a debate that is meritorious, a debate that is worth having. If the government does not wish to support this bill, I say this to the government: if there is an opportunity to save lives of Victorians and a better way to handle the instance of cardiac arrest and the first response to it, then give us that idea and let us know what it is. This is a proportionate, sensible and well-considered bill that very much ought to be debated by the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:45): There is absolutely no disagreement in this chamber about the importance of automated external defibrillators or the difference that they can make when somebody suffers a cardiac arrest. We know that when someone suffers a cardiac arrest every second counts. What I do want to say is that good intentions do not remove the responsibility to make good law. This bill proposes a sweeping mandatory scheme across Victoria; that is what it proposes. It requires AEDs in a very broad range of buildings and places such as caravan parks, gambling and performance venues and commercial buildings. These are substantial new obligations affecting government, councils, community organisations, education providers, businesses and our transport operators. They also involve ongoing responsibilities for maintenance, signage and reporting, backed by significant penalties for noncompliance. These are just some of the implications of this bill, but the

bill proposes that these requirements come into effect and commence from 1 January 2027. A proposal of this scale needs so much more than a headline. It needs proper consultation, coordination and responsible decision-making. It needs proper consideration of where AEDs will have the greatest impact, how devices will be maintained and replaced, how accessibility will work in actual practice and what the cost will be and who will bear it. It is for these reasons that I do not support the motion put forward by the member for Ringwood.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:47): The Greens will be supporting this motion. We support the principle of members of the crossbench and opposition – non-government members and non-ministers – being able to introduce, first read, debate and have their bills voted on, but we also support a lot of the substance of what the member for Ringwood has put forward. Back in June my colleague in the other place Dr Sarah Mansfield, Deputy Leader of the Greens, raised an adjournment matter for the Minister for Health that was on this very topic. She was seeking a commitment from the minister to introduce mandatory requirements for AEDs, automated external defibrillators, in public spaces and venues. She noted that every day 21 Victorians suffer a cardiac arrest and only one in 10 currently will survive. We know these are not abstract statistics. Each one of those people is a parent, a child, a neighbour, a colleague, a friend, a sister, a brother, an aunt or an uncle whose life could have been saved if they did have faster access to the right equipment.

We know a cardiac arrest occurs when the heart suddenly stops pumping blood effectively around the body, and time in that situation is everything. For every minute that CPR is delayed, the chance of survival decreases by 10 per cent. Even if you survive, the risk of permanent neurological damage increases. When a bystander is able to administer CPR and deliver a shock from an AED before emergency services arrive, the chance of survival more than doubles, so that is huge. That is the difference a defibrillator makes. Currently, without that intervention, the survival rate sits at just 5 per cent. With access to an AED and early CPR, we know from the Canadian model and from international experience that survival rates can reach 50 or 60 per cent. From 5 per cent to 50 or 60 per cent is absolutely huge; it is not just a marginal improvement.

So what is stopping us? The technology does exist. It is proven, it is accessible and it is actually very easy to use these. If anyone has used one of these devices, they really are very, very simple to use. They are very automatic. They give you the instructions when you open them of how to do it. Anybody can use them, and they are very safe, accessible, life-saving devices. What we need now is the political will to ensure that they are available where Victorians are. We have had some fairly famous examples in the city, for example, of large public venues where people have had heart incidents where their lives could have been saved by early access to an AED or where they were saved by early access to an AED.

My colleague Dr Sarah Mansfield called for legislation to ensure that this happens, and she noted that that legislation also provides indemnity to bystanders who attempt to use an AED in good faith, removing one of the most cited barriers to public use, so that is not an excuse not to do this. There is also the work of St John Ambulance; they have written a letter to the minister calling for something like this as well. They are proud to support more AEDs out in the community, and they are calling for greater public education, community involvement and increased uptake. The thing is, AEDs only work if they are there. They only work if they are physically present. They only work if they are accessible, available, visible, it is obvious where they are and they can be accessed quickly, because as we said, even 1 minute matters critically. Every single minute without access to an AED reduces the chance of survival by 10 per cent. These need to be accessible 24 hours a day. They need to be clearly signposted. We very much urge the minister to commit to exploring a mandated, staged approach to AED installation across public venues in Victoria, because in a cardiac arrest every second counts and every defibrillator saves lives. I think this is something that the government should very much consider.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (09:51): I rise to speak to this procedural motion in relation to a bill that the member for Ringwood is seeking to introduce, and at the outset I want to acknowledge that the intentions in this bill, were it to be introduced, are worthy. This is an issue I think there would be

unanimity across the house upon. Cardiac health is something which is particularly important to me and my family, and I suspect to all of those across the house. Each of us will have been touched, whether as MPs or as family members, by instances of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, undiagnosed perhaps, which can result in catastrophic outcomes where undiagnosed heart conditions that people have result in very sudden cardiac arrest. That is why this government, since 2014 – and I note the member for Pascoe Vale, as an adviser to former Minister Eren, assisted with this work – has rolled out 1400 AEDs at public spaces across Victoria. The idea of rolling out more is a worthy one. But that good intention does not compromise the need for substantive work to be done in thinking through the implementation of the provisions of a bill such as this.

One of the issues that I have got concerns about is the idea that this bill would take effect on 1 January 2027. That idea of conferring very significant obligations upon a whole range of organisations, from local councils to sporting clubs to businesses, is I think challenging. For a bill of this nature that deals with really substantive and important things – and the member for Ringwood is right that these things matter – I would suggest that consulting more widely, ensuring that there is an opportunity for people to discuss and consult on these issues before the tabling of the bill is probably the better way go so that we are not suddenly sprung in dealing with this on the floor of the Parliament in the morning.

The member for Ringwood has spoken on this bill already; I am speaking on it at the moment. While I do not think any of us object or have any issues whatsoever with the intention of the bill and the need to ensure that more Victorians survive sudden cardiac arrest and issues like hypertrophic cardiomyopathy that might be undiagnosed, my contention is that consultation is important. It is solely for that reason that I oppose this motion.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:54): Well, if people want to see where democracy has gone here in Victoria, they only need to come and watch these particular speeches. You can actually look at the members from the Labor Party giving speeches about the importance of the bill that the member for Ringwood wants to introduce, then they will vote against allowing a debate in this place. That is what it has come to here in Victoria. The member for Ringwood should be entitled to put forward a bill that we could at least have the debate on. Whether it is the Greens, the independents or the opposition, what we have seen too often in this place is when we have tried to introduce legislation, including on keeping people like Paul Denyer behind bars, the government votes against it and then comes back within a month or two and goes, ‘Hey, I’ve got a good idea, we’ll do what they did, but we’ll call it our own.’

That is where democracy is here in this state. This government have continually blocked any good idea from the other side of the aisle at every step of the way. And that is disappointing and not in the best interests of Victorians. It simply does not pass the pub test. And what is worse is whilst we are talking about the importance of a bill like this where we are talking about saving people’s lives, what did the government introduce? The government introduced sledge motions to have a go at fake claims around cuts here in Victoria. They want to come in here with their fake ideology, their fake claims about what the Liberals and Nationals may or may not do, but they will not allow an open and honest debate on legislation that could potentially save someone’s life.

I put it to every person in this house that someone knows someone who has had to have CPR and has seen the outcomes when it is negative, when you lose someone. As a former copper I can tell you I have been to those scenes, and they are horrible when you think someone’s life could have been saved. I note the member for Rowville is not in here at the moment, but we know that at one stage in life if it was not for these electronic devices, his wife would not be here. That is a fact, and that is why you can come in here and debate these things. For the member for Ringwood to get shut down, then have to get up with point of order after point of order to try and introduce this important bill and then for the government to say, ‘Yep, really important. We all understand how it will save someone’s life. We understand the impact. We know where these could be used. We know the positives of them, but we don’t want to have a debate on them’ is not where Victorian democracy should be.

We have had 12 years of this Labor government – 12 years where they think they know everything, 12 years of a government who continuously put absolutely ridiculous motions on the notice paper, a government who after 12 years come in here and want to bag the opposition because they have got nothing to talk about from their 12 years in government. If we want to talk about something from 12 years of government, let us listen to the Insurance Council of Australia today, where they have had an increase in crime under the watch of the current minister and the –

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I simply ask that contributions relate to the procedural motion before the house.

The SPEAKER: The member for Berwick to come back to the procedural motion.

Brad BATTIN: I am very much on the procedure. How many motions are on this paper or have been on this paper in relation to crime? There have been plenty. If we want a debate about what should and should not be on this notice paper, let us start talking about the motions that this government is putting forward around trying to call out fake things from the opposition at the same time that they will not talk about the real things from their side.

Anthony Carbines: On a further point of order, Speaker, I renew my point of order to be relevant to the procedural motion before the house.

Brad BATTIN: On the point of order, Speaker, it is absolutely relevant to what is in here. It is about the government business program. It is about the member for Ringwood introducing a piece of legislation and also all of the motions that this government is putting forward for this particular paper.

The SPEAKER: The motion is about the introduction of the bill that the member for Ringwood has introduced, so that is what you need to speak to.

Brad BATTIN: Speaker, I will take your guidance on that, and we will talk about the piece of legislation that the member for Ringwood wants to introduce. The member for Ringwood has come into this place again to try and introduce legislation, as has happened on more than one occasion on this side of the house. We will see yet again in 12 minutes time the Victorian Labor Party, with their absolute height of hypocrisy, come in here and say, ‘We’re all about democracy. We all believe that every person in Victoria should have a voice and everyone counts.’ But what they have done today is highlight that the people of Ringwood do not have a voice in this place, because it will be shut down by the Victorian Labor Party each and every step of the way. What we need to do is ensure that if pieces of legislation come into this place, good ideas from either side of the house, we at least have the courage to debate them. If you have not got the courage to debate this, that is a message to Victorians: this Labor government has simply given up.

The SPEAKER: Members should not use the word ‘you’. It is a reflection on the Chair.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:59): I rise to oppose the introduction of a bill by the member for Ringwood. I do want to acknowledge, as others have done, the importance of automated external defibrillator technology. I want to acknowledge the work of St John Ambulance Victoria, particularly in this place, and I want to acknowledge, as others have done, that cardiac arrest and heart disease touch many people and many families. But I would like to put very simply that this is not a new idea. In fact St John Ambulance have put this idea around a lot. And this is not something that does not exist already in this state. The Victorian government has rolled out AEDs in a wide number of locations. This is merely a proposal to expand that. And I would put to you, Speaker, and to the house that this really is a health budget allocation question, not a question of legislation but a question for the Minister for Health and the Department of Health to determine where best to put their funds. As we know, in the health area there are many, many areas in which we would love to see additional funding, and there is always the challenge of thinking about where best to do that. We have been unlucky in this house recently to know people affected by cancer and by MND. There are many different areas of health

research where we could think about putting additional funding. I put it to you that this particular matter put forward by the member for Ringwood is best dealt with in the lead-up to the 2027–28 budget.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (31): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (48): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Members statements

North East Link

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (10:06): Cars, then trains. Cars – recently I attended a rally in the electorate of the member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition, right near the border of mine, about the Labor government's plan to put an unventilated smokestack in the North East Link, which will spew all kinds of pollution across suburbs, schools and parks, with no consultation with residents and no consultation with schools – and they are still unapologetic about it. The residents of Balwyn, of Bulleen and of Templestowe Lower know that only a Liberal–Nationals government will fix this problem once and for all. Only a Liberal–Nationals government will listen to local residents – not some independent who wants to have a discussion and talk about whose land we are on. We actually want people to fix the problem, fix it quickly, get a decision and do it properly, and that is what a Liberal–Nationals government will do.

Western suburbs rail lines

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (10:07): Trains – only a Liberal–Nationals government will allow the people of Melton and Wyndham Vale to have suburban trains for suburban commuters. We saw the Premier opening a brand new Metro station. And what services it? Nine-car country trains. We are going to double the capacity for those trains, and we are going to double the frequency on that line.

Gabrielle Williams interjected.

Matthew GUY: The member for Surrey Hills can interject all she likes, but she is part of the problem. We are the solution.

Webster Street, Dandenong, level crossing removal

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Education, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Women and Gender Equality) (10:08): I rise today to celebrate a milestone for my community, the Webster Street level crossing removal project, which is just 12 days away from completion. From 22 September my community will have a new and safer way to get around Dandenong. This level crossing was one of the most congested before we came to government,

but after removing the boom gates, we have now been able to build an underpass that creates better connections between Cheltenham and Hammond roads all the way through to Lonsdale Street, or Princes Highway, as it is always also called. This helps local families and helps local workers and businesses as well to get where they need to go. Travel times during the morning peak will be significantly reduced, meaning less time in the car for locals and more time with the ones that they love. We have also built a new walking and cycling path, connecting to the Dandenong Creek Trail and providing safer and more accessible options for active transport.

This project is being delivered two years ahead of schedule. It is delivering better and safer journeys and making my community more livable as a result. Under the Liberals, investment in Dandenong simply stopped, and they are promising to do it all over again, with \$40 billion in cuts in the pipeline. A Liberal–One Nation coalition will leave Dandenong worse off. They will cut projects like this one, they will build nothing and they will sack workers, and they will rip money out of education and healthcare services too.

State election

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:09): Yarrawonga College P–12 have been waiting 12 years for the Victorian Labor government to finish their school. As the fastest growing town in regional Victoria, Yarrawonga deserves its fair share, and it is no surprise that the Labor government for Melbourne has partly funded an upgrade. It is so disappointing that while Melbourne is showered with brand new schools we in the regions are supposed to be grateful for small mercies. A Liberal–Nationals government will make sure that Yarrawonga P–12 gets its fair share.

CFAs across the Ovens Valley are falling into disrepair under the Carroll government. When fire strikes, our volunteers are first on the scene to protect our community. Labor's big fat tax in a cost-of-living crisis has seen no investment in Myrtleford CFA or Yarrawonga CFA. A Liberal–Nationals government will show respect towards our CFAs and invest in their safety and future, because we understand the importance of our CFAs.

A lack of investment in sporting facilities by this tired Labor government is hurting the Ovens Valley communities. Cobram, Yarrawonga and Wangaratta have been let down by this Melbourne-centric government, and only a Liberal–Nationals government will invest in Ovens Valley communities. Whether you or your children play footy, netball, cricket or pickleball, the Nationals will deliver our fair share.

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. Only the Nationals will ease the cost of living and implement our fair share guarantee.

Carrum electorate student leaders

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (10:11): Congratulations to the St Anne's Primary School 2026 school captains Ruby Evans and Lawson Cadd. Congratulations to the St Joachim's Primary School 2026 school captains Tianna Shaw and Braddley Couper. You are outstanding role models and ambassadors for your schools.

Carrum Patterson Lakes Junior Football Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (10:11): I was delighted to present the Player of the Finals award at the Carrum Patterson Lakes Junior Football Club presentation day. Congratulations to the outstanding recipient Summer Rae. Summer showed not only what it means to be a great footballer but what it means to be a great teammate and leader. I also want to acknowledge the commitment of Carrum Patterson Lakes Junior Football Club to supporting and growing opportunities for girls and women in sport. This club has created a sporting culture where girls know they absolutely belong. This commitment matters. It

is helping build confidence in young girls today and creating the next generation of women who will lead on and off the field. I thank Chris Cassap, Jodie Burton, Nick Williams, Lauren Parry and everyone at the club for the life-changing work they are doing.

Carrum Downs Junior Football Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (10:12): It was such a great celebration of a great season at Carrum Downs Junior Football Club's presentation night recently. Congratulations, and thank you to the fabulous committee: president Paul Strickland, vice-president Jade Perkins, secretary Lisa Anderton, treasurer Emma Adlam and registrar Kim Nash. You are just incredible. Thank you and all of the families for supporting this wonderful local community sporting group.

School Sustainability Festival

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:12): Last Thursday we celebrated the 21st School Sustainability Festival organised by Port Phillip EcoCentre and supported by a number of local councils. This year saw students from almost 25 schools. The event allows students to present environmental workshops and activities. As the EcoCentre says, the event is Victoria's longest running school sustainability festival celebrating and empowering student leadership for our environment.

Mooncake Festival

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:13): On Friday evening we welcomed hundreds to St Andrew's Anglican Church in Brighton to attend the Mooncake Festival. The historic Chinese autumn festival celebrates a time when the moon is at its fullest. The event drew a large crowd. Thank you to Reverend Ian Morrison and Xeverie Swee De-Leon for your warmth. May the moon bring wholeness, prosperity and a happy, reunited family.

Plantation Avenue, Brighton East

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:13): For the fourth time residents in Plantation Avenue, Brighton East, have waded through water shin deep. For the fourth time their street flooded. Residents believe inadequate cleaning and lack of maintenance of the drainage system may be contributing to the repeated flooding. Residents should not have to put up with ongoing damage to their homes. South East Water and Bayside council need to act.

Elwood Primary School

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:13): For the second time in two weeks staff at Elwood Primary School were forced to stand in open running sewage because of faulty plumbing in one of the bathrooms. For over a year the school has been waiting for the state government to fund repairs. We also know that despite a public commitment by the Premier to repair infrastructure at the school, Labor withdrew promised funding. As the school says, enough is enough. And their broken promise is known by the entire community.

Viewbank Tennis Club

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) (10:14): I was pleased to be at Viewbank Tennis Club recently for the opening of new facilities there thanks to a North East Link community grant of \$75,000. The Viewbank Tennis Club upgrade includes kitchen upgrades and an outdoor barbecue area to create a safe, modern and more energy-efficient space. It is a project that boosts community engagement and encourages more families, friends and visitors to connect through sport and social activities. It was a great event that evening at Viewbank Tennis Club, a really well-respected club in my local community. It was a great application that they put forward. The North East Community Fund has seen a lot of upgrades to community facilities locally, and Viewbank Tennis Club certainly benefited.

It is a great outdoor area they have got with barbecues, seating and undercover areas, and the upgrades to the kitchen and clubrooms are also really important. We previously upgraded lighting there, fencing and the courts. It is a great set-up at Viewbank, and I wish them well for the season ahead.

Ivanhoe Bowling Club

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) (10:15): Further, I was at Ivanhoe Bowls club, a great club in my electorate which we have given a \$350,000 grant for upgrades to the clubrooms. That has been matched with funding from Banyule City Council. I am pleased that project is about to get underway, and it is great to kick off the season back in division 1. The Ivanhoe Bowls club are a huge club, well respected in the local community for over a century. They have been providing great services, and I wish them well for the season.

Mornington electorate community sport

Chris CREWOTHER (Mornington) (10:15): What a weekend for local sport on 5 and 6 September. Congrats to the Mornington Pirates, A1 grand final premiers for 2026; Mornington Soccer Club's under-13s, champions after an undefeated season; and the club's women's side, champions with a perfect away record. I also congratulate Mornington Football Netball Club's under-19s on progressing straight to the grand final and the Mount Eliza Football Netball Club's C-grade on a thrilling 59–57 finals victory. Also it was great to join Liberal candidate for Hastings Frank Schiefler to watch the Langley versus Mount Eliza game in Mornington.

Just a Farmer

Chris CREWOTHER (Mornington) (10:16): I also acknowledge our farmers and local families, particularly in my electorate in places like Tuerong, Baxter and Moorooduc. The member for Nepean, Renee Heath, Zoe McKenzie, VFF Peninsula and I hosted the *Just a Farmer* movie, shining an important light on the pressures of life on the land, mental health, grief and resilience. To our farmers, thank you for your hard work, perseverance and contribution, especially as a grandson and a nephew of a farmer myself.

Mornington electorate coastal erosion

Chris CREWOTHER (Mornington) (10:16): Lastly, I have had the privilege of meeting many local volunteers and community groups recently. I particularly thank coastal advocates who joined our coastal erosion working group, including the Baden Powell Park Scout Group; reps advocating for Shire Hall, Mothers Beach, Birdrock Beach, Hawker and Craigie beaches and Mount Martha north and south beaches; and the member for Nepean. We will keep on advocating for investment in our important coastal areas.

Diamond Valley College

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:17): With great schools and support young people can achieve so much, including Diamond Valley College's terrific play *I Heard a Bird So Sing*, created and directed by talented students Zac and Phoenix, with wonderful acting by Veronica, Remy, Matilda, River, Amelia, Jasmine, Ayla, Willow, Leo, Lily and Tom; Abbey, Evie, Zoe, Lily and Andie in the ensemble; terrific backstage support from Charlie, Emilia, Julian, James, Kaiden, Ollie and Sophie; and music by Phoenix, Sara and Ollie – so much talent on display, supported by a fantastic school. Congratulations to everyone involved. You were amazing.

Eltham High School

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:17): Congratulations to the wonderful Eltham High School on their 100th birthday. As would be expected

in a community as creative and talented as ours, Eltham High's celebrations include the *Collection Exhibition* at the school and the *Centenary Exhibition* at Montsalvat. These exceptional exhibitions showcase works acquired by the school since the 1950s and the work of past students, current and past staff and parents who all practise as artists. These collections are an incredible showcase of works, and everyone involved is to be congratulated. Thank you, Eltham High School, for investing in and celebrating the arts and for providing such an exceptional school over the last 100 years.

Rotary Club of Eltham

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:18): Congratulations, Rotary Club of Eltham, for another fantastic art show full of impressive original artworks. This art show has become an important feature in our local community. It showcases so much talent, local and from afar, and is an important fundraising opportunity supporting Rotary's many programs that strengthen community connection and help those in need. Thank you, Mike Englefield, curator Brenda Ibels and everyone at Rotary for another fantastic art show.

Greater Shepparton showcase

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:18): I have been incredibly proud to have the Shepparton showcase here at Parliament House this week in Queen's Hall, an event that proudly highlights the very best of Shepparton district and the Goulburn Valley and the success and opportunities that exist. The Goulburn Valley is renowned as Australia's food bowl, proudly producing a significant share of the nation's fruit, vegetables and dairy products as well as global export. The showcase demonstrates why our region is one of Victoria's most important economic powerhouses in the country, from world-class food manufacturing and agriculture to innovation, tourism, horticulture, dairy, transport, manufacturing and small business.

Showcasing our region has been an opportunity to share and celebrate some of our iconic brands that have helped put the Goulburn Valley on the map both nationally and internationally – iconic brands like SPC, Campbell's soup, Continental, Pental and White King, to name a few. These are brands that generations of Australians have grown up with, but they may not realise that these brands and products on the supermarket shelf are made in the Shepparton region. Everything you see on display is packed, picked, produced and manufactured in Greater Shepparton. We also are an amazing tourism destination, with attractions like Picasso and the Archibald Prize currently on exhibition at the Shepparton Art Museum and the Museum of Vehicle Evolution, one of the largest car, truck and transport museums in the country. We have amazing hospitality, retail and visitation experiences for all. It is an amazing place to do business, work and call home. Congratulations to the Greater Shepparton City Council and to everyone who contributed to make the Shepparton showcase such a success.

Ossama and Sarah El Hawli

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Jobs, Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry) (10:20): Firstly, I would like to send my deepest condolences to the El Hawli family who are part of the Australian Islamic Centre. This is following Tuesday's tragic accident in Parwan, resulting in the passing of Ossama El Hawli and Sarah El Hawli. This is a loss that will be felt deeply throughout my community.

Altona North train services

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Jobs, Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry) (10:20): On 11 August I tabled a petition requesting commitment to the planning and reopening of Paisley train station in Altona North. Thank you, Ariel, for your advocacy on this petition, and thank you to Finn, who has been advocating on behalf of our younger and future generations. Sponsoring the petition – 5779 community members signed it – is a first step in ensuring our community can reduce commute times and support the growing population of Altona North.

Data centres

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Jobs, Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry) (10:21): My community is deeply concerned about the rollout of data centres in the west. I want to make it clear, firstly, that the proposed Spotswood data centre has not been approved, and without any guardrails for emissions, noise standards, fuel storage and power and water usage, nor should it be. We need a framework that guides the development of data centres and protects community amenity first and foremost. I appreciate the work that the responsible ministers have done in making sure that we get those guardrails in place and there are considerations there rather than something that panders to tech bro cowboys.

Narracan electorate battery energy storage systems

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:21): It has been no secret in this chamber that many times I have brought up the battery energy storage systems in my electorate. The particular one I want to mention today is the Samsung Darnum BESS project. Samsung have now put in their submission to the minister, but I was very disturbed to read that they have misquoted me in this Parliament, saying that I do not have a problem literally with their project. I want to be very clear about this for the Samsung consortium. I have a massive problem with their project. I do not support their project. It is in the wrong location. For them to misquote the member of Parliament for that region in their submission is absolutely abhorrent. It is misleading, and they lied. To my community, I am going to be very, very clear. I do not support it. It is in the wrong location, and Samsung need to pull their head in and actually represent what I say in this Parliament, not misconstrue it to my community. If they cannot be honest enough to quote me properly in this place, how can we trust them to do the right thing by my community? As far as I am concerned, Samsung, you can get stuffed. I do not want it in my community. Go somewhere else.

Bacchus Marsh College

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Rural and Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Water) (10:23): I recently had the pleasure of visiting Bacchus Marsh College to hear about the exciting plans for the new seniors learning community. Bacchus Marsh is growing rapidly, and our schools need to grow with it. That is why I am so pleased that the Carroll Labor government is investing \$19 million to deliver a new learning hub at Bacchus Marsh College. The new facilities will create capacity for an additional 300 students and provide modern, contemporary learning spaces for both students and teachers with science labs and art technology labs. What really struck me, though, during my visit was the ambition the college has for its senior learning community. This is about so much more than new buildings. It is about creating an environment where senior students can take greater responsibility for their learning, prepare for further education, training or work and feel proud of their school. For families in Bacchus Marsh it also means more young people can access an excellent education close to home. I want to thank the principal Dionne Fenton, who took the time to talk me through the vision she has. Bacchus Marsh is a wonderful and rapidly growing community, and strong local schools are absolutely central to its future. I am very proud this government has supported it.

State election

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:24): People often ask me, ‘With just seven MPs in a Parliament of over 100, what can the Greens realistically achieve?’ Well, in four years we have delivered rental reforms, including ending rental bidding and no-grounds evictions, privacy measures and mandatory heating and cooling. We have helped end native forest logging. We have strengthened integrity by forcing ministers to publish their diaries. We have expanded powers for IBAC. I am so proud to have campaigned for and been the deciding vote in our Statewide Treaty, which is now law in Victoria after decades of advocacy from First Nations communities. As your local MP I have delivered funding for our local schools; \$150 million for local cycling and walking upgrades; a vacant

homes tax and Airbnb regulations; food relief programs in Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond; funding for Cohealth; an extended Pride street party; and outreach workers for North Richmond. Imagine what we could do with more Greens voices in Parliament: we can cut rents, we can build public housing, we can cut stamp duty and bring down costs with free dental care and free public transport. We can end corruption and get money out of politics. We can protect nature and we can end coal and gas. And we can pay for it by making big corporations pay their fair share.

Kororoit electorate schools

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:26): As we know, Victoria is the Education State, and that is no truer than in my electorate of Kororoit. We have made significant investments in my patch, ensuring that kids in growing suburbs get access to a great public school education. We built Yarrabing Secondary College in Aintree and we are currently completing stage 2 of the project. Once completed, this will have a sports field, another learning neighbourhood and an administration building. Right next door we opened Dharra specialist school, with purpose-built accessible facilities for students with disabilities. This school is going from strength to strength, providing a positive, caring and safe environment for all local students. But there is more: we opened Mindalk Primary School in Mount Atkinson and we are opening Barramayil Primary School and kindergarten in term 1 of next year. Thanks to this government's work, kids can now walk to school and more families have access to co-located kindergartens, making pick-up and drop-off easier. Our Carroll Labor government is not just building schools but upgrading them as well. Copperfield College is a great example of that in Kings Park – they are getting an upgrade, and it is coming along nicely. I am also proud that recently our hardworking teachers got a pay rise, making them the highest paid in the country. A huge thankyou to our hardworking teachers aides, teachers, school councils and parents that make every school community in Kororoit what it is.

State election

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:27): The Nationals are ready to get on with the job of rebuilding regional Victoria. After years of Labor taking regional Victorians for granted and ripping off our communities, we have a plan to deliver the things our communities desperately need. We will fix our roads, investing \$5 billion to repair and rebuild Victoria's road network, plus \$288 million for country roads and bridges. We will tackle crime genuinely, with 3000 additional police officers, tougher bail and sentencing laws and consequences for repeat offenders. We will rebuild regional health care, with \$10,000 incentives to attract more doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals to our regions. We will build more homes, cut red tape and unlock land so families and young people can afford to stay and build their future in regional Victoria. We will fix the regional public transport that Labor has destroyed, with more seats, more services and more freedom to travel on the Seymour and Albury lines. We will ease the cost of living by scrapping Labor's emergency services tax and unlocking gas to deliver more affordable and reliable energy. We will protect prime agricultural land from renewables and put them where they belong, which is in industrial zones. Most importantly, we will deliver a fair share guarantee that will ensure regional Victorians finally receive at least 25 per cent of new infrastructure investment. The Nationals are ready to govern. We are ready to stop the waste, end the corruption and deliver a fair share for regional Victoria.

Multiculturalism

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Sport, Minister for Equality) (10:29): I had the enormous pleasure of attending a couple of events last weekend in the Indian community of Oakleigh: Sankat Mochan and Sri Venkata Krishna Brundavana. As many of us would know, you see the best of community when they are assembling together for nothing of personal gain. Cultural performances, service, putting on a meal for other people – that is the epitome of the Indian community, whether they be Hindu or Sikh or any other denomination. They are incredible people. It reminded me, when I went to these community organisations and community groups the other day, that over the next couple of months leading up to the election we will see a lot

of politicians and a lot of candidates doing different things, saying different things and taking happy snaps with Indian, Greek, Chinese background, Croatian or any other of the 190 nationalities we have in this beautiful state. They will be taking happy snaps for Facebook and Instagram but saying something very different in the corridors of power. I said to these beautiful Indian Australians, 'You will have a lot of people promising many things, but I can tell you one thing: you never, ever have to doubt the Labor government's commitment to you.' We are always on the side of multicultural communities – always.

1st Wallan Wallan Scout Group

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Victim Support, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Community Sport) (10:30): Today I would like to recognise the outstanding achievements of the 1st Wallan Wallan Scout Group and the dedicated volunteers who continue to provide life-changing opportunities for young people across our growing community. Over the past year the group has grown in strength and now supports 58 registered youth members across its Joey, Cub, Scout and Venturer groups, reflecting the strength of the program and the commitment of local families. A particular achievement has been the successful return of full management of the Wallan market to the Scout group. This role helps secure the group's major fundraising activity and ensures it can continue supporting young people for years to come.

I would like to acknowledge group leader Erin Petrucelli for her leadership and dedication, as well as group chair Damian Petrucelli and the entire leadership team, committee members, adult supporters and volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make scouting possible. It is also important to recognise several outstanding youth achievements from the past year. Congratulations to Lucas Petrucelli on achieving the prestigious Grey Wolf Award, the peak award for Cub Scouts. Congratulations also to Hayley Waddell and Jackson Scott on attaining the Australian Scout Award, one of the highest achievements available within the Scout section. These awards reflect years of commitment, leadership and personal development. The group's Venturers have also achieved great success by winning first patrol for Venturers in the Top Gear event, while members across the section –
(Time expired)

Multiculturalism

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:32): Victoria is at its best when every community has the opportunity to contribute, to belong and to build a future. Recently I joined foreign minister Penny Wong and the Premier at a roundtable discussion where we reinforced our recognition of the enormous contributions our Chinese communities make to Victoria. In Glen Waverley that contribution is part of everyday life. Families from China, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Korea and all over the world are building businesses, raising children with the best education and supporting their neighbours. And through their connections with their home countries, they help drive trade, academic exchange and tourism, all of which strengthens Victoria's economy. That is something we should all be proud of.

But we have seen rhetoric that turns people's background and connection into reasons for suspicion, singling out members of our community and questioning their connections to their home country. We can have serious conversations about national security and foreign policy without casting suspicion. Because when that rhetoric enters the public conversation, it does not simply stay online. It reaches our children, our business owners and those who choose to contribute to civic life. That is why I am so pleased to see the leadership of our state and federal governments standing firmly behind multicultural communities. As member for the Glen Waverley district, I will continue to stand against racism, hatred and division, and I will continue working with our multicultural communities to make sure everyone feels welcome, respected and proud to call Victoria home.

Mill Park electorate

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) (10:33): Last week it was a pleasure to have the Premier come to my electorate of Mill Park, alongside Elizabeth Nealy, Labor's wonderful candidate for Mill Park. We

began on Findon Road, where the Premier announced a \$270 million upgrade and duplication of that road, 3.6 kilometres between Epping Road and Civic Drive, taking the road from two lanes to four and rebuilding key intersections on the back of a re-elected Carroll government. Anyone who has sat in those queues on the school run, on the way to work or just trying to get in and out of their housing estate knows how busy Findon Road has become. I know this issue is one locals have raised with me. It is a road our families use every single day, and this commitment will mean a safer and quicker journey home for residents.

We then visited the primary campus of The Lakes South Morang College, where the Premier met students and staff. My thanks to principal Bill Panas and his team for a warm welcome, and thank you to the students who prepared a lovely card for me. From there, it was a short walk across the road to Frankie's Cafe. We met with Frankie, who is such a pillar of our community. He is a true local hero. Frankie helps handle the catering for local schools and local sporting clubs and goes above and beyond in so many ways to have a warm and welcoming environment. Thanks always to Frankie for the lovely coffee and pastries. We finished at Mernda Community Hospital, where urgent care, imaging and dialysis services are helping our community. Thanks to the Premier for visiting and making such an important commitment to our community.

Community Security Group

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (10:35): Being Premier is a privilege because it always allows you to turn your support into action. I have always supported our Jewish community. I am in awe of the contribution that they make to our great state of Victoria and the values that bind us all as Victorians. All they ever ask in return are the basic standards in life in what is the most multicultural place in Australia: the right to be safe, the right to be yourself, the right to pray, the right to hope. These rights belong to everyone. Australian Jews woke on 7 October fearing these rights were under threat. On 14 December those fears were confirmed beyond doubt. We have a long way to go to put things back to the way they were. I promise to help them step by step, and I am starting with safety, because safety is my priority.

The Community Security Group, CSG, have always had the community's back, and it is important that we have their back too. I visited to tell Justin and the team today that we are giving the CSG the long-term operational funding they sorely need – \$6 million for the CSG – because they need to protect their community and protect all of us. They asked for it. I am proud as Premier to deliver it. And it is just the start. Shana tova to our Jewish community. May your year be filled with love, joy, safety and hope. You deserve it.

Business of the house

Joint standing 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) (10:37): I move:

That this house:

- (1) agrees with the request of the Legislative Council and rescinds joint standing order 25, effective from 1 December 2026; and
- (2) sends a message to the Legislative Council informing them accordingly.

Just to continue on those matters briefly, joint standing order 25 was created solely to govern joint sittings held to elect parliamentary members to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Joint standing order 25 no longer has any legal or practical operation, and rescinding it removes an obsolete provision without affecting Victoria's ongoing work to prevent and respond to gambling harm. The government therefore supports the Procedure Committee's recommendation to rescind joint standing order 25, ensuring Parliament's procedural framework remains accurate, coherent and fit for purpose.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:38): I also rise in relation to the motion that relates to joint standing order 25. I will read the standing order review at page 13, which has come from the Council, which recommended that:

The *Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011* has been repealed and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation has been abolished. Therefore, Joint Standing Order 25 relating to joint sittings under the *Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011* is no longer required.

And I note that, as I am advised, members across the aisle in the other place supported that review and the outcomes of that review by way of recommendation. Therefore the coalition will not be opposing that recommendation being put in place through this motion today.

Motion agreed to.

Resolutions of continuing effect

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) (10:39): I move:

That this house:

- (1) agrees with the request of the Legislative Council and rescinds the resolution of the house made on 1 May 2019 relating to the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, effective from 1 December 2026; and
- (2) sends a message to the Legislative Council informing them accordingly.

Further to those matters, the resolution of continuing effect adopted on 30 April 2019 established the former administrative arrangements for appointing and governing the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser. Those arrangements reflected the integrity framework operating at that time for Parliament's institutional and legislative framework, which has since evolved. Retaining an outdated resolution risks creating uncertainty about the integrity arrangements that apply to members and the respective responsibilities of parliamentary bodies. Rescinding the resolution does not diminish the importance of integrity, ethical conduct or access to appropriate guidance for members. Integrity is not optional. Parliament's integrity arrangements must be clear, contemporary and supported by the framework now in place, not preserved through provisions that have ceased to serve their original purpose. The government therefore supports the Procedure Committee's recommendation to rescind the 30 April 2019 resolution, ensuring Parliament's procedural framework remains accurate, coherent and fit for purpose.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:40): In relation to this second matter, this resolution in relation to the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser, I refer to the Council Procedure Committee's standing orders review of this year, at page 13, which states:

The Parliamentary Integrity Adviser (PIA) position is now provided for under the *Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Act 2024*.

The resolution adopted by the Council on 30 April 2019 originally established the appointment of the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser. Therefore, for simplicity, the act came into effect after the original resolution. As the Leader of the House correctly said, there could be confusion in that the original resolution has been superseded by the legislation. It is appropriate that clarity exists. Therefore, in relation to this resolution, we will not be opposing the motion today.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:42): I am pleased to continue my contribution on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. The Premier's first act on taking office was to announce that he would call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's construction industry, and that royal commission was formally established on 20 August. As we have seen, the terms of reference are exhaustive and expansive. It has a sufficient budget and has been asked to report within 12 months, because we want to see outcomes from this as soon as possible. It will identify the nature and the extent of any corruption or criminal conduct, as well as serious misconduct, associated with major public and civil infrastructure projects in Victoria. We want to see how it occurred, but we also want to understand how we can prevent it from occurring again and rebuild that trust within the construction sector. That is really important, but there is more that is needed. It is not the end of the job.

What this bill is doing is making sure that there are additional resources and powers that can amplify the positive impact of the royal commission. There are two central parts: the first one is the establishment of the office of the special prosecutor to work alongside the royal commission; and the second one is around extending the powers of the royal commission to be able to compel people to provide information and written statements rather than being limited to having to call people in to give evidence for existing documents. On that first point about the office of the special prosecutor being established alongside the royal commission, royal commissions are very powerful bodies, but they are not prosecuting bodies. The royal commission can compel evidence, it can examine witnesses, it can make findings, but it cannot charge somebody or prosecute somebody or compile a brief of evidence for prosecution. If that evidence is emerging during the course of the royal commission, Victorians should not have to wait for the conclusion of the royal commission to see action on that evidence or for appropriate authorities to consider what action should follow. That is why this bill is creating the office of the special prosecutor, which will work alongside the commission in real time as evidence emerges. It will be able to provide relevant information to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other appropriate state and Commonwealth bodies. It is pretty straightforward. As I said, they work hand in glove to make sure that there is a positive outcome from this.

There is a bit of useful history behind this model. It is not something that Victoria has invented from scratch. We saw it with the Fitzgerald inquiry; we have seen it with the Brereton inquiry. There is one difference, and that is that the special investigator, following the Victoria Police Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, came after the commission and examined if there was sufficient evidence to bring criminal charges or disciplinary charges. This special prosecutor is going to work alongside the construction royal commission while it is operating, and that is one of the most important features of this bill. With that office of the special prosecutor, we want to make sure that there is public confidence in its work, so being really clear about its independence is crucial to that. The special prosecutor will be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier and after consultation with the royal commissioner. They need to have been a lawyer for at least eight years. It could be a Crown prosecutor, but that is not a requirement. The special prosecutor is not subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any other minister in carrying out their duties, and that is really important. They are also not an officer of the royal commission, they are independent.

That office of the special prosecutor itself remains a public body for the purposes of the IBAC act, which means that it itself will be subject to IBAC oversight. There are safeguards around the independence of that office to ensure its credibility. There are also going to be strict controls around information. There are confidentiality obligations, restrictions and exemptions applying to royal commission officers. You cannot just pass the information around; it needs to be carefully considered. That regulated flow of information between the commission, the special prosecutor and the relevant enforcement and regulatory authorities is looked at in this bill. Bodies receiving information from the special prosecutor can also report back about the action that they intend to take, so that makes it more than just a referral source. It means that it is a dedicated point of connection between the royal commission and the agencies that are able to act upon evidence that is brought forward.

Some of the detailed consideration around how the special prosecutor has independent prosecutorial powers will be looked at in the second tranche of what will be brought forward in early 2027, and that might need to include some additional information-sharing and investigatory powers. It is good to have the input from the experts and the agencies involved in that to make sure that what is put forward is workable and effective. In the meantime that special prosecutor has a really substantial job to do: assessing information as it emerges and getting it to the appropriate agencies so that action can be taken during the inquiry itself. That is the main thrust of this amendment.

Another section is less headline grabbing, but it is actually really important for the effective running of the commission in terms of efficiency, and that is clause 4, which expands what a royal commission can compel someone to provide. At the moment a royal commission can compel the production of documents and can require a person to come and to give evidence, but there can be a gap between those two things. To progress its work, the royal commission might just need a sliver of information from somebody about a particular thing or perhaps things that are across multiple witnesses, and to have to bring them all in just to get to that sliver, added up together, is not very efficient. Under this bill, a royal commission will be able to issue a written notice requiring a person to provide particular information or a written statement by a particular time and on a particular matter. It means that people will be required to answer specific questions from their own knowledge before the commission needs to call them to a hearing. There is no defensiveness about this. What we are doing here is setting it up so that if wrongdoing has occurred, it needs to be exposed. If systems have failed, that needs to be identified, and if people have broken the law, then we need to make sure that authorities have the evidence that they need to be capable of pursuing them. We also want to make sure that government decisions are looked at and examined as well. This is about integrity for our state.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (10:51): I rise to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. The Liberals and Nationals will support this bill, but we will seek to improve it with the amendments circulated by the member for Brighton. Our position is clear: establish the special prosecutor, ensure evidence uncovered by the royal commission can lead to lawful action and close a clear loophole that should have been fixed years ago. The bill is needed because a royal commission is an inquiry, not a criminal court. It can compel evidence, test allegations and expose misconduct, but it cannot itself investigate criminal offences, prepare a prosecution brief or lay charges. If the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria uncovers evidence of corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct, there must be a clear and secure pathway from discovery to action.

This bill creates a statutory office of the special prosecutor to work alongside the royal commission. It allows information to flow to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other appropriate bodies so that they can consider action within their powers. It also gives royal commissions generally the power to require written information or a written statement that does not already exist. We support those objectives. We also support the requirement that the special prosecutor be an experienced Australian lawyer, act fairly and independently, remain beyond ministerial direction and be subject to IBAC oversight. Evidence must move securely without compromising investigations, reputations or future proceedings.

But the house should be candid about what this first tranche does. Despite the title, the special prosecutor's principal role at this stage is to receive, assess and refer information – it is a special prosecutor who cannot prosecute. The government says that a second tranche in early 2027 may provide further investigative and prosecutorial powers and deal with the admissibility of evidence. We will scrutinise it carefully if it does come to that. The office must be given the independence, resources and legal tools required to do the job. The royal commission is examining grave allegations surrounding publicly funded construction, including alleged criminal infiltration, intimidation, manipulation of contracting and the misuse or waste of public money. These are allegations to be tested, not findings to be assumed, but Victorians are entitled to a fearless inquiry and real

consequences whenever wrongdoing is established, especially with \$15 billion of taxpayer funds – if not more – being wasted through corruption and misconduct.

The political history also matters. In July 2024 the Liberal and National opposition called for a full royal commission into alleged misconduct involving the CFMEU and Victoria's construction industry. In February of this year we committed to establishing one if elected. This Labor government repeatedly refused. The former Premier was still resisting a royal commission as recently as July. Only after a change of Premier did the government reverse course and establish this inquiry on 20 August. We welcome that reversal because a late decision is better than continued denial, but Labor cannot airbrush the delay. Victorians deserve to know what happened on government-funded projects, how long it went on, whether warnings were ignored, who benefited and at what cost, and indeed what it did cost. Integrity cannot operate according to Labor's political timetable. We need a stronger royal commission, not a cover-up commission, which is why the opposition have committed to strengthening it if elected into government.

For people in the Mornington electorate the cranes and tunnels of the Big Build can sometimes seem a long way from home; the consequences, though, are not. Every major project is funded by taxpayers from Mornington, Mount Martha, Mount Eliza, Moorooduc, Tuerong and the wider peninsula. Every dollar lost through corruption, inflated contracting or deliberate waste is a dollar that cannot be used to make a dangerous road safer, like we see everywhere right now with so many potholes from Mount Martha through to Mount Eliza. It might be used as well to support a local school, like our two local public secondary schools in both Mount Eliza and Mornington in need of upgraded facilities or indeed the Dromana college in the member for Nepean's electorate, which we share a zone for. It could also be used to improve our health services, such as the much-needed Rosebud Hospital, or to put more police into our community.

The point is especially real this week. I tabled a petition launched by local resident Paddy and signed by 716 people calling for urgent safety action at the intersection of Mornington-Tyabb Road and Racecourse Road. They are not asking for an extravagance, they are simply asking the government to perform a basic duty and make a dangerous intersection safer. When local people are told to wait for essential works, they have every right to demand that billions spent elsewhere are managed honestly and competently.

This issue also affects tradies, subcontractors and small family businesses in our electorate. They work hard, employ apprentices and pay their bills. They deserve to compete on merit, not connections. Workers deserve safe sites and proper representation without intimidation. Lawful trade union activity and workplace safety must be protected, but no official, company, union or government is above the law. This is indeed a Liberal principle: one law for all. We believe government should be limited in its reach but strong in performing its essential duties. We believe independent institutions should follow the evidence without fear or favour. We believe taxes belong to the people who earn the money, so every public dollar must be accounted for, and we believe free enterprise works only when honest businesses can compete on a fair playing field.

This Labor government's record is the contrast of this, increasingly so over their last 12 years in government. It resisted an inquiry while allegations mounted, and it is now asking Parliament to accept a bill that leaves an identified obstacle in the inquiry's act untouched. Supporting the bill does not require us to overlook that omission, it requires us to fix it. Section 18(2)(c) of the Inquiries Act 2014 currently permits public interest immunity to be relied upon as a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with a royal commission requirement. During the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, Victoria Police relied on public interest immunity in refusing access to 11 human source files. The commission did not challenge that refusal in the Supreme Court because of the time and cost involved, and it was left unable to satisfy itself about important matters within its inquiry.

That royal commission delivered recommendation 91 in November 2020. It called for the Inquiries Act to be amended within 18 months so that public interest immunity could not be used as a reason to

refuse information, answers, documents or other things required by a royal commission. Nearly six years later section 18(2)(c) remains in force, and the government has not dealt with it in this bill. The government tells us that this legislation is about giving a royal commission stronger powers to find the truth, yet it has walked straight past section 18(2)(c), which expressly allows public interest immunity to be relied on as a reasonable excuse for refusing to give information to a royal commission.

What is the point of giving a royal commission stronger powers to ask the question if the legislation still expressly provides a pathway to refuse to give the answer? This, therefore, needs to be dealt with, so this coalition amendment that we are putting forward inserts a new clause 4A and repeals section 18(2)(c). It implements the substance of recommendation 91 and ensures the bill's new written information power cannot be defeated by the very excuse a previous royal commission identified. This is also in line with the government's 2022 recommendations to close this loophole, and indeed the government in 2022 said that they would so legislate, but they did not. Where they did not, we will.

This is a situation that does not require sensitive information to be published. The act's confidentiality and information-handling protections continue to apply. It simply means that a claim of public interest immunity cannot be used to prevent a royal commission from receiving the material it needs to perform its task. The government should accept the amendment. If this government is serious about giving this royal commission the tools it needs, it cannot sensibly preserve a loophole that another royal commission expressly told it to close.

The people of the Mornington electorate and the people of Victoria do not expect special treatment, but they do expect honest government, safer roads, fair opportunities for local businesses and value for the taxes that they pay. They expect corruption and misconduct to be investigated regardless of who is involved or how politically inconvenient the facts may be. The Liberals and Nationals in opposition have been consistent in calling for this scrutiny. We support the establishment of the special prosecutor. We support a proper pathway from evidence to investigation and, where warranted, prosecution. We support the bill, but we urge the house to strengthen it by supporting our amendment moved by the member for Brighton, especially noting that the last major royal commission said that the current situation hindered its ability to find the truth. Let us support the special prosecutor but support this amendment to strengthen the bill.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (11:01): I too rise to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. This is a really important bill. It delivers on our Premier's commitment to establish a royal commission into Victoria's construction sector and to establish a special prosecutor. Today I am going to talk about why both of those two announcements are extremely important, and it is wonderful to have them before the house here today.

Like I said, the first act of our Premier when he assumed office was to call this royal commission, and it makes very clear the new priorities of this government as we look towards the future. The bills we are debating in this place this week make good on those commitments he made when he assumed office. I note that the other bill that is being debated this week delivers on the commitment to expedite the implementation of IBAC amendments, including their new follow-the-money powers, to come online this year. What this bill before the house does in relation to the special prosecutor is provide the legislative framework for a special prosecutor to work closely, importantly, with the royal commission. This is the first time that such an office has existed here in Victoria, and it will be a dedicated resource for this commission, because the royal commission on its own does not have the power to prosecute anyone. It can compel evidence and make findings, but it cannot actually put people before a court. That is exactly the intention of what the special prosecutor can and will do, so that when wrongdoing is uncovered by the commission it can be investigated and it can be pursued so that people who did the wrong thing can face the appropriate consequences.

The bill provides further qualifications of who can actually be appointed as a special prosecutor, which currently includes at least eight years of experience as a legal practitioner, and it sets out some of the basic functions and information-sharing powers that the special prosecutor will have. I understand that

further legislation will build upon these powers and functions, but the framework in this bill means that one can be established and be up and running as soon as possible.

It has been very interesting to see some of the reactions over the past couple of weeks from those opposite with this bill and what we have announced in this space. We have known for months that they have been calling for a royal commission into these issues. Now we have done exactly that, and apparently it is not good enough. They have said that the terms of reference are too narrow. I find it very hard to see how that is the case when the terms of reference are actually looking at the construction sector. We know that the issues this royal commission will be talking about are systemic, industry wide, whether it is on government projects or in the private sector. In fact the terms of reference actually permit the commission to look at a range of matters, including the conduct of anyone. Then of course they have said it is not genuine and it is not serious. That flies in the face of what integrity experts, investigative journalists and stakeholders – the very people that they have been listening to these past couple of months – have said. Those experts have been overwhelmingly supportive of these steps that our government has taken. It is really important for those opposite, and particularly the community, to understand that. The experts have been overwhelmingly supportive of the steps the new Premier has taken. I am very curious as to what their problem is here, because those opposite seem to be the only people who cannot understand what the commission's terms of reference say, and they are the only ones who do not seem to be taking this commission seriously.

I do want to be clear about the issue that those opposite have with this royal commission. I think their problem with it is that they are not the ones who were able to initiate it, and they thought that they would be. It is because they have lost a major pillar of their election platform. It is because they did not get to set the terms of reference. We know on this side of the house that deep down what they really wanted was not a royal commission at all – they wanted their own personal witch-hunt. We have seen on previous occasions when those opposite have been in government that that is what they intended all along.

What I will say is we know that it is up to the commission to determine who is to appear before it, and the special prosecutor will be able to call up those people. It is important that the commission has the power to do that, and it is important that the commission and the special prosecutor work really clearly together. The opposition have been raising issues in relation to this bill and the other bill before the house this week but not because they are interested in dealing with the systemic issues in our construction sector. The only thing I have ever seen the Liberal Party interested in when using the powers of the government is smearing political opponents, and that has certainly been the case over the past eight years. I have to say, as I look further afield at the United States, it seems to me to be right out of the Trump playbook.

I remember when they were last in power federally and the first thing they did was call a royal commission into union corruption, and it was one of the biggest wastes of Commonwealth money in recent memory. It did not expose any corruption. It took two years. It cost \$46 million. It attacked workers and only resulted in a single conviction. Some might ask why they would have gone to that length; it was because their mates in Canberra wanted to smear Labor, smear the unions and smash workers rights. The royal commission that has been called into the construction sector by our Premier and the call to have a special prosecutor work closely with that commission show our intention is certainly not to smash workers; it is to undertake a proper investigation into what has occurred in the construction sector, both in public and private sectors of that industry. I think that is really important, because the majority of workers on construction sites – and I have certainly talked before here in this place about how I have got extended family members that have been involved in the construction industry in other states – are just normal, working-class mums and dads, getting on, making a living, putting food on the table. They are not involved in anything dodgy. This royal commission is to weed out the corruption and the wrongdoing that certainly exists on our sites, but it should not cast aspersions upon every worker at every site.

The special prosecutor, importantly, that we are appointing, will be independent of government, and they will not answer to the Premier, or any other minister for that matter. I think that is really important as part of the separation of powers, and this bill goes on to really clearly state that. If the commission and the special prosecutor think it is appropriate to question department staff or question ministers, be they current or former, or even wish to question former premiers, I am sure it is within their prerogative to do so. They do not need a witness list put in front of them by the opposition. It is entirely inappropriate that they keep trying to propose and put forward their own personal witness list for this royal commission.

The Premier said not so long ago that he would call for a royal commission. It was his first act as Premier, and he has done it. He said he would create a special prosecutor to work within the commission to investigate any alleged wrongdoing uncovered by the commission and act on it accordingly. This bill that we are debating here in this place today will deliver exactly that – it will deliver on that promise. Victorians should have the confidence that we are taking these issues seriously. The speed at which this legislation has been crafted and implemented should make it very clear that we are doing exactly what we said we would do, but we should be clear about what is right and wrong. It is right to investigate alleged wrongdoing and to investigate and address corrupt conduct. It is wrong, however, to use the powers of a royal commission as a political weapon against a government you disagree with – that is wrong. I do not think that Victorians would like to see it used that way. If those opposite are not happy with the terms of reference of this royal commission, if they are not supportive of the work we are doing and they think it is not good enough, they should be up-front about why that is the case.

On this side of the house, the Premier and the Labor team will continue to get on with the work of this commission so that Victorians can have greater confidence in the construction sector to work better so that we can get on with delivering the projects that Victorians certainly do value. The work of this royal commission is so important to ensure that this is the case. This is a really good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (11:11): It is a great pleasure to rise this morning and make a contribution in favour of this bill. As I said during my contribution on the government business program and also in my contribution on the IBAC follow-the-money powers bill on Tuesday, when the Premier came to office his first act was to come out and call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. He did so because Victorians deserve to know how organised crime made its way onto some government projects. We have seen that play out through the media, and Victorians deserve to know how that happened. The best way to do that is to hold a royal commission.

It was established on 20 August this year and will seek to give Victorians those answers. The objects of the royal commission, which are set out in the terms of reference, among other things, are to identify the nature and the extent of the misconduct, corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct relating to any major public and civil infrastructure projects in Victoria; to support the government to prevent future corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct; to rebuild trust in the integrity of the major construction sector; and also to instigate referrals to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other relevant bodies by working cooperatively with the special prosecutor.

It is, as I said, the right thing to do, to have a royal commission. Royal commissions are inquisitorial by nature. They are set up to gather information and to hear evidence, but as you can imagine, given our separation of powers, the commissioner does not have the power to prosecute. What we often find in a situation of a royal commission is that prosecutions, when they need to be made, given evidence that may be heard, can take some time. The Premier's commitment to setting up a special prosecutor to work alongside the royal commission will make sure that if there is evidence heard that requires referrals to police and prosecutions to be made, that can be done in the most timely of manners. I think that is the right call. Being here, debating this legislation and hopefully seeing its passage through this house and the other place in due course acquits that promise that the Premier made on day one of taking office.

What is also incredibly important with any of these processes, and in a royal commission in particular, is to ensure the independence of the process. It is important to ensure the independence of the royal commission to hear whatever evidence it needs to to give Victorians the answers that they seek but also to ensure the independence of the commissioner running the royal commission. It is why it is so absurd and so fraught with danger that the opposition decided, after they had had the wind taken out of their sails, to hold a press conference and seek to provide their own witness list to an independent royal commission. It is something that I have never really seen before and something that I never thought I would see in politics. We had the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Brighton, who claims to have a legal background, standing in front of cameras with a piece of paper, with the member for Brighton doing his scowl that he does, his kind of stank face – you know, standing there, looking down the pipe. To be standing there with a piece of paper with their own witness list to an independent royal commission I think is absurd, and it shows how immature this opposition still are. They are not ready to govern. They are not quite sure how government works. They are not quite sure how these processes work. They think it is a reasonable thing to do to stand in front of a camera and seek to influence, for their own political purposes, an independent royal commission. I do not think any of us have really seen that anywhere before. It really lifts the veil. It shows that this has never really been about policy for them. It has never really been about integrity for them. It has never really been about cleaning up corruption. It has all been about politics, as is everything with this opposition. It has been about politics. They thought that integrity was going to be a major issue heading into this election. I would contend that integrity is a major issue for voters going into every election. I would contend that voters care about the integrity of government and indeed opposition going into every election, and perhaps it is one of the reasons that we had two pretty significant victories in 2018 and 2022. But in doing so, they have sought to politicise this issue every single step of the way.

Let us be really honest about the other layer of this: the opposition, when in government, would love to seek to de-unionise government projects across Victoria. Some of the demonisation of ordinary workers throughout this process by the opposition has been nothing short of disgusting. Whilst the government, in setting up the royal commission, wants the answers that Victorians are seeking about what has happened on some of these projects, what I will not stand for and what I will not do, ever, is stand in this place or in my community in Tarneit and demonise construction workers in Victoria, because for the most part I would say 99 per cent of these workers are good, hardworking, decent people that are doing nothing more than trying to provide for their families and, in doing so, building Victoria for us and for all Victorians.

We have been really, really lucky in the west to have a significant amount of incredibly important infrastructure projects that make it easier for people in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing to live their daily lives. But also, the jobs that these projects are creating are contributing so significantly to Victoria's economy. I mentioned on Tuesday, I think, the West Gate Tunnel – obviously a really significant project, a second river crossing into Melbourne. As somebody who spent eight years driving in from the west to Carlton every single day over the West Gate Bridge, I can tell you how amazing the West Gate Tunnel is as a project for me and for my family and for families in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing, Point Cook and Werribee and also further west in Geelong as well. It means that they can get into the city quicker, if they are doing that on a daily basis in particular, and spend more time with their families.

We have also been lucky enough to have several schools built in my electorate. At the moment we are very close to finishing stage 2 of Brinbeal Secondary College. For anybody who has had one of these new schools, but in particular new secondary colleges, built in their electorate, they are absolutely amazing. Young people in Tarneit now have the opportunity, in my view, to attend a secondary college where the infrastructure is as good as any government school anywhere in Victoria, and that is right there in Tarneit. It is there in Tarneit not just because of a government that invests but because of the amazing construction workers that are just finishing that project at the moment.

And then the jewel in the crown, I would say, is the new West Tarneit station. We came to the election in 2022 and said that we would build a second station in Tarneit, and on Sunday we will open that station. The first trains will stop at West Tarneit station on Sunday, and all of that is possible because of a government that invests in the infrastructure that Victorians need, particularly out in the western suburbs, and also because of a group of amazing construction workers that have worked over the last 12 months day and night to make that station ready for people in Tarneit in September. A royal commission is incredibly important to get the answers that Victorians need, and having a special prosecutor next to it will make sure that they can get those answers faster.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (11:21): I am very happy to rise to give my contribution on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. There has been some great debate today on this side of the chamber. Obviously that side of the chamber must like the bill, because they are not out here talking about it, against it or for it. What has been said in the past and the concerns they have do not really seem to be following through at all. They are not leading by example. They are not here. I am here, and I am very happy to be here.

A member interjected.

Paul MERCURIO: Thank you. I am here all day. I think this bill and the one we just debated, on similar topics, obviously go hand in hand. The last bill was the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, about giving them powers to follow the money, which is really important, and also broadening the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ – two things that are incredibly important and work in hand with this bill.

I am very happy that the first act by the Premier after assuming office was to call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria’s construction industry. People have been calling for it, and he listened and he has called it. The Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria was established on 20 August this year. It is backed with a budget of \$50 million and has been asked to report within 12 months. Its terms of reference are broad and expansive and its objectives include identifying the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct on our major public and civil infrastructure projects; supporting government to prevent that conduct happening again; and rebuilding trust in the integrity of the major construction sector, as the member for Tarneit spoke so well about. It is also there to instigate referrals to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other relevant bodies working cooperatively with the special prosecutor. That last point is exactly why this bill is in front of us today. I might just say the terms of reference have been broadly accepted by quite a few eminent people within our community.

Victorians undertake these major public and civil infrastructure projects together, funded by the public and delivered on behalf of the public. It is essential that they are carried out with the highest possible level of integrity and the trust and confidence of the Victorian community. That trust has been tested, we all accept that, and this bill is part of how we rebuild. But here is the thing about a royal commission, and it is important that people understand: a royal commission has no power to prosecute anyone and it cannot compile a brief of evidence. That is by design. It is an inquisitorial body and not an adversarial one. It does not carry judicial or prosecutorial powers at all. It can compel evidence, hold hearings and make findings, but on its own that leaves a gap between finding out what went wrong and doing something about it. This bill closes that gap. It amends the Inquiries Act 2014 to create the office of special prosecutor, the first of its kind in Australia, a dedicated resource working alongside the royal commission. As the commission uncovers evidence of corruption, the special prosecutor is there to work cooperatively with it, making sure that evidence gets to the right place – Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities or any other relevant Victorian, interstate, territory or Commonwealth body – so it can be acted on, not left sitting in a report gathering dust on a shelf somewhere.

Very importantly, the special prosecutor will be independent. They are not subject to the direct control of the Premier or any minister in the performance of their duties. The independence is not a technicality, it is the whole point. Victorians need to know that when evidence of wrongdoing comes to light it will be followed up on its merits, not on anyone's say-so. I would also note that the special prosecutor remains a public body under the IBAC act, which means they themselves stay subject to IBAC's oversight. That is exactly the kind of accountability built into accountability that this reform is all about, and it gives the community confidence that this office will operate fairly.

There has been some talk about the office of the prosecutor not being able to prosecute. In fact there are two tranches to this reform. The first one is setting up the office and empowering the office of the special prosecutor to give them the necessary reforms that they need. This bill is tranche 1 of the reforms to establish the office and provide scope for information sharing with the special prosecutor, as I said before. Tranche 2 of the reforms will be progressed in early 2027, and it will look to provide additional powers and functions to the special prosecutor, subject to consultation, and may include further information-sharing, investigatory and prosecutorial powers and to make other consequential amendments as required. The work is being done. The fearmongering from some who are suggesting that the special prosecutor will not be able to prosecute is misleading and disingenuous.

The bill also allows information to flow between the royal commission and the special prosecutor, including material the commission has received from Victoria Police, IBAC and other regulators. Bodies that receive information from the special prosecutor can report back on what action they intend to take. The special prosecutor is bound by the same confidentiality obligations that apply to royal commission officers. They are prohibited from knowingly disclosing information they acquire, except in prescribed circumstances, and anyone who receives information from them is barred from taking advantage of it. The special prosecutor will also be protected from legal liability while exercising their powers and functions. This is in line with the immunities already given to royal commissioners and staff. This is how you build a system that is not just thorough but accountable and fair at every step.

The second part of the bill gives royal commissions – this one and future ones – a new power to compel information. At the moment a commission can require someone to produce documents or attend a hearing. What it cannot do is require someone to put what they know into writing if that knowledge is not already sitting in a document somewhere. This bill fixes that. It means the commission can ask someone directly in writing to give a statement or answer specific questions before it ever needs to call a formal hearing. That is a practical change, it is an important change, and it means the commission can work out who knows what, target its efforts and avoid the cost and delay of trawling through mountains of paperwork when a straightforward written answer will do the job. This power will outlast the commission itself and the office of the special prosecutor, strengthening how future royal commissions in this state gather evidence. I will note this power already exists for some Commonwealth royal commissions. This bill simply brings Victoria into line, and it comes with the same checks and balances that already apply to a commission's existing powers.

I also want to say something plainly because I think it needs saying in this debate: nothing in this bill and nothing in the bill we have just debated is about attacking unions. Unions have fought for the conditions, the safety standards and the fair pay that construction workers across the state and around the country rely on every single day. That history matters. The overwhelming majority of people working on our building sites, union members included, turn up and do an honest day's work building the roads, hospitals and schools this state needs. This is not about union bashing. This is about making sure that whatever crime, corruption or serious misconduct has found its way onto a construction site, whoever is responsible, it gets found out and gets dealt with. That is what the royal commission's terms of reference are about – looking at the conduct of everyone involved on these projects – and it is why the commissioner, not the government, decides whose actions are relevant. This bill supports that work by making sure when wrongdoing is uncovered it actually goes somewhere. It is about integrity for the whole industry, not an attack on any part of it.

What we are doing here is straightforward. We listened to what was needed to make sure a royal commission's findings do not just sit on a shelf. We are giving it a dedicated, independent partner to make sure that when the truth comes out it leads somewhere. That is what accountability looks like, and it is what Victorians expect from major projects built with their money. This bill, together with the one we have just debated in this place, represents a new direction – one focused on transparency, independence and making sure integrity in our construction sector is not just spoken about, it is delivered. We have listened, we are acting, we will continue to act and I commend the bill to the house.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (11:31): It was wonderful to hear the contributions of my fine colleagues in this chamber this morning. I was just listening to the member for Hastings and the very clear and important point he made towards the end of his contribution that this bill, the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026, is incredibly important but in no way is it here to diminish or to bash unions and union members at all. We recognise on this side of the chamber the importance of unions and the union movement in representing people who often have very little power without collective voice and the good work they do in ensuring that members are paid well – decent wages for decent work – and return home safely. The union movement should be proud of all that it has done in this nation over many years to ensure that occupational health and safety is at the forefront of every workplace in this state. We have much to thank them for in that regard.

I am very pleased to speak in support of this bill, and from the outset I feel it is important to address some of the concerns the member for Brighton raised about public interest immunity claims under the Inquiries Act 2014. The first thing to point out is that the government has published whole-of-Victorian-government guidelines for public interest immunity claims, and the guidelines clearly outline how the state identifies and raises claims for public interest immunity claims before inquiries and royal commissions. This exists already, and what is clear from those guidelines is that decisions about making such claims are informed by what is in the public interest. If the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in maintaining confidentiality, then an immunity claim cannot be made. Further, if the state does make a public interest immunity claim, it is then up to the royal commission to test the claim. If the royal commission determines that the public interest in disclosure of the information outweighs the public interest in its staying confidential, it will insist on the information being produced. That determination is informed by the terms of reference and how important the information is to the royal commission's inquiry. We are leaving it up to them to decide.

The other thing to point out is that public interest immunity exists for important reasons. It protects sensitive and confidential information about matters including national security, police operations and the identity of sources. Settings for the release of documents and information need to ensure that they do not undermine or prejudice one of the ultimate objectives of the royal commission and special prosecutor by making information available to the very people who are likely to face prosecution for their involvement in crime and misconduct on construction sites. I will leave that part there. I think it is really important that we put that on the record and that those opposite are made aware of that.

Every day in electorates right across the state, including my beautiful electorate of Monbulk covering the Dandenong Ranges, Victorians have watched major public infrastructure being built with their money. Our record of investing in public infrastructure is plainly visible for anyone to see: level crossing removals, new hospitals, schools, road projects. In Monbulk district we have seen the Angliss expansion recently opened, numerous school upgrades and modernisations and a superb car park for our commuters at Belgrave station. Victorians and my people of Monbulk have every right to expect that money is spent honestly, that contracts are won on merit and that if crime or corruption has found its way onto our building sites, it is dragged into the light and it is dealt with. That is what our government has promised, and that is what this bill helps to deliver.

We know the multitude of workers, as I said before, have been honest and have done the right thing, but there are those who clearly have not. One of the very first acts of this government under Premier Carroll was to call a royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. On 20 August this year, by letters patent published in the *Government Gazette*, that body was formally

established as the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria, with the Honourable Christopher Kourakis AC appointed as commissioner. It has been given a substantial budget of \$50 million and 12 months to report to ensure that the report is timely, and the terms of reference are broad enough to examine the nature and the extent of corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct on government-funded construction projects, the role of executive government and the impact of that conduct on construction costs borne by all of us as Victorian taxpayers.

This bill amends the Inquiries Act 2014 to do two key things: it establishes, for the first time in this state, the statutory office of the special prosecutor to work alongside the commission, and it strengthens the commission's own power to require information. I am going to take the house through both of these in some detail because the design of this reform reflects a great deal of careful thought, and those who have been involved in developing this are to be commended for their tireless efforts to ensure that this royal commission does the job it is intended to do. By design, a royal commission is an inquisitorial body, it is not a prosecutorial one. It can compel evidence, hold hearings and make findings, but under the Inquiries Act it has no power to prosecute or to compile a brief of evidence. That is entirely appropriate to its function, but it means that left on its own a royal commission can uncover serious wrongdoing but has no direct mechanism to ensure it is acted upon. This bill is closing that gap by creating a dedicated specialist resource embedded alongside the commission, working in real time as evidence comes to light so that when wrongdoing is uncovered, it is investigated, it is pursued and people face consequences. It is what Victorians expect, it is what we expect and it is what this bill will ensure can occur.

The bill establishes the office as a single statutory position, the special prosecutor, to be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier following consultation with the construction royal commissioner. Independence is the foundation that this office is built on, and the bill is explicit that the special prosecutor is not subject to the direction or the control of the Premier or any other minister in performing their duties. On top of that, the special prosecutor remains a public body for the purposes of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, meaning IBAC itself retains oversight of the role. In exercising their functions, the special prosecutor is protected from legal liability in the same way royal commissioners and their staff already are, so they can act on the evidence without fear or favour. Removal is similarly rigorous, and this is important: it can only occur by the Governor in Council on the Premier's recommendation on specific stated grounds such as misconduct, neglect of duty or incapacity, with any acting appointment during a vacancy limited to three months. The office does not simply vanish the moment the commission finishes its work. It will continue for six months after the commission's final report is tabled, so that referrals in train can be followed through.

The bill allows the commission to disclose to the special prosecutor information that is required, including material that has received from Victoria Police and IBAC where relevant to the special prosecutor's functions. The special prosecutor can then refer that information to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing bodies and equivalent interstate, territory and Commonwealth bodies for them to consider what action their own functions allow. The special prosecutor is bound by the same confidentiality obligations that already apply to royal commission officers. The bill goes further by making clear that anybody receiving information from the special prosecutor must not take advantage of that information beyond its proper purpose. These are careful, considered safeguards around a genuinely new information-sharing power.

Clause 4 addresses a real and practical limitation in the current law. Today a royal commission can only compel the production of a document or thing that already exists at the time its notice is issued or compel someone's attendance at a hearing. It has no power to require a person to set out in writing information that exists only in their knowledge. This bill fixes that. It will allow the commission to issue a written notice requiring a person to provide information or a statement in writing by a specified time and in a specified manner, including where the commission considers it appropriate, by requiring

written answers to specific questions rather than requiring that person to give oral evidence at a hearing. This is a sensible, efficiency-driving reform, and importantly it is not limited to this commission. It will endure as a standing power for all future Victorian royal commissions long after this commission and this office have finished their vital work.

This bill is tranche 1 of a two-tranche reform, and tranche 2, expected to be progressed in early 2027, will consider further powers and functions for the special prosecutor developed in consultation with the commission itself, Victoria Police, IBAC and the Office of Public Prosecutions. This is not a delay; it is the right way to build durable institutions. Getting the architecture right, in proper consultation with the agencies this office will work alongside, matters more than rushing every element into a single bill. This is a carefully considered, thorough piece of legislation that will only serve us well, and I commend it to the house.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (11:41): I am actually quite surprised that I am standing up after another Labor member in this place, because –

A member: Where are they?

Mathew HILAKARI: They might have gone for lunch or they might have headed home for the day, but certainly for a political party who have been talking about these issues for a very long time and talking a very big game when they are in front of the cameras, they just have not turned up to this place. It has been Labor member after Labor member up on their feet because the Liberals and the Nationals either have just walked out of the building or simply do not care about this topic. I did hear the member for Brighton make his initial contribution to this, and I think my main takeaway from that was actually that he had complaints about his lack of access to executive privilege. That was the main takeaway for me from his contribution. I can understand that, because he has not been in an executive position. There is real risk in this state that he and others – to be really specific, One Nation – could be in that position of executive privilege, which I think is quite a scary thought.

By the way, I do not think the Liberal Party are going to have that privilege of having executive privilege at any time soon. I think that the risk to Victoria is that One Nation will form government, and those opposite will be simply crossbench losers. They will be relegated to therefore only being able to provide supply to One Nation or provide support in the house in terms of any motions of no confidence, and I wonder how long that confidence would exist. I am quite shocked to hear of their willingness to engage in preference flows between each other, understanding the nature of the discourse that One Nation brings to the table. I think Pauline Hanson's first real contribution in Parliament 30 years ago – she is a veteran of politics – was to say that the country was being swamped by Asians. What a disgrace. Yet those opposite are working out what the best way is to do a preference deal and try and pretend they are not doing a preference deal. We see across the board in Victoria that they are willing to empower and put in a group of people like One Nation and the ideas that they espouse in a great multicultural state. Simply the best thing we have going for us is multiculturalism in Victoria. I was at an event this morning, Namaste Westside, promoting the western suburbs and the tourism that we have there, and that welcome idea of 'namaste' is something that we know that One Nation has no interest in – in fact the opposite, so I am deeply concerned about that. But I will move on from the member for Brighton.

The member for Ovens Valley had a great many complaints over the IBAC system. I thought he was a little bit churlish, because just sentences before, he indicated that he was very proud that the Liberal–National parties, when they were in government, set up IBAC. And yet they have had nothing but complaints since that point in time. So, as to the thoughtfulness that they brought to the table at that point in time, it is just interesting that they would celebrate and also commiserate and complain about it for a good 12 years after the fact. The Liberal Party did spend a lot of time talking about the need for a royal commission. Obviously we have delivered one. It has been a real priority for the Premier to put forward a royal commission and a special prosecutor, which we are discussing in this bill. But they are a little bit crestfallen.

Part of the reason I think they are not turning up to deliver any speeches on the special prosecutor or the royal commission and the reason they are sort of ducking and covering as quickly as they can is because their real intent around a royal commission was to set up a Tony Abbott-style royal commission. You would all remember that the federal royal commission into trade unions occurred in March 2014. They simply wanted to take those terms of reference and plonk them into Victoria. They are not known for their hard work in the Liberal Party. Hopefully they would have changed the name from 'federal' royal commission to 'Victorian' royal commission, but that would have been the extent of the work that they would be up for. That royal commission was a failure in one way. It did not really go to any issues of criminality or otherwise, but it was a success for the Liberal Party in the other way, in that it drained unions of their funds. That was a real intent of it: to try and take away the legitimate democratic representatives of working people, try and diminish them and try to crush them using the federal government's finances, to try and diminish the finances of those trade unions that have set up and over time delivered huge wins for working Victorians and working Australians. That was really their intent. And they are absolutely crestfallen now because some of the people that they thought were their backers were not actually their backers; they were just looking for a decent royal commission to be set up. They have acknowledged that publicly, that the royal commission that we have set up in Victoria is appropriate and will get the task done alongside the special prosecutor that we are talking about today. They are just so crestfallen because they thought these guys were partisan actors. No, they were just looking for the appropriate integrity measures, and they have called out that these integrity measures are appropriate.

Now they have got nowhere to go, because no-one is going to back in their faux royal commissions anymore. They are going to find it really hard, should they be given the honour and privilege of forming government, which I do not believe they will, to rewrite those terms of reference, which they have every intention of doing. Everybody who is a member of a union across Victoria, every trade unionist and every worker in Victoria should fear a Liberal Party getting their hands on the reins of government, because that is exactly what they will seek to do. They will seek to smash unions, diminish their ability to ensure that workers go home safely and get decent pay and conditions. That will be their intent. I call out to every single worker across this state and their representative: understand exactly who we are dealing with here – people who are willing to use taxpayer funds to attack workers and to attack unions. They are not their own funds, by the way; they are not digging into their own pockets to do this but using taxpayer funds to undertake their partisan process.

If you remember the royal commissioner at the time who did the trade union royal commission within the federal scheme, it was Dyson Heydon. I do not say OAM anymore. He had to hand that back – a partisan actor known before he was set up as a royal commissioner. It was an absolute –

Daniela De Martino interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: You are absolutely right, member for Monbulk, it was a stitch-up then. And the stitch-up that the Liberal Party and the National Party had been proposing has been taken away from them because an appropriate royal commission has been set up, with appropriate support, including what we have before us today in terms of the special prosecutor. This is part 1 of this set of work, and we need to do part 2 later on, in the next term of government.

The royal commission has been set up with a substantial budget of \$50 million, which is appropriate. They need to report within 12 months, and they will be given, as the Premier has said, every support that they need to get the job done, because we do know there are absolutely concerns across the whole of the construction sector, and we are willing to examine our own efforts in government alongside the efforts of business. You might find it weird to hear the word 'business' used in conjunction with this royal commission, because when the Libs have been talking about it, they have never said the word 'businesses' – never. It seems to be absolutely relegated from their language, but the businesses, including their boards and their management, need to be held to account for their behaviour. This behaviour will be closely examined by the royal commission and referred on to the special prosecutor should this bill be adopted through both houses of this Parliament and approved by the Governor.

I have only got 30 seconds left, Acting Speaker. I would always seek extra time from you, but you do not always give it. The royal commission will identify the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct relating to any major public civil infrastructure project in Victoria. It is right to do so. I wish I had more time to talk about this. I am sure a Liberal–National member will follow me straight after this and the 7 seconds that I have left. They have got the opportunity to stand up. No, they will never stand up for Victorians.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (11:51): I am sorry to disappoint the member for Point Cook, but I am standing up as another government contributor. I will come back to the lack of speakers from the other side of the chamber and very notably the lack of speakers from the Greens, full stop, on this bill. I will return to that topic, but before I criticise the Greens on that front, I would like to begin by recognising the contribution of the Greens member for Brunswick to our broader integrity packages. We have, especially those of us in the class of 2022, been listening to some valedictories in recent weeks, and with certain sadness we are realising we will not see a lot of people who have joined us for this term of government again. I have admired some of those valedictories. They have been remarkable contributions. I very much enjoyed the member for Essendon's, who is with us now. He is known for his very considerable contributions to this chamber but got his valedictory into a wonderfully concise 90 seconds. It is worth checking out, for those who were not here to hear it. I loved the finish where he just said 'Goodbye' and down the mic went. Of course the member for Pakenham kicked that off, and we all reflect on the extraordinary contribution that she has made and the extraordinary contributions she could have made for Pakenham and Victoria had circumstances been different. The member for Brunswick is also departing due to very significant health challenges, and our thoughts are with him. We hope – and I am sure – that he will find some strength, solace and satisfaction in the fact that two of the things that he mentioned in his valedictory speech not that long ago – group voting tickets and the change to the definition of 'corrupt conduct' in the IBAC legislation – have now both occurred or are in the process of occurring.

I will turn now to the context for this bill, and that is particularly the 'Building bad' issue and the reporting of Nick McKenzie and the \$15 billion figure that has dominated public debate. I do just want to say that were Geoffrey Watson here, I think he would say that the \$15 billion number is not what he ever wanted people to be talking about. Geoffrey Watson had a very clear point to make in his *Rotting from the Top* report. His key thesis, in essence, was that the CFMEU construction and general division had changed since the Bill Oliver–Martin Kingham era. It had been taken over by other individuals. He lists a lot of them; obviously John Setka and Joe Myles have been particularly prominent in the commentary. His thesis is that these individuals and their colleagues took over the union, then the union took over certain projects. That is essentially the issue that he thinks we should be addressing, the intimidation and criminality that occurred with that. Certainly parts of his thesis have been substantiated by the investigations that have already taken place.

But I think it is so important to be clear that there has been a very, very strong response to those 2024 allegations. Of course they are serious, but I cannot overstate how important it is that the federal Labor government took over the administration and running of the CFMEU general and construction division. If we turn to Geoffrey Watson's thesis about the individuals he mentions, the individuals that he mentions are no longer working in that union. In fact, as I understand it, almost 50 per cent of the people who were in the union at the beginning of the administration period no longer work there.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: Yes, thank you, member for Pascoe Vale. It is a very significant number. Not only that of course, but police have commenced investigations. There have been over 80 charges laid against, as I understand it, over 17 individuals. There seems to be this view amongst the opposition that that is nothing, and to those opposition members who are here I put this question: can you think of any scandal nationally, Australia-wide, in the last decade that has attracted 17 people being charged? I know charges are not convictions, but that is a very serious response. If we think of HIH, if we think of the Pyramid collapse, if we think of the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking,

Superannuation and Financial Services Industry, if we think of the fact that tobacco companies in this country knowingly sold a carcinogenic product to people for decades – never apologised for it, covered it up and tried to sell it to children – and if we think about James Hardie with asbestos, which did the same thing, in none of those scandals were 17 people charged. Within the relatively small organisation that the CFMEU construction and general division was – not small, but I believe about 100 or so employees – to have 17 of them charged at this point is a very significant response, and to have, as I understand it, well over 50 moved on from their positions is about as big a response to an organisational scandal as we have seen in this country, probably since the Fitzgerald inquiry. It is a very, very significant response.

A very important thing that I would like to put on the record here is that the Greens are not speaking on this bill because the Greens supported the Setka-era CFMEU. The Greens stood up and lectured us about integrity on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, but they are not here on today's bill, because Max Chandler-Mather went to the 'Defend the CFMEU' rally, and when he was repeatedly asked did he criticise John Setka's behaviour, he repeatedly went to that same response we often hear from them, where he said, 'Oh, look, we don't condone violence of any kind, but ...' He refused to ever specifically address any of the allegations in Geoffrey Watson's report with respect to Setka and other individuals, and that is why we do not see the Greens here today.

I began by thanking the member for Brunswick for his contribution, and I do worry – there was a tradition that the Greens were very what I might call broadsheet Greens. They were good on policy detail – robust policy detail, progressive policy detail – and I think the member for Brunswick was one of those people and made a really significant contribution. There is a rise now of these tabloid Greens, who have no interest in policy detail except for manipulating it for a TikTok or Instagram reel, and Max Chandler-Mather, who contributed so little to our public policy debate, was one of those people. I would just say that I hope that is not a trend that continues, because many of us will miss the days in which the Greens actually made a proper, considered contribution to public policy rather than just chasing engagement and likes on social media.

I want to touch also on this notion of grey corruption or soft corruption that is often associated with Robert Redlich, who puts that view forward. I do think we have to be very careful. Corruption is a very serious issue, and people misusing their public office for improper private gain is a very real problem. But I think that in order to deal with it as a real problem we have to be black and white about the fact that that is a form of poor behaviour that is very different to maladministration. I worry that when you listen to Robert Redlich he says that we made the wrong decisions about the Commonwealth Games and that was corruption. As I understand him, he says that if a school principal were to order some office paper and the Forest Stewardship Council certification was not correct or something that would be corruption. I think we have to be very careful, as there is a difference. You can criticise administrative decisions of course – they are criticised in this place every sitting week in a lot of detail – but there is this notion that the Victorian government should have just immediately stopped all construction procurement as soon as allegations about the CFMEU arose. I say that is not the right perspective, firstly, because the very serious response was taking place that I have set out, which was the right response; but secondly, as I think the member for Tarneit touched upon, if we had stopped all construction projects, we would have been stopping projects the vast majority of which had perfectly honest people doing perfectly honest work.

I note that the Baillieu and Napthine governments were governing in a period where there were some very serious different allegations about the CFMEU. Did they stop all construction projects? No. Did they continue the M80? Yes. Did they continue the regional rail link? Yes. Did they continue the desalination plant? Yes. Did they even take the steps we are taking today to deal with that problem? No. You can criticise them – I am criticising them right now for that – but do I suggest that Ted Baillieu was corrupt? Am I saying that Denis Napthine was corrupt? No. I do think – and I say this specifically to Robert Redlich and those who have this view – we need to be clear that those administrative decisions that I can criticise, as I have just done, of the previous Liberal government are not the same

as corruption. We see that locally. We have proceeded with a lot of important projects locally, and I do not think it was wrong for us to proceed with upgrading Reservoir High School just because there were allegations about the construction sector taking place. Certainly as far as all of us locally could see, those projects were being done in an honest and good way, supporting local employment and, most importantly, providing local benefits.

Just touching on Reservoir High, I did earlier this week congratulate Zoe Lyon and Daniel Luttick on bass in my members statement, but I am just repeating it now because I made a slight mistake and I am just tidying that up for *Hansard*. So well done to Zoe Lyon and Daniel Luttick on bass in the Reservoir High musical.

If I take another example, we had some challenges with the procurement of the Preston Cricket Club nets. I am not going to tell the whole story now, but basically in the end we just had to get that project done. Full credit goes to Richard Norris from Preston Cricket Club, who particularly pressed that. Actually, I will update the house on Richard Norris. I have mentioned this before, but he is entering now his 60th year on the general committee of Preston Cricket Club and his 78th year volunteering with the club. He started in the 1948–49 season, when most of Reservoir was just paddocks, and I believe – I will put it on the record here – that Richard Norris currently holds the record for the longest ever voluntary contribution to a sporting club in the state. If anyone in the chamber has anyone who has served longer, please feel free to let me know. I thank Richard for his work. He will remember on that particular project in the end we just had to get it done. As I say, people may criticise our administrative decisions on that project, but it is not the same as corruption.

So, having touched on what I think are two very important points, our response to the allegations that have been made by Geoffrey Watson and Nick McKenzie and others has been very, very significant, and we should be careful to delineate between those very, very serious issues and other questions of maladministration. I commend the bill to the house.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (12:01): Acting Speaker Farnham, it is lovely to see you in the chair, of course, and to follow my very good friend and neighbour – physically and geographically in my electorate but also here in the seating plan of the chamber – the member for Preston after a very, very comprehensive and fantastic contribution, particularly calling out the Greens and their hypocrisy on these issues and their deafening silence on this particular issue as well.

I rise to support the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. This bill is an important step towards the Victorian Labor government's commitment to upholding integrity and uncovering misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. The bill seeks to amend the Inquiries Act 2014 to establish the office of the special prosecutor, led by an appointed special prosecutor to work cooperatively in conjunction, of course, with the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria. The Victorian government undertakes major public and civil infrastructure projects on behalf of all of the Victorian community, and it is essential that such projects are conducted with the highest possible level of integrity and have the trust and confidence of the Victorian public. The royal commission has been established to identify the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct affecting Victorian government-funded construction projects.

But a royal commission has no power to prosecute or compile a brief of evidence under the Inquiries Act. This is appropriate, given the role of the royal commission as an inquisitorial forum rather than an adversarial forum with judicial or prosecutorial powers. However, the royal commission has the potential to uncover evidence of criminality and serious misconduct and corruption. The special prosecutor is intended to work parallel to the royal commission to provide information to Victoria Police, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, IBAC, and regulatory and licensing authorities or other appropriate Victorian, interstate, territory and Commonwealth bodies to consider relevant actions in accordance with their functions. The bill will ensure that there is a

dedicated specialist resource working alongside the royal commission so that when wrongdoing is uncovered it is investigated and prosecutions can be pursued.

Given the complexities associated with legislating for a fully empowered office of special prosecutor, necessary reforms will need to be undertaken in two tranches. This bill is tranche 1 of those reforms to establish the actual office of the special prosecutor and provide scope for information sharing by and with the special prosecutor. Tranche 2 of the reforms will be progressed in early 2027 to provide additional powers and functions to the special prosecutor, subject to the consultation and engagement that is required, and may include further information-sharing, investigatory and prosecutorial powers. It will make other consequential amendments as required, such as amendments relating to the admissibility of evidence obtained by the construction royal commission in subsequent legal proceedings.

The special prosecutor will focus on ensuring that appropriate action can be undertaken by relevant law enforcement, integrity and regulatory bodies where evidence passed on from the royal commission indicates that further investigation and action could be taken to address instances of criminal or corrupt conduct and serious misconduct. The special prosecutor will do this by working in cooperation and collaboration with the royal commission to provide relevant information to the appropriate body for them to consider whether to take relevant actions in accordance with their functions. The bill provides that legislative vehicle to create the statutory office of the special prosecutor in the Inquiries Act, which consists of one special prosecutor appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier following consultation with the construction royal commissioner. The bill provides that the special prosecutor must be an Australian lawyer of at least eight years standing and provides for an initial appointment term of up to two years. This appointment may be extended by up to 12 months by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier. To ensure the independence of the role, the special prosecutor will not be subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any other minister in respect to the performance of their duties and functions and the exercise of their power. The performance by the special prosecutor of their functions and the exercise of their powers will be carried out fairly and independently.

The special prosecutor will remain a public body for the purposes of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and therefore subject to oversight by IBAC. Independence from government is central to public confidence in the special prosecutor's operations as it will ensure that the performance of their functions is conducted without any government influence. The special prosecutor will have the power to do all things that are necessary or convenient to be done for, in connection with or incidental to the performance of their duties and their functions. The bill will enable the royal commission to disclose to the special prosecutor any acquired information, including information received from regulatory and licensing authorities, it considers relevant and appropriate for the performance of the functions of the special prosecutor under the Inquiries Act or any other relevant act, for that matter.

The special prosecutor will play, of course, a key role in increasing confidence in the integrity of the Victorian construction industry, ensuring that relevant information can be provided to appropriate bodies to consider relevant actions in accordance with their functions. The royal commission and the special prosecutor will represent another major important step forward to ensure that the events that led to the royal commission can never occur again.

Of course this bill is part of our Victorian Labor government's commitment to integrity and to acting on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major projects across the state. The Premier's first act after 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 allegedly onto building sites, who allowed it to happen and how we can make sure that it must never happen again. The royal commission was established on 20 August 2026 and will give Victorians those answers.

The commission's terms of reference are broad and expansive. The commission will be funded by a budget of \$50 million and has been asked to report back within 12 months. The objectives of the construction royal commission are set out in the terms of reference that they will be adhering to, and they include, amongst other things, identifying the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct relating to any major public and civil infrastructure projects in Victoria; supporting the government to prevent further corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct and rebuild trust in the integrity of the major construction sector; and instigating referrals to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other relevant bodies by working cooperatively with the special prosecutor, which this bill is all about.

Of course these reforms have not happened in a vacuum; they have not happened in isolation. Further to the member for Preston's contribution, we have as a government taken serious ongoing action in this space. I just want to take us back through a little bit of a timeline here, because it was the federal Labor government that did place the CFMEU into administration and appointed an administrator back in 2024, with around 270 union officials removed when the administrator took control at the time. At the state level our Victorian government continued to support that strong and robust action through a range of measures. We wrote to the federal government to exercise its powers under the Fair Work Act 2009 to review and, if necessary, terminate any CFMEU enterprise bargaining agreement on Victorian construction sites to prevent and deter any further alleged criminal activity. We asked the ALP national executive to immediately suspend the CFMEU construction division from the Victorian Labor Party over two years ago now, I believe, and subsequently also banned donations from the CFMEU and suspended the construction division from the Victorian ALP – a major step.

We referred all these matters, when initially raised, accordingly with Victoria Police, IBAC and other relevant authorities, and Victoria Police has continued to pursue many of these matters via Operation Hawk. I refer to the paper just today. Operation Hawk to date has resulted in over 80 criminal charges associated with around 17 or 18 individuals alone. We commissioned the independent construction sector review, the Wilson review, to expose and take action against any rotten or toxic culture within the building industry, which recommended and led us to implementing even further measures, including a new single point of entry complaints referral body for the sector relating to Victorian government construction sites – the construction referral service.

We have since also strengthened the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority's, VIDA, ability to direct the removal of individuals engaging in unlawful practices. We strengthened the Labour Hire Authority's powers by expanding the fit and proper person test to include past indictable convictions, insolvencies, close associations with unfit persons or membership of criminal organisations, amongst other changes, to enable the LHA to publish more information about licensing decisions. We have introduced a new criminal offence of causing or threatening to cause detriment to a person who makes a complaint to Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. The Labour Hire Authority changes alone have already resulted in over, or at least, 140 labour hire businesses and organisations having their licences cancelled and almost 50 licence applications being refused from businesses in the construction industry. The Supreme Court, from what I understand, has issued to date around \$800,000 to \$900,000 in penalties to five construction companies and three company directors for their involvement in unlicensed labour hire operations in the sector.

We have also since strengthened a broad range of other laws to complement these efforts, including cracking down on organised crime: anti-bikie laws, illicit tobacco laws and so much more. We have established as well the organised crime command through Victoria Police with a \$170 million investment – a new permanent organised crime command which, once fully staffed, will have 158 additional staff. It brings together under the one roof Operation Hawk, which has been targeting that alleged organised crime activity within the construction industry; the VIPER Taskforce, Victoria Police's statewide tactical and investigative capability targeting serious and organised crime; Taskforce Lunar, which is targeting organised crime syndicates associated with illicit tobacco trade and arsons; and Operation Eclipse, which has targeted organised criminal activity around arson

extortion attacks against Victorian hospitality businesses. With more time I would love to go on, but again this is just another important step in our tranche that takes real action and serious action when it comes to questions around integrity and transparency on our construction sites.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (12:11): I rise today in this chamber to speak in strong support of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. I am very surprised to see those opposite not speaking anymore. I thought they would be quite keen to talk on this matter, but clearly not. This legislation represents a vital, uncompromising step forward in our government's commitment to upholding integrity, exposing corruption and eliminating criminal misconduct within Victoria's construction industry. The Victorian government undertakes major public and civil infrastructure projects on behalf of the Victorian community. These are the roads, the rail lines, the schools and hospitals that connect our neighbourhoods and serve our families. When the government invests hard-earned taxpayer dollars into infrastructure projects, Victorians have a fundamental right to expect that every single dollar is spent with the absolute highest level of integrity and transparency. Victorians deserve answers. They deserve to know how organised crime found its way onto some of our building sites, who allowed it to happen and, crucially, how we make sure it never happens again. In saying that, though, most of our building is done by hardworking, honest, responsible people. Acting Speaker Farnham, you have been in the construction industry. I see a nod, yes, that is correct. This is not about bringing down those that are in our construction industry. It is just about bringing down those that are doing the wrong thing. Most of our schools, our hospitals and public transport infrastructure are built by hardworking people. We support them, we back our workers, but we also need to find out why certain things happened and dig a bit deeper.

That is precisely why the Premier's very first act upon assuming office was to establish the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria. Formally established by letters patent on 20 August 2026, this royal commission has been given a broad, expansive mandate, a \$50 million budget and a clear directive to report within 12 months. Its core objective is clear: to uncover the nature and extent of corruption and criminal conduct on public infrastructure projects; to support government efforts to rebuild trust in the sector; and to instigate direct referrals to law enforcement and regulatory authorities. However, as every member of this house should know, a royal commission is an inquisitorial body, not a judicial or prosecutorial one. Under the Inquiries Act 2014 a royal commission has immense powers to compel evidence, hold hearings and make findings, but it does not have the power to lay charges, compile briefs of evidence or prosecute offenders in a court of law. It is entirely appropriate that these functions remain separate to preserve the core function of a royal commission, but we must also ensure that when evidence of serious criminality and systemic corruption is uncovered, it does not sit idle on a page – it must lead to swift, decisive action. That is why this bill creates the office of the special prosecutor for the first time in Victoria. By amending the Inquiries Act 2014, clause 5 of this bill establishes a dedicated specialist and embedded resource that will work in parallel and in close cooperation with the royal commission.

This bill creates the legislative framework for a special prosecutor appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier following consultation with the royal commissioner to operate alongside the inquiry in real time. Rather than waiting until the conclusion of a lengthy inquiry to begin sifting through thousands of pages of evidence, the special prosecutor will act as a bridge. As evidence of criminal conduct, corruption or regulatory breach is exposed, the special prosecutor will process that information and channel it directly to Victoria Police, the Independent, Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, regulatory and licensing authorities and relevant interstate or Commonwealth bodies. This streamlines the pipeline to prosecution, ensuring that law enforcement agencies can consider immediate, relevant actions within their respective jurisdictions.

To ensure the public can have total confidence in this office, the bill guarantees the complete independence of the special prosecutor. The special prosecutor will not be subject to the direction or control of the Premier, any minister or the government of the day. They will perform their duties fairly,

independently and transparently. The special prosecutor will remain a public body under the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, ensuring they are subject to rigorous oversight by IBAC. The bill also sets high statutory standards for the role. The appointee must be an Australian lawyer of at least eight years standing, appointed for an initial term of up to two years with the flexibility to extend for a further 12 months if necessary. It also appropriately accommodates the potential appointment of a Crown prosecutor or senior Crown prosecutor, preserving their statutory rights, pension entitlements and position. Crucially this bill establishes a two-way regulated flow of information between the royal commission and the special prosecutor, ensuring strict confidentiality and information-sharing safeguards equivalent to those applying to royal commission officers. It also permits bodies receiving information from the special prosecutor to report back on the actions they intend to take, creating full operational accountability.

This bill represents tranche 1 of our reforms. Because creating a fully empowered statutory special prosecutor is a complex legal endeavour, we are taking a measured, deliberate approach. Tranche 1 establishes the statutory office and enables information sharing and embedded operational workflows ahead of the November caretaker period. Early in 2027 a re-elected Carroll government will introduce tranche 2 legislation to grant further investigative, prosecutorial and evidence admissibility powers to this special prosecutor. It is essential that these further powers are designed carefully in consultation with Victoria Police, IBAC, the Office of Public Prosecutions and the royal commission itself so that we build a robust legal framework that does not interfere with existing statutory functions.

Beyond establishing the special prosecutor, clause 4 of this bill delivers critical enhancements to the investigative tool set of all Victorian royal commissions. Under the Inquiries Act 2014 a royal commission can only compel the production of existing documents or summon individuals to give oral evidence at a hearing. It cannot compel a person to create a written statement or compile information that is not already documented. This bill fixes that limitation by granting Victorian royal commissions the power to compel a person by a written notice to provide specified information or a written statement within a designated timeframe. This aligns Victoria with Commonwealth powers under section 2(3A) of the Royal Commissions Act 1902. This simple yet important reform will save immense time and public funds. It allows the royal commission to target its inquiries with precision instead of trawling through millions of pages of corporate documents or dragging witnesses into expensive, protracted oral hearings just to establish basic facts. The commission can compel direct written answers and witness statements up-front. This will streamline proceedings, clarify who holds relevant knowledge early in the process and ensure evidence-gathering is both fulsome and efficient. Crucially, these information-compelling powers are subject to standard legislative checks and balances, and they will endure in the Inquiries Act long after this specific royal commission concludes.

There is so much more that I could say, but I have under 30 seconds left. Let me remind the house of what the terms of reference explicitly empower the royal commission to investigate: the conduct of anyone engaged in corruption, criminal conduct, and serious misconduct across major public and civil infrastructure projects – any conduct that is corrupt, criminal or undertaken for illegitimate purposes. I commend the bill to the house.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (12:21): I rise to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. This is an important piece of legislation that goes directly to the issues of integrity, accountability and public confidence in the delivery of major public infrastructure projects across our great state of Victoria, and I thank every member in this place who has made a contribution, including the member for Mulgrave just before me. As members of this place, we have a responsibility to make sure that public money is spent properly, that public projects are delivered with integrity and that when allegations of corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct emerge, governments act decisively. That is exactly what this bill seeks to do. This legislation forms a key part of our Labor government's commitment to uncovering misconduct within Victoria's construction industry and restoring public trust in the systems responsible for delivering the schools, hospitals, roads, rail projects and infrastructure that Victorian communities rely upon every single day. It supports the work of the

Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria established on 20 August 2026 to investigate allegations of corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct affecting government-funded construction projects.

As the member for Ripon, I know how hard rural and regional Victorians work and how strongly they expect governments to be good stewards of public money. Across my electorate, people want to see investment in roads, hospitals, schools and community infrastructure. They also want confidence that every dollar committed to those projects is being spent honestly and in the public interest. When allegations of criminal influence, corruption or misconduct arise on projects funded by Victorian taxpayers, communities rightly expect action. They expect governments to investigate, uncover the truth and hold those responsible to account. That is why the royal commission matters and why this bill is so important. The royal commission has been tasked with identifying the nature and the extent of corruption as well as of criminal conduct and serious misconduct associated with major public and civil infrastructure projects. Its objectives include rebuilding trust in the integrity of the construction sector and supporting referrals to law enforcement and integrity agencies through cooperation with a special prosecutor.

One of the fundamental realities of royal commissions is that while they are powerful investigative bodies, they are not prosecutorial bodies. They can compel evidence, they can summon witnesses and they can make findings, but they cannot prosecute criminal offences. They cannot lay charges, and that is a deliberate feature of the system, reflecting the fact that royal commissions are inquisitorial bodies rather than courts. However, a royal commission has the potential to uncover significant evidence of criminal conduct and corruption. This bill addresses that gap by creating something new for Victoria, the statutory office of the special prosecutor. The special prosecutor will work alongside the royal commission and act as a dedicated specialist resource focused on making sure that information uncovered during the inquiry is referred to the appropriate authorities for further investigation or action. The special prosecutor will be able to provide information to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other relevant Victorian, interstate, territory and Commonwealth agencies so they can consider what actions fall within their respective powers and responsibilities. This is a practical reform. It creates a direct pathway between the royal commission's investigative work and those agencies responsible for enforcement, regulation and prosecution.

Importantly, this legislation makes sure that the special prosecutor is independent. The bill explicitly provides that the special prosecutor is not subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any other minister when carrying out their functions. The role will be appointed by the Governor in Council following consultation with the royal commissioner and must be filled by an Australian lawyer with at least eight years standing. Those safeguards matter. Public confidence depends upon integrity processes being free from political interference. Victorians need to know that decisions about referrals and investigations are being made independently and based on evidence. The bill also establishes clear accountability measures around appointment, removal and confidentiality obligations. It allows a special prosecutor to be removed only on specific grounds such as misconduct, neglect of duty or inability to perform the functions of the office. The role will also be subject to confidentiality obligations similar to those that already apply to royal commission officers.

This legislation also introduces another significant reform. It strengthens the information-gathering powers available to Victorian royal commissions. At present royal commissions can compel the production of documents and require witnesses to attend hearings and give evidence. But there are circumstances where vital information may not exist within a document. Sometimes information exists only in a person's knowledge. Sometimes obtaining a simple answer requires investigators to search through thousands upon thousands of documents. This bill addresses that challenge. It creates a new power enabling a royal commission to compel a person to provide written information or a written statement by a specified time and in a specified form. That may include answers to questions, the provision of specific information or the preparation of a witness statement. This reform will improve efficiency and effectiveness, and it will enable royal commissions to obtain targeted information

without unnecessary delay. It will help identify key witnesses, it will reduce the need for costly and time-consuming document searches and it will assist commissions to gather evidence in a more structured and effective manner.

Another important aspect of this bill is that these strengthened information-gathering powers will continue beyond the life of the construction royal commission itself. This means future Victorian royal commissions will also benefit from these improved investigative tools. This legislation represents the first stage of a broader reform process. The Labor government has made clear that further work will be undertaken during 2027 to consider additional powers and functions for the special prosecutor. These reforms will be developed in consultation with the royal commission, Victoria Police, IBAC, the Office of Public Prosecutions and other stakeholders to make sure that any further arrangements are effective, practical and legally robust. That is a sensible approach. These are significant reforms. It is important that they are developed carefully, informed by the practical experience of the royal commission itself and by the agencies responsible for enforcing the law. I also note that the royal commission has attracted significant public and media attention, as we all know, and that key stakeholders have indicated their willingness to cooperate with the inquiry. That cooperation will be essential in making sure the commission can undertake its work thoroughly and transparently.

Ultimately this bill is about giving Victorian taxpayers confidence in the integrity of major public infrastructure projects. It is about making sure serious allegations are properly investigated and that information uncovered through the royal commission can be acted upon. It is about ensuring public institutions have the powers they need to uncover wrongdoing and support accountability. For rural communities and regional communities like those across Ripon, where every infrastructure dollar matters, those outcomes are critically important. This legislation strengthens the royal commission, it establishes the independent office of the special prosecutor and it improves information-gathering powers. It represents another important step in restoring and maintaining public confidence in Victoria's construction industry and the delivery of major public projects. That is why I commend this bill to the house.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (12:30): I rise to speak on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026, a bill about ensuring integrity and accountability are at the heart of the delivery of major government-funded projects. It establishes the office of the special prosecutor to work alongside the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria, another important step in this government's strong and definitive response to serious concerns about integrity in our construction industry. As his first act the Premier announced that the government would establish a royal commission to inquire into misconduct affecting Victorian government-funded construction projects, alongside a special prosecutor. On 20 August that royal commission was formally established, with the Honourable Christopher Kourakis AC appointed as commissioner. It has comprehensive terms of reference that have been welcomed by the most eminent integrity experts.

Establishing this royal commission is a significant step. It gives us an independent process to uncover the facts, examine the evidence and identify the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct affecting government-funded construction projects. But we also need to recognise what a royal commission is and what it is not. A royal commission is an inquisitorial body. Under the Inquiries Act 2014 it does not have the power to prosecute or compile a brief of evidence, yet through the course of its work this royal commission may uncover evidence of criminality, corruption or serious misconduct. That is why the special prosecutor matters, and this bill puts in place the legislative architecture to establish that special prosecutor. The special prosecutor will work in parallel with the royal commission and provide relevant information to bodies including Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and other appropriate Victorian, interstate, territory and Commonwealth bodies. These bodies can then consider what action should be taken in accordance with their respective functions. It means we do not simply establish a royal commission, wait for the final report and then begin thinking about what comes next. Where relevant information emerges

through the course of the commission, there will be a dedicated, embedded resource working in real time alongside it to help ensure that information can reach the appropriate authorities.

Importantly, it is not the role of government to determine who has done something wrong. It is not the role of ministers to determine what should be investigated or who should be prosecuted. Those decisions belong with independent institutions operating according to law and following the evidence. Our responsibility is to make sure those institutions have the framework they need to do their jobs, and a central feature of this bill is therefore the independence of the special prosecutor. The special prosecutor will be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier following consultation with royal commissioner Mr Kourakis. Once appointed, the special prosecutor will not be subject to the direction or control of the Premier or of any other minister in performing their duties, exercising their functions or using their powers. Their functions must be performed fairly and independently. The special prosecutor will remain a public body for the purposes of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011, meaning they will themselves remain subject to IBAC oversight. That independence matters. If we are serious about accountability, then we must be serious about allowing institutions to follow the evidence wherever it leads, and we must make sure the public can have confidence that decisions about that evidence are being made independently and without political interference.

The bill also establishes the information-sharing framework that will allow this relationship to work. The royal commission will be able to disclose acquired information to the special prosecutor where it considers that information relevant and appropriate to the performance of the special prosecutor's functions. The special prosecutor can assess that information and provide it to the appropriate law enforcement, integrity, regulatory or licensing body so that that body can consider what action to take. At the same time, this bill puts important safeguards around that information. The special prosecutor will be subject to confidentiality obligations, restrictions and exemptions applying to royal commission officers, including restrictions on knowingly disclosing information acquired during their appointment, except in prescribed circumstances, and that balance is important. We want information to be able to move to the bodies that it needs to, but we also need that information to be handled appropriately.

I represent a community where people have strong expectations of their government. People in Northcote have a deep appreciation for the social contract. We are all a part of the democratic institutions we uphold and the laws and liberties that we respect. They go to work, they run their businesses, they pay their taxes and they contribute to our community. I think there is a very basic principle at the heart of this bill: people who do the right thing should be able to expect that the rules apply to everyone. That is especially important when we are talking about major projects being delivered on behalf of the Victorian community. Government undertakes major public and civil infrastructure projects with public money. That is the role and responsibility of our government as we plan for the future of our city and our state. Victoria remains the fastest growing state in the country, with our population expected to reach 10 million by 2051 – 8 million of those people will live and reside in Melbourne. We have a duty to plan for that growth with the services and city-building infrastructure we need to see us through the coming decades.

In Northcote we have benefited greatly from some of these fantastic infrastructure projects. Just this week we celebrated four years of the removal of the level crossing on Bell Street in Preston and the opening of the new Bell station. It is an award-winning station, having been named one of the world's most beautiful passenger stations in 2024 by the prestigious Prix Versailles architecture and design awards. Many thanks to the work of Wood Marsh, who designed the striking multicoloured glass panels and the concrete pattern that mimic the roofscape of Preston's post-war heritage neighbourhoods. But quite beyond its stunning architecture, this station has changed daily life for our community, dramatically improving the ability to move amongst our suburbs and easing what was one of Melbourne's worst congestion points. We have seen similar improvements with the building of the new Chandler Highway bridge. The Eastern Freeway upgrade is also underway to reduce travel

times and deliver a new bridge over the Yarra River as well. Our health workforce can now use the Metro Tunnel to get to our world-class health services in Parkville. Uni students can now more easily make their way to Melbourne Uni. The upgrade at the Austin Hospital ED will allow for 30,000 more patients each year.

These are projects that help make Melbourne one of the best cities in the world to live and are fundamental projects to shape our city and our lives, and the vast majority are built and delivered by hardworking Victorians who are doing the right thing. These are people who deserve to have their work recognised and celebrated. Where there are serious allegations about the infiltration of bad-faith actors, government has a responsibility to respond – not defensively, not looking the other way, but by opening those allegations to proper scrutiny and ensuring that independent bodies are equipped to deal with what that scrutiny uncovers. That is the approach this government is taking.

It is worth noting, as the member for Preston very aptly did, that the Greens are nowhere to be seen in this debate. They maintain a very problematic relationship with the CFMEU, and it is curious indeed that they are not willing to come into this chamber and speak in support of greater scrutiny in the construction industry. Let us not forget that it was not very long ago when the former Greens member for Griffith stood up to oppose the CFMEU being put into administration, a pretty shocking stance for the Greens to take in relation to what we know has been the infiltration of organised crime within the construction arm of the CFMEU.

I also want to acknowledge clearly that this legislation represents the first tranche of reforms relating to the special prosecutor. The bill establishes the statutory office, enables the necessary information sharing and puts the initial powers and functions in place. But there will be a second tranche of reforms. Importantly, though, the special prosecutor can perform meaningful functions under this bill from the outset. Information uncovered by the royal commission will not sit untouched until a final report. The special prosecutor can assess that information and provide it to bodies capable of considering further action. That is a practical and immediate function.

There is another significant reform in this bill which deserves attention. The bill strengthens the compulsory powers available to royal commissions in Victoria. At present royal commissions can compel the production of documents and require a person to attend and give evidence at a hearing, but the bill will go further, requiring a person, by written notice, to provide written information or a statement. That is a significant improvement to their powers and will ensure greater oversight and integrity. For all of the reasons that I have stated today, I commend the bill to the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (12:40): I rise in support of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. This is an important bill because it is about integrity, accountability and restoring public confidence in the way major government-funded projects are delivered in Victoria. It is about making sure that if corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct is uncovered, there is a clear pathway to ensure that information is acted upon and the appropriate authorities can investigate and pursue consequences where necessary. As members know, one of the first actions of the Premier was to establish the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria. The royal commission was established because Victorians deserve answers. They deserve to know how allegations of criminal activity and misconduct may have affected parts of the construction industry, who was responsible and what reforms are needed to ensure that these issues do not occur again. This royal commission has been given broad terms of reference and significant resources. It has been tasked with identifying the nature and extent of corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct relating to major public infrastructure projects. It has also been asked to help rebuild the trust in the integrity of Victoria's construction sector and to support referrals to law enforcement and integrity agencies and regulators where appropriate.

For communities like Broadmeadows, this really matters. Residents in Broadmeadows understand the importance of good public infrastructure. People rely on local roads, hospitals, schools, community

facilities and public transport every day. There has been so much investment in the Northern Hospital, and the latest big upgrade is the new emergency department. As I said yesterday, we have so many good, honest construction workers in Broadmeadows who also want the sector cleaned up so that they can be as proud as I am of the things we have built. They have delivered life-changing infrastructure in my electorate, such as the Health and Community Centre of Excellence at Kangan Institute, a jewel in the crown of Broadmeadows, which gives so many people the opportunity to do our free TAFE programs there. The magnificent new tech school, with a focus on building skills in growth industries, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, logistics, robotics and IT, is already opening imaginations, opportunities and possibilities and making a huge difference to our kids in the north. 120 new social homes are ready to open soon, giving many people the dignity and safety of a roof over their heads. And one of the many projects this Labor government is delivering is the provision of more than 15,000 new social and affordable homes.

There is also so much investment in our schools. Labor is upgrading all of the special schools across the state, including more than \$10 million to the wonderful Jacana School for Autism, and that is an incredible project we have delivered. We have delivered over \$8 million to Hume Valley School and \$20 million to double the capacity at Broadmeadows Special Developmental School, giving them a whole new indoor gymnasium, new art and food tech rooms, a performing arts centre and high-quality staff amenities. A \$14.5 million project has delivered the leading-edge science, technology and arts building, new classrooms and a food technology hub at John Fawcner College. New music and arts rooms and student amenities have been delivered at Moomba Park Primary. There have been major upgrades at Meadows Primary and Fawcner Primary and full rebuilds of Westbreen and Glenroy West primaries. One of the first government owned and run affordable childcare centres has been built in Moomba Park: the Wimbi early learning centre. We have expanded so many kinders in my area to deliver our nation-leading free kinder program for three- and four-year-olds, making sure every child has the best start in life.

We have got new SES headquarters in Fawcner being built, the new ambulance station in Oak Park and the upgraded Broadmeadows court, with all of these done by our skilled construction workers. There is so much more. Improvements to parks, creeks and sporting infrastructure, and of course one –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on two issues, I noticed that the member on her feet is reading a speech, which she might like to pass over, but she is not even a little bit on the bill about the special prosecutor, and I ask you to bring her back.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I will address one at a time. Member for Broadmeadows, are you reading a speech or reading from notes?

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD: I am referring to my notes, and I am also listing many of the construction projects that have happened in my electorate, which is relevant to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Broadmeadows, I will address the second point of order. The member for Broadmeadows is being relevant to the bill as it is to do with construction and the special prosecutor, but I remind the member not to go too broad.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD: One of the things I am most proud of is the magnificent Glenroy station, which has been a game changer for Glenroy with the level crossing removal. I would like to thank all of the good people who have built or are building these important projects. Public infrastructure is key for our community's future, and taxpayers rightly expect that money invested in these projects is spent properly and that projects are delivered with honesty and integrity. When governments invest billions of dollars in infrastructure, Victorians have the right to expect that these projects are free from corruption and criminal influence. They expect accountability and transparency, and this is exactly what the bill seeks to strengthen.

The key reform contained in the bill is the creation of the office of the special prosecutor. This will be a new office established specifically to work alongside the royal commission. It is important to

understand why this is necessary. A royal commission is a powerful investigative body. It can gather evidence, compel witnesses and make findings. However, a royal commission cannot prosecute individuals. It does not have the power to bring criminal charges or conduct prosecutions; its role is to investigate and report. This bill recognises that limitation and addresses it. The office of the special prosecutor will work alongside the royal commission in real time. As evidence emerges, the special prosecutor will help ensure that information is referred to the appropriate agencies, including Victoria Police, IBAC, regulators and licensing authorities, so that potential wrongdoing can be properly investigated and addressed, which will be a whole lot quicker than just a royal commission. In practical terms, this means there will be a dedicated specialist whose sole responsibility is to help ensure that evidence uncovered by the royal commission does not simply sit on a shelf. Where information reveals potential criminal conduct, corruption or serious misconduct, there will be a structured process for referral to the authorities that have the power to take action. I think Victorians see this as common sense.

The bill also places significant importance on the independence of the special prosecutor. Public confidence depends on people knowing that decisions are being made independently and without political interference. That is why the bill makes it clear that the special prosecutor will not be subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any minister. The role will be filled by an experienced legal practitioner, and safeguards are included around appointment, removal and accountability. The special prosecutor will also be subject to the same confidentiality obligations that apply to royal commission officers. These measures are really important because they help ensure that the work of the special prosecutor is conducted fairly, independently and transparently.

The bill also improves the ability of the royal commission to gather information. Under the current law, a royal commission can compel the production of documents and require people to appear and give evidence. However, there are circumstances where relevant information does not exist in a document or where the information is spread across many sources and is difficult to identify efficiently. This bill addresses that issue by giving royal commissions the power to compel written information and witness statements directly. A person may be required to provide information in writing, answer questions or provide a witness statement before a specified time and in a specified manner. That may sound like a technical change, but it is actually a very practical reform. It means the royal commission can obtain targeted information more quickly, and we know we want quick action on this, which is why the Premier did this in one of his first announcements. It means investigators do not always need to sift through enormous numbers of documents in order to find a specific answer. It means people can be required to provide relevant information even when there are no existing documents. And it means that the commission can identify key witnesses and relevant facts before formal hearings take place.

Ultimately these reforms will help the royal commissioners operate more efficiently and more effectively. Importantly, these powers are not without safeguards. They will operate within the same framework of checks and balances that already applies to the existing compulsory powers under the Inquiries Act 2014. This is about improving effectiveness without compromising fairness. Integrity in public administration is not something Victorians should ever take for granted. Trust in public institutions takes a long time to build, but it can be damaged very quickly when allegations of corruption or misconduct arise. That is why strong institutions matter, that is why effective oversight matters and that is why this bill matters. I commend the bill to the house.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (12:50): I rise today in support of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. I will go straight to the bill, Acting Speaker Farnham, because I know this is a very important bill, and in your past life, before coming to this place, you had a lot of experience in building and construction, so I had better go right to the heart of this bill. This bill will introduce amendments to the Inquiries Act 2014 to establish the office of the special prosecutor to work in cooperation and in conjunction with the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria, the construction royal commission. Further, the

bill will amend the Inquiries Act to strengthen a royal commission's power to require information, as well as making minor technical and consequential amendments.

These are really important changes that are part of the legislative agenda of the government this week. Integrity has been the theme of this agenda. As we have seen, the Premier, from his very first day, has come out really strongly on this and made it very clear that integrity is not optional for this government. We can also see that with the legislation before us this week. This bill and the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, which I was very glad to make a contribution on yesterday, both go to the heart of integrity in this state, and I am really glad to see both of them here before us this week.

As I have mentioned, this is something that is raised with me often in my community. Many of my constituents have a strong sentiment that Victorians deserve to know 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 powers and public hearings, with terms of reference that are broad and expansive with nothing off limits. This has been a really welcome announcement, and the bills before us here this week are further welcome developments, with follow-the-money powers, a broadened definition of 'corrupt conduct' and now the establishment of the office of the special prosecutor to work with the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria, the construction royal commission.

This will be the first time in Victoria that we have an office of the special prosecutor, which will be a dedicated resource specifically for the major construction projects royal commission, as we have heard from many speakers before me. It is important to acknowledge also that a royal commission does not have the power to charge or prosecute anyone. It is an investigatory body. It can compel evidence and make findings, but it cannot put people before a court. That is why we are establishing an office of the special prosecutor – so that when wrongdoing is uncovered it is investigated and it is pursued and people face serious consequences. That is what the community is calling for – my community and the broader Victorian community – that is what the community expects and that is why we see this bill here today.

We have seen the commitment to integrity from the Carroll Labor government this week – strong action on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major construction projects in Victoria. That has been evident from the Premier's first act after assuming office, that being to call the royal commission into crime and misconduct in Victoria's construction industry. As I said, Victorians 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 will never happen again. Again, these changes and the establishment of the office of the special prosecutor are welcomed by my constituents.

I should also note the Inquiries Act already enables a royal commission to refer information to law enforcement agencies, but this bill will provide the major construction projects royal commission with a specialist, dedicated and embedded resource to work in real time as evidence of crime and misconduct is uncovered. The appointment of a special prosecutor will streamline appropriate action being taken by relevant bodies where corruption, criminal misconduct and serious misconduct are identified. These are important and strong changes that I am happy to support here today.

When we talk about major construction, there is so much happening in the Clarinda district and across the south-east. There are the hospitals: Monash Medical Centre and Monash heart hospital, right on Blackburn Road next to my electorate. Many of my constituents have benefited from the Monash Medical Centre and Monash heart hospital. On public transport, there is the Suburban Rail Loop. In terms of roads, there have been level crossing removals in Clayton. At Clayton South Primary School there is so much happening onsite at the moment with the \$12.45 million new administration and learning building, which consists of a general-purpose classroom and a science space, and a new playground and landscaping – all happening at Clayton South Primary School.

Kathleen Matthews-Ward interjected.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, member for Broadmeadows. There is such a broad scope in terms of building, and we have heard that so much is happening also in the electorate of Broadmeadows from you, the speaker before me. It is a really exciting project and one of so many across our district and across the south-east.

There is so much construction happening also. It is very important to make sure that this is happening effectively, efficiently and with integrity across all our major projects, because the Victorian community expects that our tax dollars are spent effectively and efficiently. That is what we want to see so that we can continue to deliver amazing projects in Clarinda and in the south-east, like the work at Clayton South Primary School and like the massive \$535 million expansion of the Monash Medical Centre at Clayton, which is now underway. That is an amazing project that will deliver a new seven-storey medical tower above the newly expanded emergency department. Once complete, the tower will include expanded maternity services, supporting around 2400 births annually; an operating theatre, providing capacity for up to 7500 more surgeries each year; a new intensive care unit with modern technology to support the hospital's sickest patients; and a new medical equipment central sterile services department, helping deliver more surgeries. This is all happening in the south-east, near the electorate of Clarinda and in the electorate of Clarinda. They are amazing facilities that will be so important for my constituents in Clarinda district getting the health care that they need. That goes alongside Monash heart hospital and all the other amazing health infrastructure that we have delivered and supported in our health precinct.

Once again, I am glad to see this bill here before us today to make sure that we have that accountability and so we can make sure that we can continue to deliver those important projects for my constituents in the Clarinda district, across the south-east and across Victoria. I commend the Premier for bringing this bill to the house.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Local Government

Absence

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts will answer questions for the portfolios of local government, consumer affairs and renters.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Motor vehicle theft

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. New data shows that Melbourne recorded more cars stolen or broken into than any other Australian capital city combined, and as a result Victoria now has the highest car theft insurance losses in the country, at \$244 million. Why should Victorian families pay more because of Labor's crime crisis?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. I am a new Premier with a new direction: 200 PSOs, giving the chief commissioner everything he needs, 400 reservists –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this glib response is certainly not relevant.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on his feet for a short time.

Ben CARROLL: If you go through the stats, there are more youths in custody, remand is at a five-year high and there is less bail and more jail under our government. Those opposite have come up with a great plan: more judges.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): The insurance council says the cost of theft ultimately flows through to higher insurance premiums for every motorist. Does the Premier take responsibility for the high premiums Victorians are paying because Labor has turned Victoria into the car theft capital of the nation?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:05): We have always got more work to do. I have always said there will be a choice in November between cuts to the police force and continuing the biggest police force in Australia.

Ministers statements: government services

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:05): Our government is very focused on making sure that we protect the services that Victorians rely on. While those opposite call things cuts, we know that they are not savings at all. We know we are about services. Their cuts: 31,700 jobs lost. Victorians want to know: does that mean the Ballarat Base Hospital will not have the services that Victorians are relying on? Does that mean places at Kangan TAFE will be slashed as well? Does that mean the Whittlesea Primary School's great breakfast program will not be continued in 2027? These are services that families cannot afford to lose. Cutting them does not make them disappear; it leads to more issues for families and more cost of living that they will have to find themselves. Those opposite like to talk about being the party of family values, but they love nothing more than passing laws that hurt working families and make it easier for mums and dads to get the sack. On our side we will always make sure that people are put first, because we believe everyone deserves the care and dignity of a home. Everyone deserves to have a nurse on call. Everyone needs to have a great local school. We will keep protecting and investing in those services because making life better for working families is what our Labor government is here to do.

Police resources

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:07): My question is to the Premier. Victoria has the highest number of home burglary insurance claims in the nation, with almost 3900 claims costing more than \$56 million last year. Isn't it a fact that Victorians are paying more while having their sense of safety crushed because of this Labor government's catch-and-release bail system?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:07): I reject the premise of the question. Remand is at a five-year high.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:08): The Premier has said, 'Victorians have told us they want police stations open and, when they enter a police station, someone to be there at the counter.' With home burglary claims the highest in the nation, why is the government closing another four police stations?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:08): We are investing in 400 reservists that will keep police stations open. I met with the chief commissioner on Tuesday, and I met with Wayne Gatt today. We are investing in police; you cut police.

The SPEAKER: The Premier will address his commentary through the Speaker's chair.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was very specifically about the four police stations that the Premier has closed. The Premier has closed those four stations. It is only reasonable that he responds to that part of the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: carers and volunteers

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:09): This Labor government invests in the people that hold our community together, and that is why we are proudly investing \$46 million per year across more than 400 neighbourhood houses across the state, providing food relief and connection where people need it most. I have visited dozens of them in recent months, alongside the members for Ripon, Narre Warren South, Pascoe Vale, Wendouree, Ashwood, Melton, Sydenham, St Albans and many more. We also back our unsung heroes through the Support for Carers program and the Victorian carers card. To support community building and men's health, we deliver \$1 million annually for men's sheds, with grants of up to \$100,000. For young Victorians we deliver Amplify, Engage!, Youth Fest, the Victorian Youth Congress and critical early intervention programs. While we are building communities, those opposite would strip away the support of Victorian carers and volunteers. Just yesterday we saw the Australia Institute's damning independent report –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements should not be used to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The minister was referring to a report, I believe.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: Just yesterday the Australia Institute's damning independent report showed that the deviant One Nation–Liberals \$40 billion in cuts are impossible without the mass sacking of 31,700 Victorians, as well as cutting these vital programs. That is an economic and social wrecking ball that would drive Victoria's unemployment rate up. And who actually benefits? It is not going to be working families, that is for sure. To compare and contrast, that means anyone who relies on a community service is on the chopping block while those opposite are simply courting the rich. This Leader of the Opposition says one thing in Kew, as we know, while also trying to pull the wool over Victorians' eyes.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I renew my earlier point of order.

The SPEAKER: The minister will refrain from attacking the opposition. The minister will be sat down otherwise.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: This state does not want to be dragged into a state of miserable austerity and isolation. From fresh start to fresh hell is what we are looking at. Instead the Carroll Labor government will always choose investment in Victorian people.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is very clearly defying the ruling you just gave in response to the member for Brighton.

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

Construction industry

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday a Labor donor that made millions of dollars on the Big Build was raided by police. How can Victorians trust a Premier whose government is funded by proceeds of crime to clean up corruption in this state?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, this is a warning. Leader of the House, you are also warned.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:13): I am going to just say two things on this matter. Victoria has the toughest donation laws in the country, with more transparency than ever before. Secondly, we are about to commence the toughest royal commission Victoria has seen.

James Newbury: On a point of order for clarity, on relevance, Speaker, we know the donation was taken. What we are concerned about is the money hanging out of the Premier's pocket.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:13): This is the second Big Build labour hire firm and Labor donor to be raided by police. If integrity is no longer optional, will the Premier come clean on how many Labor donor contractors raided by police have received work on the Big Build?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:14): Under our government 165 labour hire firms have been cancelled. And on top of that, we are doing the best and strongest royal commission in history.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Rowville, the member for Polwarth, the member for Narracan and the member for Malvern, I ask you to come to order.

Ministers statements: road maintenance

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:15): The Carroll Labor government is focused on fixing our roads. The Premier has made it clear that we will not admire potholes, we will fix them, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are investing an additional \$352 million, and that is on top of our existing record \$1 billion investment in road maintenance. We will fill 500,000 potholes this year, more than double what others have promised to fill in any given year. We will also double the amount of road repairs that we do this year. That means we will fix the equivalent of more than 340 MCGs, or more than 1200 NFL fields, at more than 1000 locations across the state. And we are getting on with the job right now, not in four years time. Our hardworking road crews will work more than 3.5 million hours to fix our roads. This includes fixing signs and barriers, cleaning rubbish and removing graffiti.

Victorians know all of this work will be at risk if those opposite look after our roads. After all – let us compare and contrast – last time they were in government they cut \$160 million from the road maintenance budget and slashed 450 jobs. Independent economists have confirmed that implementing \$40 billion of cuts would mean cutting nearly 32,000 jobs – cutting the people that manage the road network every hour of every day, cutting the people that plan, prioritise and inspect our road maintenance program. Those cuts will hurt working people in Victoria and will devastate our roads. Our roads cannot be fixed and new roads cannot be built when making \$40 billion of cuts. Only Labor has a plan to fix our roads.

Danny O'Brien: Speaker, on a point of order, the minister is required to be factual. He has not mentioned the \$200 million cut on roads by the Premier.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland East is warned.

Paul HAMER: Only Labor has a plan to fix our roads. The Liberal–One Nation coalition will cut roads funding and hurt working people.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. The United Nations has written a scathing letter to the Australian government saying that the Victorian Labor government's plan to demolish and privatise all of our public housing towers will likely be a violation of international human rights law and make the housing crisis worse. Given this international condemnation of the government's plan, will the Premier still proceed with the demolition?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:18): A couple of things. It was the Victorian Labor government that introduced the human rights charter, which we are very proud of. When it comes to human rights, no-one takes it more seriously than our Labor government. No matter where you live, no matter your postcode, no matter who you are, you deserve to be living in a place that is free of asbestos and has air conditioning, and we will make sure that no matter who you are you get the best living conditions and a roof over your heads.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:18): The UN special rapporteur clearly took into account the possible alternatives that were put forward and has still urged the Victorian Labor government to hold off on any further relocations and any demolitions until further notice. The Premier claims to care about human rights, but is the Premier saying that the United Nations is wrong when it comes to human rights, or is he saying that he cares about human rights but just not the human rights of public housing residents?

The SPEAKER: There were two questions there, member for Richmond. However, I will allow it.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:19): If the special rapporteur wants to come and speak to me, he is more than welcome. What I would tell him is that we are doing everything we can, particularly with the first-ever Minister for Homelessness appointed under our Labor government – \$25 million announced this week for a comprehensive plan to address homelessness. We will always make sure that no matter who you are you have the dignity of a home and a roof over your head.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mildura! The member for Northcote can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Northcote withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: regional development

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Rural and Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Water) (14:20): I rise to update the house on the record investment in regional Victoria by the Carroll Labor government. We are proud to have invested more than \$50 billion in regional Victoria. That investment has delivered new and upgraded schools and better hospitals and health services, expanded TAFE opportunities –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Police is warned.

Michaela SETTLE: upgraded train lines and created jobs right across our regions. These are not half-baked promises on paper; it is real investment people can see in their own communities. Right across regional Victoria people can point to projects that are already making a difference because this government backed them with funding and got on with the job. Alstom in Ballarat is building trains for Victoria – good for the economy, good for workers and good for commuters. Regional labour force figures from July show that unemployment in regional Victoria is lower than any other regional unemployment in Australia. It is 2.2 per cent lower than it was in November 2014. Public servants in our regions provide vital services to our communities. They include allied health professionals like the speech pathologist helping your kid with their first words, forest firefighters who protect our communities through the summer and biosecurity professionals that are on the front lines of our bird flu response. Our public service provides important services to our region, so I read with horror a report yesterday from the Australia Institute about an absolutely implausible plan that would see 31,000 public service jobs cut. This means thousands of job cuts in the regions – our forest firefighters, our hardworking Agriculture Victoria staff and our allied health professionals there to support our communities. On this side of the house we support the regions.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The Auditor-General has found that the government cannot verify how defective road repairs are fixed, creating a risk that taxpayers pay twice to fix mistakes. Can the minister guarantee Victorian taxpayers are not being ripped off?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:23): I thank the Leader of the Nationals for his question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narracan is warned.

Paul HAMER: That is exactly why last week we announced that a re-elected Carroll Labor government will fix the way that we fix our roads. We know that the VAGO report says that the way the roads are managed and the oversight by the department are not sufficient, and that is why we are going to bring road maintenance back in house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:23): The Auditor-General found a quarter of routine road maintenance works were noncompliant, while one in eight were defective and required rework. Why are Victorian taxpayers repeatedly paying for poor workmanship on our already poor and appalling roads?

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:24): I would refer the Leader of the Nationals to my previous response to the substantive answer. That is exactly why we have got a plan to fix the way we fix our roads, including bringing road maintenance back in house, including increasing standards and improving transparency and accountability.

Ministers statements: major events

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) (14:24): NFL game week is go here in Melbourne, with some 1400 Victorians on Sunday setting a new cheerleading world record at Fed Square. I was pleased to be among those world record holders. And starting today we have the NFL kick-off festival at Melbourne Park, showcasing fantastic Aussie artists, and the free Melbourne End Zone at Fed Square, with live NFL games on the big screen for all families to get down there and check out. We have already showcased regional icons like the Phillip Island penguins, we have had our golf courses and our cuisine showcased to millions of NFL fans right across the United States. That is exactly what this partnership is all about. It is about bringing visitors who stay longer, travel further and spend more, not just exploring Melbourne but rushing past our amazing city to touch down in our wonderful regions. The week culminates tomorrow in the blockbuster, with the LA Rams and the San Francisco 49ers at the MCG. It is an extraordinary opportunity to showcase Melbourne and Victoria to hundreds of millions of people around the world.

This side of the house is proud to support Melbourne, the first city in the world to host an NFL regular fixtured game, a Formula One grand prix and a tennis grand slam – only here in Melbourne. \$300 million is expected to flow through local businesses as fans fill the city across tomorrow. September is on track to be a record for accommodation stays in Melbourne and across Victoria with a record NFL Melbourne game. It keeps the investment coming here in Victoria, the Carroll Labor government's investment in our major events calendar – 17,000 jobs a year, 8 million visitors a year

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to Victoria and \$3.6 billion in expenditure and economic activity because of our major events program. But it is always under threat from a wacky One Nation–Liberal coalition that does not support major events in this state.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly using a ministers statement inappropriately to attack the opposition.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister, without attacking the opposition.

Anthony CARBINES: It is difficult to tip a winner between the Rams and the 49ers, but the winner is Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Question time has ended. I acknowledge in the gallery the Honourable Marsha Thomson, a former minister.

Constituency questions

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:28): (1818) My constituency question is to the Treasurer, and it is on behalf of Oliver, a grade 6 student at Balwyn Primary School and a finalist in my Kew first speech competition. The information I seek from the Treasurer is: how much Victorian government debt is projected for students at Balwyn Primary School when they become taxpayers? Oliver pointed out, when he delivered his speech in this chamber on Monday, that every single hour over \$1 million of taxpayer money vanishes into thin air just to service past debt. Oliver said that it is time for this government to manage its budget in the same way our families manage theirs – with care, with responsibility and with a clear focus on what matters most. Oliver and his classmates deserve to know how much debt they are on track to inherit by the time they are old enough to start paying it off, and I will finish where Oliver did. As a famous man once said, it is time to stop borrowing from our future just to pay for the mistakes of our past.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:29): (1819) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and I ask: what percentage of train services have not completed the full service on the Upfield line in the last six months, and what other measures are in place to improve services on the Upfield line? The minister is aware of my strong and continued advocacy for the duplication and extension of the Upfield line to enable additional peak services. On top of the 77 new evening and weekend services that began last week, our new Victorian-made X'Trapolis trains and carriages are providing increased capacity and comfort. We have also updated the bus timetables to better connect with the train schedules. But we know that duplication is required to enable increased peak services, and I was proud to secure \$3.65 million in the budget for the final business case. I hear far too many stories from my constituents of being stranded for excessive lengths of time and being late for work, school, appointments and childcare pick-ups due to Metro Trains' unacceptable decision to turn back trains at Batman station.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:30): (1820) My question is to the Minister for Health in the other place. Les Pollock of Cobram made a claim through the Victorian patient transport assistance scheme back on 9 May. Usually these claims, as we know, take around six to eight weeks. It is now 4½ months since this claim was made. During a cost-of-living crisis, pensioners like Mr Pollock are seeking every dollar they can. When can Mr Pollock expect his rebate?

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:31): (1821) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Minister, when can residents in my electorate expect a response to the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report into the development of waste to energy? As members will know,

the report made 53 findings and 33 recommendations that went to improved accountability and responsibility for those who want to build such facilities and further went to the significant community consultation that is required. I remain deeply opposed to such a facility within my electorate due to its proximity to homes and local residents. I want to thank the committee for their work, and I look forward to the minister's timely response.

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (14:31): (1822) My question is for the Minister for Police. Will the minister take further measures to counter deteriorating community safety, crime and antisocial behaviour in the Mornington electorate, particularly caused by youth crime? Residents, business owners, parents and visitors are reporting more frequent and serious incidents. Concerns are especially bad around local shops, beaches and lifesaving clubs. Just a few days ago a local was chased in broad daylight by a gang of 15 youths on Shire Hall Beach. They threw rocks and beer bottles at local homes, lit an illegal fire and stalked my constituent, yelling threats to assault her. These incidents highlight the need for greater police presence across Shire Hall Beach and other local hotspots, including Mount Martha South Beach, the Mornington Life Saving Club and elsewhere. The latest stats also show we are now the car theft capital of Victoria. The opposition recognise this current gap and are pledging to put on an additional 3000 police, and we will reopen the Mornington police station front counter hours to 24/7. This is what the community needs.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:32): (1823) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. With the Carroll Labor government's new and additional investments into our bus network, how much time will passengers save on their bus trips around Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing? There are a lot of exciting new developments happening to our bus network across Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing. West Tarneit station will open this Sunday, the 13th, and with it over 1100 weekly services will be added to the Tarneit bus network through routes 182 and 186. In December last year we introduced new bus routes 154 and 194 and also upgraded route 153, adding an additional 1500 weekly trips across the three lines. Those additional services built upon changes made in July last year when the Labor government extended operating hours and added extra weekly trips across routes 170, 180, 190 and 192. Locals will remember a time when buses came every 40 minutes. These upgrades will make sure the buses come every 20 minutes across the network.

Nepean electorate

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (14:34): (1824) My question is for the Minister for Health – the third Minister for Health in less than five months. Rosebud Hospital's CT scanner is coming to the end of its life, much like this dying Labor government. It is the only publicly available CT scanner on the Mornington Peninsula and provides life-saving diagnostic imaging for emergency patients and hospital inpatients. Shockingly, after 12 years of Labor the local community is being asked to raise \$1.5 million to replace essential equipment in a public hospital. Community Bank Southern Peninsula has stepped up to match donations dollar for dollar up to \$250,000, while locals are being asked to dig into their own pockets. Their generosity is typical of the Peninsula community, but they should never have been put in this position. When will this dying Labor government step in to fund the outstanding amount required for Rosebud Hospital to purchase a new CT scanner?

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:34): (1825) My question is for the Minister for Seniors. What events will take place across my electorate of Monbulk and beyond in celebration of the Victorian Seniors Festival this October? Monbulk district is home to many seniors, and we have some outstanding organisations that encourage our seniors to get active and connect with others. From Cockatoo's over-50s club to Probus clubs in Olinda, Emerald and Ferntree Gully; Life Activities Knox; University of the Third Age groups from Emerald, Sherbrooke, Mount Dandenong; and many

more fabulous organisations – including some great bowls clubs that I know you would appreciate as a division 1 pennant player, Speaker – there are too many to mention. This year’s overarching theme for seniors month is ‘Connect, create, celebrate’, encouraging older Victorians to explore new interests, socialise and participate in free or heavily discounted local events. These are all incredibly important, because we know isolation is one of the most dangerous things anyone can experience, and I look forward to the minister’s response.

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:35): (1826) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Why is Echuca VicRoads refusing to register B-double truck combinations, instead forcing truck owners to unhook and bring each trailer separately to be registered? A constituent of mine who lives more than 1 hour from Echuca has bought a B-double truck combination and rang VicRoads Echuca to get it registered. They told him it could only be done at 9 am and one trailer at a time. Two round trips of 3 hours and two days to register one truck combination does not make sense to this person. He was also told he had to park right in front of the VicRoads office – if he parked across the road, they would not cross the road to register his truck. Obviously, the privatisation of VicRoads by the Labor government did not include any provision to have it actually deliver services to customers.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:36): (1827) My constituency question was drafted by Sam Heffernan from Preston High, who is joining us for work experience this week. It is a question for the Minister for Local Government, and the question is: what is being done to ensure sporting facilities in the Darebin area, particularly those used by state schools for physical education, are maintained to a safe and suitable standard? Our government is of course committed to providing safe, high-quality facilities for local communities. However, we do need to examine the maintenance and upkeep of these facilities, particularly given the rise in sport-related injuries within Darebin. From 2020 to 2024 sport injury hospitalisations in Darebin increased by 44.17 per cent. The heavy use of facilities like HP Zwar Reserve and GH Mott Reserve, which I understand Sam’s family know well, does not always appear to be reflected in their level of maintenance and care. Any information that the minister could provide to our office and to Sam would be greatly appreciated.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, regarding outstanding constituency questions, Speaker, I have a list of 19 outstanding constituency questions, some of them dating back to –

The SPEAKER: Order! We just need the numbers of the constituency questions.

Cindy McLeish: 3162, 3163, 3458, 3524, 3537, 3538, 3539, 3540, 3541, 3542, 3543, 3544, 3545, 3546, 3547, 3548, 3631, 3632 and 3633.

The SPEAKER: Give your list to the Clerk, please, member for Eildon.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on Tuesday you might recall that I asked advice from you in relation to the last time a reminder was given to ministers on the outstanding matters – two days ago. I am just wondering if someone has been able to search *Hansard* over the last two days.

The SPEAKER: That is a matter that will be taken up outside of the chamber, member for Brighton. It is not appropriate to ask questions of the Speaker. However, I will respond to your previous point of order.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, at the time – sorry, I should have said – you did advise me in the chamber that you would come back to the chamber with that advice.

The SPEAKER: And I will.

*Bills***Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026***Second reading*

Debate resumed.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:39): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

*Business of the house***Adjournment**

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) (14:40): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 22 September 2026.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026***Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (14:40): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 3, line 29, omit "violence." and insert "violence; and".
2. Clause 1, page 3, after line 29 insert –
 - “(i) to amend the **Summary Offences Act 1966** to repeal the offence of begging or gathering alms.”.
3. Clause 2, line 31, after “Part 9” insert “, Part 10A”.
4. Insert the following New Part after Part 10 –

Part 10A – Repeal of offence of begging or gathering alms

93A Section 49A amended

 - (1) For the heading to section 49A of the **Summary Offences Act 1966** substitute –

“Offence to cause, procure or encourage child to beg or gather alms”.
 - (2) Section 49A(1) of the **Summary Offences Act 1966** is repealed.’.
5. Long title, after “the **Sentencing Act 1991**” insert “, the **Summary Offences Act 1966**”.
6. Clause 1, page 3, after line 26 insert –
 - “(iii) to void certain warrants to imprison made in respect of a person in default; and”.
7. Clause 2, line 31, omit “3” and insert “3, 3A”.

8. Insert the following New Division to follow Division 3 of Part 9 –

‘Division 3A – Warrants to imprison

88A New section 171AAA inserted

After section 171 of the **Fines Reform Act 2014** insert –

“171AAA Historical unexecuted warrants to imprison are null and void

Any warrant to imprison a person in default of payment of any outstanding infringement fine (however described) issued by the Magistrates’ Court before the commencement of this Act under any of the following provisions, including any warrant to imprison re-issued under section 58(3) of the **Magistrates’ Court Act 1989** after the commencement of this Act in respect of the same outstanding infringement fine, that has not been cancelled, executed or recalled before the commencement of this section is null and void –

- (a) Schedule 7 to the **Magistrates’ Court 1989** as in force immediately before its repeal;
- (b) section 68 of the **Magistrates’ Court Act 1989** in respect of an order of the Magistrates’ Court, under Part 12 of the **Infringements Act 2006** as in force immediately before 31 December 2017, for imprisonment in default of payment of any outstanding fine.

Note

This Act came into operation on 31 December 2017.”’.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (14:41): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The government will support these amendments to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The amendments seek to do a number of things: remove old imprisonment warrants for infringement fine default made under repealed legislation and decriminalise begging. The fines amendment will void imprisonment warrants for infringement fine defaults that were first issued before 2018, even if they have since been reissued. We have estimated that the number of warrants to be voided is approximately 2200. As was noted in the other place, these amendments as drafted will not fully capture all imprisonment warrants for fine default arising from orders made before 2018. Cohorts left out include imprisonment warrants relating to court fine default, as only those relating to infringement fines are captured, and imprisonment warrants that were made in or after 2018 based on a court order made before 2018, pre fines reform. This means further legislative work will be required to realise the intention of this amendment in full.

The other amendment will decriminalise begging, just like it is decriminalised in New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT. I want to thank Ms Payne in the other place for moving this amendment. I also want to thank the staunch advocates in this space, in particular community legal centres and specifically my local CLC, Peninsula Community Legal Centre and its CEO and my good friend Jackie Galloway.

Begging often stems from underlying issues such as homelessness, mental health conditions, substance dependence and family violence. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and express my sadness and condolence to those who knew and loved Jessica Geddes. Jessica was only 27 years old when she was killed by her abusive partner in 2020. Jessica often begged for food and money while her Centrelink payments were directed to her abusive partner. In his findings into Jessica’s death now retired state coroner John Cain recommended a welfare-oriented approach to people who beg rather than a criminal response. Today we take the important step of decriminalising it. A criminal response to begging disproportionately punishes the most vulnerable people in our community and is inconsistent with this Carroll Labor government’s commitment to early prevention, health-based reform and harm reduction. I want to acknowledge the work that Victoria Police already undertake to ensure those who beg get the support and services they need. They will continue that important work.

In closing, this bill does a mountain of significant and important work, informed directly by the voices and experiences of victim-survivors of family and sexual violence. This work is not work that happens overnight. When I first became Attorney-General almost two years ago, I knew I wanted to push reforms that would centre victim-survivors in their effort to seek justice for the wrongs done to them. This bill is the second bill since I became Attorney-General that has done that. Progress can be slow – sometimes painfully slow – but it is so important that laws like this are developed properly with victims and with experts; they are too important to rush. I want to thank the members, past and present, of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council. VSAC was established by this Labor government after the Royal Commission into Family Violence. They have been instrumental in these laws, particularly criminalising coercive control. This law is for you.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:46): I rise to speak on the amendments that are being made to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026 and note how deeply sad it is that a bill that comes from such a good place – a place that the coalition has supported and in fact raised policy matters on that we led – has been dirtied up in the days before an election and before the end of Parliament by doing deals with the independents in the upper house to get their votes, buy their votes and curry their votes on other issues.

I will say for the chamber about the Attorney-General – who you may not always hear me say great things about, but I will say something very positive about the Attorney – that when it comes to the amendment today that we are considering on begging, the Attorney did not support it. The Attorney did not support the amendment being put in the Council. Her office spoke to me numerous times about not supporting that amendment and spoke to other members of Parliament about that position – more than one member of Parliament – and I support her view.

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Brighton is not being factual and is misrepresenting.

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I ask you not to yell across the chamber. It is a matter of debate.

James NEWBURY: Multiple members will confirm the advice of the Attorney's office to us in relation to the position on begging. I understand why the Attorney would not want to see the decriminalisation of an act without any consultation, without any feedback and, frankly, without even putting any thought into the implication of decriminalising something that will cause and encourage antisocial behaviour. We know because over the period of 2017 to 2026 there were 850 offences in relation to begging. This is not the decriminalisation of an act by which there have been no charges and no instances occurring; we know that over that time period there have been a little short of a thousand – which means just under a hundred a year – offences in relation to begging. It does not surprise any Victorian to see this government remove consequences for antisocial or bad behaviour in this state from the statute books. No-one is surprised by that, because there are no consequences in this state. In relation to begging, I read into *Hansard* a quote from the Australian Restaurant & Cafe Association chief Wes Lambert, who said:

The decision by the state Labor government today to decriminalise begging along with the proposed (working from home laws) will only further reduce demand and will decimate our sector already struggling with the nations highest taxes and regulation.

Restaurants and cafes across Melbourne are facing one the most difficult times in recent memory.

One in every two claim they will either close or not renew their leases in the Melbourne CBD.

There has been zero dialogue with our industry and is a sad indictment on the new premier who promised to make commonsense decisions and work with business.

We know that it was just hollow words, just like we know that when it comes to consequences for behaviour in this state, we have seen a government simply do a dirty deal with independents in the upper house to remove the consequence for begging. The sad fact is that this amendment is being moved in a bill that has good purpose. In fact it is so foreign a concept to this bill that the amendment to the Summary Offences Act 1966 has to be inserted into the bill itself. What that means is the bill never contemplated an amendment to the Summary Offences Act. It was never contemplated when this bill was drafted. But when it comes to consequences, the amendments before us do not stop there. We just learned from the Attorney that 2200 outstanding warrants for imprisonment are being voided.

Sonya Kilkenny interjected.

James NEWBURY: The Attorney is saying to me ‘That’s right’, with joy, across the table. What this comes down to is a government who do not believe in consequences. Think it through. Over 2000 instances of someone breaking the law in such a way that the state has previously determined they should be imprisoned. As of yesterday the state’s position was that 2200 people should be imprisoned whose warrants are now, under this government’s watch, being voided, which goes to the very heart of the concern the community has about the weak Labor government’s lack of consequences.

Though I did not deal with the Attorney’s office on this amendment, I would be surprised if the Attorney had supported that amendment initially. But as of yesterday more than one member of Parliament was advised that the Attorney’s position was of support in relation to our position that we would not support the decriminalisation of begging. In fact when I first heard that there was an alternate view, I contacted the Attorney’s office proactively and said, ‘I’ve just heard something which isn’t in line with the conversations I’ve had previously, which is completely out of kilter with what I’ve heard previously. It couldn’t possibly be right.’ The advice I got back was that it could not be right that they would support that amendment and that they would check to determine whether the Premier’s office had overruled the Attorney without telling them. That is exactly what happened. I spoke to more than one member of Parliament about it. After checking with the Premier’s office, we were advised that the amendment would not be supported. On multiple occasions the Attorney’s position, as advised to multiple members of Parliament, was to not support the amendment, because how could you change a consequence for behaviour without –

The SPEAKER: The member Brighton is not to use the word ‘you’.

James NEWBURY: How could anybody possibly change a consequence for behaviour without any thought on the change that they are making? But here we are. We have two significant changes which will affect, if you look at the statistics in relation to begging over the last 10 years, 850 people. As the Attorney has just advised the house, for 2200 people that as of yesterday the state believed deserved to be imprisoned, ‘Cut that up’ is what the government said. So when the Premier stands before Victorians and says he wants to do something about the crime crisis that we are in and acknowledges the lack of consequences, he has made it worse – and we know why. I believe the Attorney-General did not support this because I believe the Attorney would not flippantly make a change. I believe very strongly that the government have only agreed to these amendments because they want to pass their work-from-home legislation through the Council. That is what I believe, and I think there is no other way to see it.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a debate on a series of amendments that the Attorney-General has introduced, and the speaker, the member for Brighton, is straying from the amendments and making assertions that have no basis in fact. I ask you to bring him back to the amendments.

James NEWBURY: On the point of order, Speaker, I am speaking directly to the amendments. I am speaking directly to the substance of them and the motivation around them. I am entirely in order.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton to continue. I remind members that many of these amendments that come from the Council are quite narrow amendments, and they are to be spoken to. The amendments are to be spoken to; the justification behind those amendments is a matter of debate.

James NEWBURY: Of course it is. I agree with you. It is a matter of debate, and it is only reasonable to assume that the government has done a deal with the Legalise Cannabis members because it wants their vote. I think that everybody can see what is happening here, and I hear that it is not the only deal that is being done with independent members at the moment. I hear there are other members who are doing deals.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, we are talking about the current amendments.

James NEWBURY: That is right, and that is what I am talking about, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Are you arguing with me, member for Brighton?

James NEWBURY: Not at all.

The SPEAKER: I will not tolerate backchat. The member for Brighton will speak to the amendments that are currently before the house, not proposed amendments that might be coming.

James NEWBURY: I have only spoken to these amendments. I have spoken to these amendments because we can be certain that a dirty deal has been done, which is now seeing these before the chamber. The proof of that is that the Attorney had a different view. The proof of that is that the bill itself did not contemplate a Summary Offences Act 1966 amendment. It did not contemplate it. These amendments, if you read them clearly, make clear that they require acceptance in the bill that the Summary Offences Act will be changed. It was not contemplated when this bill was drafted, and that is why we know the dirty deal has been done. We know the dirty deal has been done – and doesn't that say everything about this government? This deal has been done purely to get a vote across on the work-from-home legislation. That is what it is all about. We know it. We know that is what it is about.

What Victorians have seen is another instance of consequences evaporating in this state, because the Victorian community knows only too well that consequences do not exist. So when Victorians sit at home and ask themselves 'Why don't people who commit crimes and do the wrong thing have any consequences?' and the Premier stands up and says otherwise, here are two actual examples of where this Labor government today has taken away consequences for behaviour, and not minor ones. As the Attorney herself has said, there were 2200 people who as of this morning – not yesterday, this morning – the government believed should be in prison, who had warrants issued for their imprisonment. Those warrants are now voided.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: The former minister is saying that it is okay because they cannot afford to pay the fine. What if everyone says they cannot afford to pay a fine? What if every single person says they do not want to pay a fine? Why have a consequence? Why have a consequence at all in Victoria? You know what, do not just do it for fines. This is Labor, soft on crime. Why not just do it beyond fines. Why not do it for crime? When they commit a crime, let them out. That is what is happening. You think I am joking, but all Victorians see that too. All Victorians know it does not matter what is happening in Victoria. It does not matter what you do in Victoria, there is no consequence, and Victorians know it, don't they? Victorians know.

Sonya Kilkenny: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet has strayed a long way from the amendments before us.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Brighton, I remind you that we are debating what has come back from the Council and to stick to those amendments.

James NEWBURY: The implication of these amendments passing is material to the debate on this set of amendments. Of course when we debate these amendments we need to understand what it will mean if they pass. What it will mean is a signal that there are no consequences for certain behaviour. 'Don't pay a fine; it doesn't matter,' says the government. In these 2200 instances where a warrant has been issued, they are cutting them up.

You can understand why the government is touchy, because they did not want a debate on this. The government did not want to debate these amendments, they wanted to slip them through. They thought somehow they could just quickly slip this debate through and no-one would notice. You know why that was their plan? Because they did not publicly announce their intention to do this. At no point has the government, on these amendments before us, told the community what they proposed to do. There was no public announcement, no public commitment, no public conversation about what they proposed to do, yet here we are, which is why you know that this is entirely a dirty deal. Yesterday the Attorney's office could not even fathom the idea that this could be supported, and there will be multiple members, I suspect, who will raise that, Attorney.

We know that this set of amendments is entirely about dirty deals that are being done in the Council. It is shocking. It is absolutely shocking that the government would think that the way to run government is to simply amend laws without any consultation, without any broad engagement about the implications. Has anyone considered – because the government clearly has not – what happens to our city that is already on its knees if we encourage further antisocial behaviour? Is there any thought as to what happens to our city of Melbourne, which is on its knees, if that antisocial behaviour is encouraged?

This is just one way. Of course there are many other ways the government has done that and has quite badly damaged in its time our beautiful city of Melbourne. But this is one additional way that the government puts a knife into the city of Melbourne again. The traders have spoken so strongly today about what has occurred in relation to these amendments. They have been immediate in their response and immediate with their concerns. As I raised earlier, the Australian Restaurant & Cafe Association chief said:

There has been zero dialogue with our industry and is a sad indictment on the new premier who promised to make commonsense decisions and work with business.

That was said not an hour ago by a sector that found out after the act. The community found out what the government was proposing to do after the amendment had passed the Council. How can it be that a change of this nature could be made without consultation? How can it be that the government could try and hide the change that is being made? It is not unreasonable to consult when you are proposing to change the Summary Offences Act 1966. It is not unreasonable to expect that that would occur. It is not unreasonable to think that a government would, if it were proud to be making the change, announce it, consult on it, perhaps put out a media release about it, hold a press conference and discuss it, and then talk to the most affected communities where these issues have occurred. As we know, over the last 10 years there have been 850 offences in relation to begging. It is not as if this particular matter sat on the statute books and was never used by police.

The other part of the issue in relation to the removal of the begging offence – this is a very, very serious tangential issue – is we know that this government have gone weak on move-on laws. Those two issues together will cause an increase in antisocial behaviour. We have seen that the weakness of move-on laws is having an effect. Even police have confirmed it. Everybody has confirmed, other than the government, that move-on law changes have been a problem. This is why the coalition has been so strong on move-on laws, because we believe police deserve the power. We believe police need the power and police think they need the power, but the government does not think they need the power. When you decriminalise begging at the same time as having removed move-on laws, those two issues have a flow-on effect in terms of antisocial behaviour and police response. There are circumstances where police need to act. The culmination of what the government has done, by going weak again and

again and again and cutting consequences again and again and again, has an impact on behaviour that is occurring. We are seeing a city that is on its knees, partly because behaviour is being not only tolerated but encouraged. Behaviour is being encouraged. We know that is true. That is why the coalition has such strong views on these issues. It is sad to see, with these amendments, what Labor is doing.

But what we also know is, though they were not aware of these changes, Victorians have worked it out. And this Parliament has another three sitting days, so there is only so much damage they can do in that time. I tell you what, these amendments prove one thing: this government is hell-bent on damaging Victoria. Figure out a way to damage Victoria and this Labor government will find a way. I look forward to this Premier standing up tomorrow and having to explain where the genesis of these two amendments came from. Where did these two amendments come from? Well, we know where they came from. They came from the crossbench the government wanted to do a dirty deal with. That is where they came from. Is there any other point of principle in relation to these amendments? Did they come from the Victorian Law Reform Commission? No. Did they come from any peak body? No. Did anyone even contact the government to seek to amend their bill to do it?

When the Attorney-General got up to speak about these amendments, the Attorney did not justify the background as to what led them. The Attorney did not justify why, why, why. So when the Premier gets up tomorrow – if he does, because he is very good at holding occasional press conferences, delivering single sentences and sitting down – he will have to explain where these two amendments came from. It is not an unreasonable question to ask, is it, when amendments are moved that have a serious implication, as does an amendment to the Summary Offences Act: how did this happen? Where did this come from? The truth is that this set of amendments is purely about doing a dirty deal in the upper house, because there are so few votes this government naturally have in the Council to support things they are proposing to do. The government has now been forced to be bought – to go to independents and say, ‘How can we buy our votes?’

It is completely unreasonable to make these changes without any form of consultation. How can it be that these changes have been proposed without being announced? The two facts are that (1) there was no announcement of the change and (2) the Attorney’s office did not support the change, and I went through that in some detail earlier. In fact there was genuine shock at the proposal that these could be supported in any way, and I am not the only member of Parliament who will put that on the record, because it is true. It is true that the Attorney took the view, I suspect, that changes of this nature should not be made at a whim. Set aside the substance – when you make an amendment, it is reasonable to understand what you are proposing to do and the implication of what you are proposing to do, and that is why you announce, you consult, you discuss. And so –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Essendon will come to order.

James NEWBURY: Obviously another long lunch. These amendments should not be before this chamber, because they were not announced. They were not supported by the member who moved them. It is not an unreasonable point for us to make.

I would like to reiterate the point that I made earlier in relation to the implication. When it comes to begging, the most recent statistics show that between 2017 and this year there were 850 offences. In relation to the fines amendment, 2200 warrants are being cut by this government – cutting consequences. Victorians know. That is why we will not support them. We cannot support it. There are 2200 instances that this morning this government believed were people who had committed an offence in a way that should have seen them imprisoned. This says everything about this government and the dirty deals they are willing to do to buy votes in the Council. That is what this is about, the dirty deals this government is actually doing, and Victorians are being damaged because of it.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (15:16): I am very pleased to rise in support of the amendments that have been moved by the Attorney-General, who again reiterates her support for these amendments. There are two things we can be sure of at all times: first is that the Liberal Party will consistently do everything in their power to talk our great city down; second is that they will do everything that they can in their power to blame victims, to criminalise poverty and to show not one ounce of empathy when it comes to some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Quite frankly what we saw just then from the member for Brighton was a hysterical and frankly nasty response to very important amendments.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on her feet knows all too well that she is straying very much from the bill and using this as an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member is being relevant. It was brought up in debate.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I want to first just talk to the amendments as they relate to begging. Let us be clear: what these amendments do is seek to decriminalise begging in our streets. And let us understand that begging, as it currently exists, is a crime of poverty. Right? So we are responding to recommendations arising from the eminent and highly respected former Victorian coroner John Cain in relation to the very tragic death of 27-year-old Jessica Geddes, killed by her abusive partner in 2020. Jessica often begged for food and money while she was waiting on her Centrelink payments that were directed to her abusive partner. So let us be clear about the people that we are talking about here.

I think it is also important to put on the record some facts in relation to the actual incidents of fines being issued in relation to begging here or charges being issued in relation to begging. Begging charges have dropped by 90 per cent in the last five years, and just 10 charges were laid in 2024–25. No jail time has been imposed for begging in more than three years, so let us be clear about the nature of the problem that we are dealing with here. What is more, the advice that the government has received is that police have all the powers that they need to deal with any problematic behaviours that are occurring on the street in relation to breaches of the peace for obscene, indecent and threatening language and so on. So the police have the powers that they need to deal with behaviour on the streets that may be disruptive to others.

I talked about the Liberals attacking our great city and state at every opportunity that they have. Do you know what *Time Out* magazine recently named as the leading city in the world? What city was that? That would be Melbourne.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I would ask where *Time Out* magazine is mentioned in relation to the matters currently being considered by the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): You have strayed from the amendments. I ask you to come back, member for Macedon.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, if I may, I am rebutting –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Macedon, I have just ruled. If you can continue with the debate, that would be great.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: In rebutting some of the points that were made by the member for Brighton, who talked about the fact that apparently Melbourne is in the depths of despair and that our traders are doing it really tough, I am not saying that it is not tough for some of our traders, but let us be clear: Melbourne is held up in lights around the world, including by *Time Out* magazine, and the *Economist* still has Melbourne as the third-most livable city in the world. Let us be clear: we have a great, great city. The Liberals will always talk down our great city, whereas we will do everything that we can to support it. Secondly, we know that the Liberals have a track record when it comes to attacking people living in poverty in this state. What they have done, and what we have heard from

the member for Brighton, is an absolute attack on people, and women in particular, who are struggling in poverty and as a consequence –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, that is a straight imputation. Under standing order 118, I ask her to withdraw.

Daniela De Martino: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, it is a matter for debate. It was a discussion about the contribution being made and the nature of the description of the amendments before the house at the moment and the consequences of them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): The member feels as though he has been impugned by another member and has asked for it to be withdrawn, so I ask the member for Macedon to withdraw.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I withdraw.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have never done this before, but I would like the member for Brighton to withdraw. I find what he said about me personally offensive.

James Newbury: I withdraw.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, what the amendments seek to do is ensure that where we can we seek to decriminalise poverty, and that is what these amendments do. We know that a criminal response to begging disproportionately punishes the most vulnerable people in our community and is absolutely inconsistent with our government's commitment to early intervention and prevention.

That leads me to the violence reduction unit and the work that we are doing there to ensure that we are getting in early and working with people who are at risk of offending in the criminal justice system, and indeed this is already showing some really great signs that it is working. A good example of that is the community connectors program, which is getting social workers talking to people –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, again the member for Macedon has strayed from the amendments. She has moved to the violence reduction unit, and I ask you to bring her back to the amendments.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am talking about various interventions that our government has made to address poverty –

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: It is about poverty actually – that is why the amendments are here – and about how this can lead to criminal behaviours. If we make early interventions, we can stop this before it starts.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Macedon, you had strayed slightly. I would like you to come back to the amendments that we are debating.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: In the time that I have left, I will support the Attorney-General in the amendments that she has brought to this place. Let us be clear about the intent of these amendments. This is about ensuring that we are acting to decriminalise begging in order to provide a response that is more appropriate – that is, a welfare-led response to poverty as recommended by the coroner John Cain. With regard to the fines amendment, this is in place in order to ensure that vulnerable people are not sent to jail for the crime of being poor. This is what the member for Brighton is arguing should happen: poor people – lock them up. Some people can pay their fines. Some people can access a million dollars from the Liberal Party slush fund to pay their legal fees. Others cannot. And as a consequence of that –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, that is out of order. The contribution is not relevant in any way to the amendment. Simply slagging off a political party is not relevant to the amendments that are before the house. I ask if you could bring the member back to the amendments that are before the house.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: You are nasty.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Before we go any further, member for Brighton, I remind people when they raise a point of order to be succinct.

James Newbury: Under standing order 118, I would ask the member to withdraw the comment she just threw across the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Macedon?

Mary-Anne Thomas: I withdraw.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:26): On the amendments – finally – the Greens will of course be supporting the amendments to decriminalise begging and stop people going to jail for unpaid fines. I have been listening to the debate carefully, and I have to say I am also appalled that the Liberals believe that people who are so destitute they have been forced into begging for food and for money to survive should be punished and potentially jailed and criminalised and charged and put through the criminal justice system. I mean, this is Trump-style politics, it is US-style cruelty. I did not expect that in a compassionate place like Victoria, but here we are. The thing is that we have had begging being illegal and being criminalised in this state for far, far too long. People who are simply asking for help should be met with compassion, should be met with assistance, should be met with understanding. They should not be met with punishment and they should certainly not be met with criminal sanctions.

Nine years ago my Greens colleague in the other place Sue Pennicuik MLC moved an amendment to decriminalise begging. Nine years ago I started advocating to decriminalise begging. As the member for the city of Melbourne, where I dare say most of the charges would be laid against people begging, I was very proud to advocate to decriminalise begging. I have an article here from the *Age* from nine years ago, back in 2017, before many people here were even in this chamber, about my advocacy. The headline is ‘Greens begging law reform is about compassion’, and that is exactly what it is about. Some of my quotes in that article are as relevant now as they were back then. Back then we had Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, who was taking a very punitive approach to people sleeping rough or facing hardship on our streets, a Liberal Party lord mayor. But we also had a Labor Party who refused to decriminalise begging. The only reason they are doing it now is because they have been forced into doing it by the independents and the Greens. My quotes in the article read:

The Labor Party and Lord Mayor want to keep begging a crime and keep throwing people in jail or finding them just for asking for help. That doesn’t do a thing to solve the problem ...

I absolutely stand behind those words that I said nine years ago. I also said they should be investing in services rather than demonising people who are falling through the cracks. Absolutely, I stand by those words. That is why I am very pleased to support these amendments to finally do something that I called for nine years ago – to decriminalise begging to help people who are facing hardship on our streets, not put them through the criminal justice system.

We have seen a concerning rise in particular in governments and councils taking a punitive approach to people facing hardship on our streets. We know that housing is completely unaffordable. We know we have rising homelessness and rising rough sleeping on our streets. That is not the only form of homelessness that is rising, but it is the most visible form of homelessness. We know we have seen cuts to our mental health services. We have seen cuts to alcohol and drug addiction and rehabilitation services. There is barely a day where there is a public drug or alcohol rehabilitation bed available in Victoria right now – most days there is not even one bed available. So when the Liberal Party, the member for Brighton or others see people facing hardship on our streets, who might be begging, who

might be facing a crisis, they should just think, 'Why is that person there?' Nobody chooses to be there. Nobody chooses that kind of life. You would not choose it, and you would not wish it on your worst enemy. But the reason those people are there is largely because systems and services have failed them. The child protection system has usually been the one that has failed people.

When I was first elected as the member for Melbourne something that happened just a few years into my first term was that we saw City Square occupied, before it was closed due to the Metro Tunnel work. City Square was one of our big open public squares in Melbourne. A number of people who were experiencing rough sleeping and homelessness went and occupied that square. They went and occupied that square because they wanted to shine a light on the homelessness crisis that was happening in Melbourne and the failure of services. They wanted to say, 'We are not invisible. We are sleeping rough in our city, but we are not less than human.' They wanted to say to people, 'We are here, and these are the issues we are facing.' They invited people to come down and talk to them, to talk to rough sleepers about why they were sleeping rough on our streets. I took up that invitation. I went down there, and I spent hours with people who were sleeping rough, who were occupying City Square, who wanted their city to take their issues seriously. The majority of people I spoke to had come out of the child protection system. That ultimately was the catalyst for them ending up sleeping rough on the streets of the City of Melbourne.

We have a government system, the child protection system, that has so fundamentally failed people that they have ended up sleeping on our streets. It is so obvious that it is system failure that is leading people to that situation. We have had a royal commission into the mental health crisis, but many of the recommendations of that royal commission have still not been fulfilled. I was meeting with Melbourne City Mission just the other day. They were telling me about the recommendation for 500 beds with mental health support for young people who are experiencing homelessness and mental health issues and that those 500 beds had been promised and never delivered. They are desperately in need of those 500 beds.

Frontyard is the Melbourne City Mission's drop-in centre. It is the access point or the first door that you can go to when you are a young person in the City of Melbourne who needs a place to stay and is experiencing homelessness; you go to Frontyard. I have been down there at Frontyard, I have seen the amazing work they do and I have spoken to the people who work there. The people at Frontyard have a big whiteboard. Before they open their doors in the morning, they get into the office and call around every crisis accommodation provider that is within cooe of the City of Melbourne to find out how many beds are available for young people, because they know as soon as they open their doors they will get an influx of young people who need somewhere to sleep that night. They put up on the whiteboard the number of beds that are available. They do that every single morning. Every single morning when they open their doors they have an influx of people and those beds are filled almost instantly, and then there are no more beds available. There are still people coming through the door, but they cannot house them. Those workers are at their wit's end. They are like, 'There's just no beds. There is no housing to send these people to.'

When I spoke to people experiencing homelessness and particularly rough sleeping at City Square, a lot of them also told me that the reason they are sleeping on the streets of Melbourne is because there is no long-term housing available. Yes, they might get into transitional housing or crisis housing accommodation for a month, maybe two months, maybe three months, but after that there is nowhere for them to go because there is no public housing, because the government is not building any more public housing; in fact they are demolishing public housing. We have the lowest investment –

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: Well, it is true. It actually is true. We have the lowest investment per person in public housing of any state or territory. That is a simple fact. It is simply a fact that in Victoria we have the lowest amount spent on public housing and social housing of any state or territory. That is a fact. I notice the people opposite are quiet now, because they cannot dispute the facts.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member needs to be factual. People also live in social housing, so she is just taking one element of housing.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I ask the member for Melbourne to come back to the amendments.

Ellen SANDELL: I will come back to the amendments, and I am being entirely factual to say that this Labor government is demolishing and privatising public housing – all 44 towers, many of which are in my electorate.

I would like to go back to the City of Melbourne, because we are talking about an amendment which is about decriminalising begging, and this does affect a lot of people in the City of Melbourne. I was mentioning before that there has been a concerning rise in councils using punitive approaches when it comes to people begging on our streets or people facing rough sleeping and homelessness on our streets. We have seen it with Port Phillip, where they have sent in officers to just simply take – steal – people's belongings and take them away and dispose of them without their consent. We have also seen it with the City of Melbourne, where they are spending \$3.75 million to put security officers on the streets of the City of Melbourne who, homelessness services have reported, have been going around and essentially bullying rough sleepers and people begging and making people feel very unsafe on the streets. These are armed officers, who are security officers, roaming the streets. That \$3.75 million would be much better spent on assertive outreach.

I know this government supports assertive outreach. They talked about it on Tuesday at the Council to Homeless Persons event that I attended. The City of Melbourne are also out there lauding their record investment of just over \$2 million in assertive outreach – health workers, mental health workers – a health-led response, with people going around the city and actually getting to know rough sleepers, getting to know people who are begging, connecting with the services they need, forming a connection with them and providing some long-term solutions. The City of Melbourne has been celebrated for spending that \$2 million. They themselves, I know, are very proud of it. That is a good investment. It is the biggest investment of any council in that type of activity and that type of program, which is very good. But it is dwarfed by the \$3.75 million that they are spending on security officers. I very much hope that with the passing of this law to decriminalise begging, we can see that \$3.75 million – which I know our Greens councillor Olivia Ball has been very outspoken against – redirected to health-led, assertive outreach on our streets to keep everybody safe, health workers visible in our communities to keep everybody safe and programs that actually work, not programs that are simply about punishing people or getting a good headline in the *Herald Sun*.

When it comes to decriminalising begging, I would like to thank Sue Pennicuik, my former colleague, for her advocacy on this matter. It has been nine years, but it is finally here. It is a very good change to our laws that will make our state and our city a fairer and more compassionate place to be.

The second part of these amendments is around people who have unpaid infringement fines. We know that the law in this state has been that you can go to prison for having unpaid infringement fines. This is a terrible, terrible law. I have also spoken about this many times, and I would like to thank the incredible people at Justice Connect and Westjustice who first brought this issue to my attention many, many years ago, and I have raised this in the chamber before. This is essentially the state acting as a debt collector for big corporations, particularly big toll road companies like Transurban. We know that big corporations like Transurban and the state Labor government have a pretty cushy relationship, but I do not think that the state should use its resources to act as a debt collector for a private corporation. I think that is very bad public policy. We do not get the state to act as a debt collector for other private corporations. If you do not pay your phone bill, for example, it is not like the sheriff can come knocking. But that is the case when it comes to CityLink tolls, for example, where Transurban has managed to get the Labor government to agree to act as their debt collector and do that work for them. I think that is pretty atrocious.

The Greens have been against this for years, and today we are seeing a partial reform to this system to remove some historical unexecuted warrants for imprisonment for unpaid infringement fines. That is good, and it is entirely appropriate. The Greens very much support it. Thank you to the community legal centres, who do not get nearly enough credit for the incredible advocacy they do on behalf of some of the most vulnerable people in our state – people who walk into their office literally with bags of unpaid fines and warrants. It is community legal centres – really good people – who spend hours and hours sorting through these fines and warrants that are largely, again, due to poverty, due to vulnerability, due to failures in our government systems and due to this dodgy deal that the government has been able to do with Transurban that has largely created this horror for so many people.

I would just lastly say that if we are doing reform when it comes to fines, there is another issue that the Greens have put on the table for many years that I think warrants looking at very closely, and it is a very commonsense reform, which is concessional fines. This is something that we did during COVID that we put on the table for the government, and they picked it up, and it was a very good reform. It would mean that people who earn less pay less in fines and people who earn more pay more in fines. It happens in other places around the world. It is a fairness measure, but it is also an effectiveness measure, because a fine for someone who earns a decent income – a speeding fine, for example – is a lot less punitive and is a lot less punishment than the same fine for someone who is on income support or earning a much lower wage, for example. Essentially, the same fine has differing levels of impact and punishment and deterrence.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Melbourne, I ask you to speak to the amendments.

Ellen SANDELL: We very much support these amendments, and we hope that we go one step further in this Parliament or the next to do other fines measures that are similar to these amendments but extending them, such as concessional fines. We did it during COVID, and we can do it again. It is a very commonsense fairness measure. I will leave my comments at that.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:43): I am really, really pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026, a bill that is iconic and emblematic of the type of government we are: a Labor government who supports women, supports the vulnerable and cares for people in Victoria who are doing it tough. We know that those opposite do not care about the most vulnerable Victorians. They do not care when they are locking them up, when they are wanting to make their lives even harder. They do not consider a trauma-informed response to these very, very vulnerable people, who are experiencing the very worst time of their lives when they have no other choice to survive and the only strategy that they have to survive is to beg.

It is not a lifestyle choice to beg people for money, to ask people for support. Extreme poverty should not be a crime, and that is what allowing people who have been found to be begging to be sent to jail would make it. It would criminalise extreme poverty, and that is not okay. I really want to say that we have to look at the kind of Victoria that we want to be – the Victoria we want to be today and the Victoria we want to be in the future, not only the short-term future but the long-term future. What does our state look like for future generations, and what messages are we sending our children and our future grandchildren about what Victoria stands for and who we are? I think that we have to really think about these terms. As Nelson Mandela wrote in his book *Long Walk to Freedom*, do not look at how a society treats its highest citizens, look at how a society treats its lowest citizens. That is what our values and our compassion are about. That is what the Education State is about. It is about lifting people out of poverty. It is about asking what is the best for the future, and locking people up for begging is not that. This is a moral test for this Parliament. This amendment is a moral test – you get to choose what side you want to be on. Do you want to be on the side of people who are trying to get by? We are on the side of those people, and that is why we have invested in Foodbank. That is why we are making sure that people who need food can get the food they need through organisations like Foodbank. I had the opportunity to visit Foodbank in Ballarat with the Premier –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Wendouree has moved far from the amendments. I ask you to bring her back.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Member for Wendouree, I ask you to talk about the amendments, please.

Juliana ADDISON: Absolutely. When people in Ballarat are begging for food, for survival, I am saying that going to Foodbank is a way that people in their most vulnerable times can get food. There is an alternative thanks to our government, thanks to the care and the support we have for vulnerable Victorians, and I am proud of that. And I am going to say that when I was there the other day with the Premier, talking about people, about survival, so they do not have to beg, there was a woman there who said to me that she had not had a coffee in five years, because that is how hard it is. She did not have any spare money to get a coffee. When you go to the Foodbank in Mitchell Park, in the good electorate of Ripon, you get offered a coffee upon arrival and you get dignity. Dignity is the absolute opposite of begging. That is why I talk about dignity and the dignity that Foodbank in Ballarat gives, because it says to people, 'You are worthy of more. You deserve respect' and that is what is at the heart of these amendments. It is respect for people. It is respect for people who are at risk of homelessness. It is respect for people who are doing it really, really tough and who have no other means of survival but to beg.

I want to give a shout-out to Melissa Hardman, the CEO of Westjustice, who is an extraordinary person who is doing really, really good things in the west. I want to also give a shout-out to Allied Justice, who is supporting the most vulnerable. When every other door has been closed, Allied Justice in Ballarat, our community legal service, is providing legal advice and legal support to help people on the worst day of their lives, and I just want to say thank you. Allied Justice is based in my electorate of Wendouree but does great work across the Central Highlands region. And to Louisa Gibbs, for her leadership as CEO of the Federation of Community Legal Services: thank you for your commitment to supporting the most vulnerable people when they need legal advice. Whether it is for a summary offence or whether it is for any other legal requirements that they require, our community legal centres are about protecting the most vulnerable and really making sure that we are looking after the most vulnerable members of our community.

I just want to say that the section that we aim to amend is really, really important. We have seen these laws dismantled in other jurisdictions. In the UK they have dismantled these laws, and we have seen it in other states. Victoria is such an amazing jurisdiction that we often lead the nation, but in this case we need to catch up. We need to make these amendments to ensure that Victorians are given the support. And the reason we need to make sure that this amendment goes through is because of the disproportionate punishment that this provides to our most vulnerable. I do not often agree with the member for Melbourne, but I do recognise that for someone who earns a living wage or well beyond that, a fine is something that may be an inconvenience. For someone who is homeless, for someone who is couch surfing, for someone who has found themselves unable to get to a place where they may get a couch that night – they may need to jump on a V/Line train or they may need to get a bus somewhere and they may need to beg to get that – a fine has a disproportionate impact, and I think that us showing compassion and living our values is so important.

I know we have got the member for Shepparton coming up. With the consideration of the house right now I just want to say thank you to the member for Shepparton. She has been outstanding. I am really looking forward to her valedictory speech, because the member for Shepparton has just walked in and I am delighted that she can hear this. Thank you so much to the member for Shepparton for the four years that you have served in this place and also the eight years you have served your community. We are indebted to you, and you will be absolutely missed.

In wrapping up my contribution today I want to say that I am very, very pleased to be on the right side of history on this one, to stand up when the moral question was asked of this Parliament about what

decency looks like. When someone is having the worst day of their life, what would Jesus do? I ask the member for Sandringham: what would Jesus do?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Through the Chair, member for Wendouree.

Juliana ADDISON: Through the Chair, I am looking over to the member for Sandringham, who is a man of great faith.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Wendouree has strayed very much again from the amendments. Could you please bring her back?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): I ask the member to come back to the amendments.

Juliana ADDISON: Because we are so late in the 60th term of this Parliament, the member for Eildon is a little bit upset because she thought she was my favourite Liberal and I have not given her a shout-out. So, member for Eildon, thank you for your care and concern. Go Cats. We are still on a unity ticket when it comes to the Geelong Football Club but not on a unity ticket when it comes to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill. I commend the amendments to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:53): I will be keeping my remarks to the amendments that we have. There are a lot of people in the chamber who have not been following this bill closely and following the amendments. The amendments were not brought forward by the Labor government. In fact they were brought forward by Legalise Cannabis, and there was a lot of debate during the three days on whether the government supported them or not, because there were points where they did not support them. I do want to also put on record that if those in government took care to research some of the most charitable organisations in the state, they would find that they were established by Liberal Party members and have done an amazing job.

This set of amendments has had a very topsy-turvy pathway through the chamber. On Monday afternoon we were advised that Legalise Cannabis had a couple of amendments that they were bringing forward. As we have heard, the first set related to the decriminalisation of begging, and that was including a new clause in the bill to amend the Summary Offences Act 1966. This act was not already in the bill. It was not part of the original bill. It was something that was not directly related to the really important matter that was before the house around family violence and coercive control and changes to good character. The second lot of amendments were addressing imprisonment in relation to unpaid infringement notices and fines. We had not been lobbied by any stakeholder with regard to these matters, and it was a little bit of a surprise when the government changed their tune probably three times about whether they were going to support these amendments or not. I have my notes written down from my discussions with ministerial advisers about the path of what was happening. They were debated on Tuesday, and instead of going into committee, where these amendments would have been discussed, they were pulled and it was adjourned, and no-one knew what was happening. Legalise Cannabis did not understand whether the government was supporting their amendments or not, and we certainly had no idea what was happening. We actually spoke to Legalise Cannabis, talked about our position on those and had some very good discussions between Ms Crozier and Ms Payne in the other place.

On Tuesday again we were advised that the Premier's private office had a different view to the ministerial office; we were told at one point they were supporting them and we were told at another point they were not supporting them. We had different information given to different people. To hear what was talked about by government members when they had not been part of this is really quite affronting. The notes that I took yesterday from my discussions with the minister's office show some were being supported and others were not being supported, and they expected them to withdraw them before it went to the vote, noting that the member who was moving those wanted to speak on them. We were consistently given conflicting information by a government who really did not know what

was happening. They did not know whether they were going to support these or not. They certainly did not bring these forward, and it was never on their agenda to bring these forward; it was because they were raised by another member in the other place. We had spoken, as I said, to a member for Legalise Cannabis about our position and our concerns, and I think I will leave it at that. It has already been canvassed that we will be opposing these amendments. They have not had a smooth path through.

At the same time I reiterate most strongly our support for the changes regarding coercive control and good character, which are well overdue. They are something that we canvassed in this place 12 months ago. Even though the legislation is passing now, it is still going to be some time – another 18 months – before those changes come into being.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (15:57): I am very pleased to rise and contribute to the amendments which have been returned from the Council to us here. I was listening with great intent to the member for Wendouree's very fine contribution – very impassioned contribution – on the importance of these changes that we are very happy as a government to agree to. I actually had a look at amendment 4, which inserts part 10A, 'Repeal of offence of begging or gathering alms'. That in itself gives us an indication of the age of this kind of offence, which is no longer now going to be an offence in the state of Victoria, and for that I am beyond thrilled. It is an Old English word 'alms', and it comes from 'ælmysse', which comes from the ancient Greek word 'eleēmosynē', and I did check with the Minister for Sport to make sure that I was correct in that pronunciation, and he thinks I was. It was the United Kingdom's Vagrancy Act 1824 which first introduced this as an offence, and what a sad state it is to actually criminalise poverty. In accepting these amendments, what we are saying quite loudly and quite proudly as a government is that we will not criminalise people who are poor and who are at their lowest ebb and have to beg just to get by. As the member for Wendouree quite clearly stated, it is not a lifestyle choice to go out and beg, it is a point of absolute, complete desperation. If someone is at that point in their life where they have to sit there with their hand out or ask someone for something to be given to them because they have absolutely nothing, we should not be criminalising them. They should not be punished for that; instead they should be dealt with with care and with compassion and be taken care of when they are at their absolute lowest point.

I note that the clock is ticking down towards what I expect will be a very fine contribution from a person in this chamber, the member for Shepparton, who I have had so much time for over the past four years – a true woman of distinction, a real lady in this place. I am really delighted that I will be sitting in here to hear her very, very fine contribution, and with mere seconds to go I commend these amendments to the house, and I look forward to the member for Shepparton.

The SPEAKER: The time has come for me to interrupt business in accordance with the resolution of the house today for the member for Shepparton to make her valedictory statement. I remind visitors in the galleries that no photography or filming is allowed.

Members

Member for Shepparton

Valedictory statement

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (16:00): Standing in this place I have such a strong sense of gratitude – I am not going to cry straight off the bat surely – as I reflect on my journey so far, my working life, the experiences, the people I have met, the communities, my family and friends, all of which have shaped me into the person I am today.

Before I start my contribution I want to say how amazing it has been to have the Shepparton showcase at Parliament – just for me – this week, and what a way to finish up my last few weeks in Parliament, celebrating all that we are and all that I represent. In discussions this morning with some of the Parliament's staff at the chamber doors about me leaving this place and what my plans were it was suggested that I could have made a magnificent entrance into my valedictory speech: wheeled in sitting on the large cow that is on display in Queen's Hall. Of course I respect the rules of the house and know

that no props are allowed, and we know I am one of the better behaved ones in this place. However, had it been the member for Mildura, I say it possibly would have happened. Had I done it, it would have been spectacular and something I would have loved having on the record.

Today I reflect on my time in this place and the privilege of serving my community for the past 10 years of public service. After almost 30 years in my business, in 2016 I went into public office, elected into local government, where I served for almost six years, including four years as mayor – such a privilege and an honour. During that time my love for the region and my deep care for the people saw a synergy that saw me thrive in public office and service. I saw the opportunity that I had to make a meaningful difference, to advocate for my region and to care for my people. I absolutely found my passion and purpose for the next stage of my life.

In 2022 I was given a wonderful opportunity with the National Party. Once again the Shepparton electorate placed their immense trust in me – for a third time. Following two local government terms, I was given the incredible honour to represent the Shepparton district here in the Victorian Parliament. I was incredibly proud to win the seat back for the Nationals after eight years. It is because of my National Party team that the past four years in this place have been extraordinary and also a lot of fun. The past 10 years of public service has been life changing and the biggest honour and privilege of my life. I am grateful for the belief and trust in me and the many things that we have achieved, celebrated and shared as a region and communities.

It was not an aspiration or plan for me to go into politics or public life in such an official way, but my aspiration had always been to support my community and our region – a community that had supported my family and our family businesses for over 60 years. I truly believe that leadership is not about a title, a position or authority, it is about connection, authenticity, communication, being present and genuine care. My style of leadership is probably different to what has been seen in the past, particularly in this place. I have always wanted to have a genuine connection to people and to the community. I wanted to be the politician there for the people. I love jumping on the barbecue out the front of Kmart, volunteering on the People Supporting People barbecue, serving sausages on a Saturday morning, because you get to be seen, you get to talk to the people and you get to support a wonderful cause. That was something I was already doing well before my public life.

The Shepparton district is such a beautiful part of regional Victoria and a wonderful place to work and raise a family, a place that I have always been so proud of and loved to call home. But what is most special are the people, our diversity and our kindness, and we are a community that cares very deeply for each other – something I have seen time and time again, particularly during the most challenging of times: during the pandemic, when we were the most locked down regional city in the state; during the floods back in 2022; and in recent times, our neighbouring bushfires. So many times I have seen and experienced the generosity, kindness and care of the community. It is often at the worst times you see the best in people: all people from all walks of life and many different cultures across our community coming together to help those in need – a united, compassionate and proud community.

We are a very multicultural community, something that we celebrate and that enriches our community. I am proud to be the Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Multicultural Affairs, something that allowed me to proudly share the strength and the diversity of my community wide and far. Sam Atukorala, the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District CEO, is here today. We have worked so closely together. I thank you, Sam, for your support and also for your sincere friendship. I must tell you a story. I was at an event once, ready to arrive, and Sam had got there before me. Sam told people his sister was arriving, and I walked in – a bit of explaining to do there! But that probably tells you a lot about our relationship. Sam is like family. We are neighbours as well, but we have a friendship like no other. Kammy is here also, and he and his Indian community have shared and celebrated their culture with the broader community. Kammy has also become a wonderful, dedicated leader in our community, something that makes me so proud not just for his heritage but for the whole community. He is also a very close friend who has been beside me every step of the way.

When I came to this place I wanted better things for my community – investment in our hospitals, more public and affordable housing, to fix our roads, more police, greater family violence support, improved sporting facilities and infrastructure, increased mental health services and better public transport services, many of which we keep calling for today. It should not matter who is in government when it comes to health care. Whoever is in government should be required to ensure that all communities have completed hospitals with the infrastructure and healthcare services that they need and deserve. That should and must be a priority. GV Health is only half-completed and in desperate need of an integrated cancer centre. This means people have to travel for cancer treatment and care, and families are also significantly impacted when they want to be there to support their loved ones. The housing and homelessness crisis continues in my electorate today with increasing numbers. Housing should also be a priority and a given human right. We are seeing increasing numbers of people sleeping on our streets or in their cars or with no place to call home. Priorities must change.

It is also distressing to see the level of financial distress that sees people struggling to pay their bills and their rent and to keep a roof over their heads. I am so pleased that we have received some housing for people sleeping rough with much-needed wraparound services – a first for regional Victoria, something I am incredibly proud of – and workers accommodation for our hospital. We have also received early childhood centres and a youth mental health facility. But as I have mentioned, we need so much more investment into the regions.

Many of you know I came from a challenging childhood, and I have shared some of that experience in this place. We must ensure that families have the support that they need, including mental health and addiction support. Family breakdown and separation is a tragic consequence for a family when they do not get the support that they need. My own personal experience made me more determined to help families, children and teenagers experiencing disadvantage and homelessness. We must also support the amazing foster carers and family support services, who are often the safety net to catch the most vulnerable; our community houses, who are there helping the most vulnerable people in need – they must have continued and increased funding support; and also our food relief services, all of which are experiencing extreme, increasing, unprecedented demand.

I am blessed to have six siblings: two sisters and four brothers. My sisters Kerry and Keeli – three Ks, if you did not pick it up, Kim, Keeli and Kerry – and my brother Robbie are here today. They have given me love and support all of my life, and whilst we shared some challenging times we always had each other. Somehow we broke the family cycle of generational disadvantage and family breakdown. I am so proud of them all, not only for their success in life but for the beautiful people that they have become. I know my parents would be proud of us all, and I know they would have loved to have seen me in this place.

During my time I have had the opportunity to meet so many people along the way, whether that be for matters that I have taken to the floor of Parliament or at meetings, community events, on constituent matters, visiting local businesses or through my office door. Every interaction, contribution and connection has mattered. It has been a privilege at my office to provide a space of comfort, connection and care for the community, and I am so grateful to my team, who have always treated every single person that came through our office door with dignity, care and the respect that they deserve regardless of their issues or circumstances. We know it can be tough. We get such a huge range of different levels of circumstances and needs. It can be a heavy load for the team, and that is why it is so important we have the right people.

I have been incredibly blessed to have the most amazing, hardworking, dedicated and caring team. I wish to acknowledge Melissa and Jack from my office, who are here today. Melissa is the kindest and most compassionate person, who has genuinely made people feel listened to and that they matter. Her kindness went beyond the office door, and it was not unusual for people to pop in just to let Melissa know that they were doing okay – something she encouraged. However, there were constant cakes, chocolates and treats delivered because of her kindness and, yes, a few extra kilos because of it. Mel has worked tirelessly every single day. She has supported me during the good and bad days. I have to

share that when the power rebate was on, Mel went to caravan parks and places where she was worried that they would not know about the rebate or have access to a claim, putting up flyers on community billboards and calling constituents offering assistance – the same with the recent rego rebate. Between Mel and Jack they assisted over – are you ready for it – 700 people through our office door, which is truly extraordinary. However, we could not get Mel to abide by security rules. The window was often up at the front of office, and she could be heard saying ‘I think you need a hug’ and going out into the reception. I would not change her for the world. We are definitely B1 and B2. Thank you, Mel. I will be forever grateful, and there is no better person I could have had as my front of house or by my side.

Jack has been with me from day one, and his commitment whilst also studying has been incredible. It is a big task looking after an MP, getting me ready for Parliament, keeping me updated and well prepared, while taking everything in his stride and doing everything in the most efficient, professional way. Putting up with Mel and me takes a special guy, just like Jack. We have had so many amazing and fun times together. Thank you, Jack, for everything you have done for me these past four years. You have been outstanding, and I am incredibly proud of how far you have come. I know you have such a bright, successful future ahead. Thank you for your dedication to the National Party as a Young Nat and taking on roles way beyond your age.

I also wish to acknowledge Safa, who joined our office as a casual and is from Afghanistan and studying year 12. Safa has been a strong voice for youth and youth leadership in our community, opportunities for young people and how their voices can be heard regardless of background, culture or circumstances. Safa has only been in Australia for three years, and I am incredibly proud of him. I also want to thank many of my previous staff over the years.

When it comes to my National Party colleagues, they are such a great bunch of humans – a mix of personalities, as I am sure you are aware. We are all different but, do you know what, it worked because we genuinely care for each other. You have been my family away from home. You have supported and encouraged me along the way, and I am so proud of all of you, of how hard you have all worked representing your communities and of your loyalty to this place. I have been led by two outstanding leaders in Peter and Danny. I must share some of my National Party induction. Those that know me know that I do not swear. At our first Christmas Kris Kringle Peter Walsh gifted me with a book. That book was on the correct pronunciation of swearwords and how to put them in the right context. That is a true story. They kept saying, ‘Will you just say the word?’

I wish to thank you, Speaker, for the way you have managed the chamber. It is not an easy task. It has been likened to being a principal with a bunch of naughty school students, something I tend to agree with. I cannot imagine anyone else in that chair. I also wish you well in your future endeavours. I thank all of the staff in this place: the clerks, chamber staff, hospitality team, committee support, cleaners, Hansard – everyone. You are all just amazing. Parliament can be a challenging environment that allows for behaviour that sometimes is quite questionable, and I do hope in the future that might change just a little.

To everyone in this place, I know we all come to this place sharing a common goal to serve our communities and to make Victoria a great state. I have made some great friendships on both sides of the chamber, and I want to acknowledge Emma for her strength, courage and amazing advocacy for MND and for her support of my friend Maxine, who we lost to MND a couple of years ago. Brad Rowswell, thank you so much for your friendship. I have to raise Brad because I had a very close friendship with his brother Brendan. I always told him, ‘Sorry, Brad. Brendan was my favourite.’ A great loss.

I want to acknowledge the many organisations, groups and volunteers who are often our unsung heroes who are there for our community. Azem and his volunteers at People Supporting People support the homeless, those sleeping rough and the disadvantaged. To the loyal Shepparton branch National Party members, your support and belief in me never wavered. To Shepparton branch president Sarah Ross-

Edwards, whose father was a National Party member of Parliament for 24 years, your loyalty and commitment to the party continues your father's legacy, and your belief in me I was so grateful for.

I also thank my Liberal Party colleagues for their friendship and support. And to Jess: you are an exceptional leader. Your genuine connection with and care for people, which I saw in my community, is what this state needs right now. You will be an outstanding Premier.

I thank my friends who have always been there whenever I need them – Sev, Robi, Kammy, Cheryl, Sam, Azem, Collete, Carmen, Helen, Jenny and Alan. There is a saying: 'It's not only the people you meet, it's the people you keep.' Thank you for being in my corner. Sev, you were my number one most loyal volunteer. You have continued to wear my T-shirt, which was quite hilarious, on your working jobs, and you did cause a bit of chaos on the polling booths by keeping everyone on their toes.

My greatest joy and proudest achievement in life is being a mother to my two daughters Emma and Olivia. I am proud because they have grown into such amazing, beautiful, intelligent, kind and giving women. I am looking forward to having more time with my girls and sharing more fun times and adventures. Life is never dull, particularly with daughter Emma.

To my husband Brendan, you have supported me every step of the way. You have been my greatest supporter and cheerleader and have shown me nothing but loyalty, love and encouragement. You have constantly believed in me and told me how proud of me you are and gone along with everything I have wanted to do. You have been the driver, the photographer and you have come to events when I know you really did not want to. I know I have been demanding at times and sometimes very picky with your photos and have given you short notice when I have needed something, but you have never once complained. How lucky am I. Brendan has been retired for six years, and next month we will celebrate our 40th anniversary. What a crazy ride it has been. We have travelled so many journeys through life together during that time, running our businesses, raising our beautiful daughters and during my time in public office, sharing so many adventures along the way. I know with what comes next we will do it together and I will have your support. But it is also time for some downtime, maybe a holiday, and to spend some time with our family and friends and even maybe a few Collingwood football matches – heaven forbid.

I hope that my journey will encourage others to achieve whatever they want to achieve in life. Sometimes the start of your journey may not be an easy one, and mine certainly was not. But if I can achieve the things that I have in my life, anyone can, and that is a message that I will continue to share.

Finally, thank you to my community. It has been an absolute privilege, honour and joy to serve as your local member in the Victorian state Parliament and the past 10 years of public service, something I will be forever proud of and grateful for. Whilst I may be taking a different pathway, I will continue to support and care for my community in any way that I can. That will not change. Thank you.

Members applauded.

Bills

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

Debate resumed.

The SPEAKER: The house will divide on the question that the Council amendments be agreed to. I ask members to take their allocated seats. I ask the Government Whip to include the member for Pakenham's vote based on where she is presently sitting, and I ask the Clerk to record the votes.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (28): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.**Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:28): I rise to speak in support of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026 and to specifically support the establishment of the office of the special prosecutor. Before I go on to the bill, I want to extend my condolences to constituents in my electorate. People will be reminded of the tragic accident that happened on Tuesday, where there was a rollover in a car at Parwan, and we have lost two young kids through that incident. They were two kids from the Melton electorate, one aged seven and one aged 11. One came from the Melton Specialist School, the other one from Al Iman College – two fantastic schools. I just want to extend my best wishes and condolences to the schools, the staff and the students but in particular the families. The funerals were today. It is a tragic time for those families and those communities, so I want to extend my condolences. I know everyone in the chamber would do the same. It was a tragic event.

The bill that we are talking about today is fundamentally about integrity, accountability and the proper use of public money. Those things matter to every Victorian, but they particularly matter to areas like mine in Melton – one of the fastest growing communities. We are going to double our population within the next 20-odd years, so it will go from 220,000 to 450,000 by 2045. We all in this place speak about what we need in our electorates – new roads and improved public transport, new schools and expanded health services – and in the last 7½ years in my electorate a lot of that has been delivered and is still being delivered. Of course the new Melton hospital, which will open in 2029, is on track; it is on time and it is on budget. We need that sort of infrastructure in areas like the fast-growing area of Melton. We also need governments to build things, and that is exactly what the Andrews–Allan–Carroll government has done over the last 12 years – build things. I can certainly say that in my electorate. When governments spend billions of dollars of taxpayers money on major infrastructure, Victorians are entitled to expect the highest possible standards of integrity in return. And if there is any whisper or any evidence of corruption, criminality or serious misconduct in that process, then Victorians are entitled to expect something to be done about it. That is why the Carroll government and the Premier have established the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria. There is no point having the power to uncover wrongdoing if the system is incapable of responding effectively when that wrongdoing is uncovered.

The royal commission can investigate and can compel evidence. It can examine witnesses and it can expose conduct that might otherwise have remained hidden, but what it cannot do is prosecute. We have heard in this chamber that a royal commission is not a prosecuting authority. It cannot take evidence of criminal conduct, compile a prosecution brief or prosecute an offender. That is what this bill explicitly addresses. The bill establishes a dedicated special prosecutor who will work alongside but independently of the royal commission, and where the commission uncovers information indicating possible corruption, criminal conduct or serious misconduct, the special prosecutor will be able to ensure that relevant information gets into the hands of the authorities that can do something about it. That could be Victoria Police. It might also be IBAC. It might be a regulatory or licensing authority like the Labour Hire Authority. It could be an appropriate Commonwealth, interstate or territory body. The important point is that we do not simply collect evidence, put it in a box and wait for the final report. So if information emerges that warrants further investigation, this is the pathway for that investigation to occur. And if information emerges that warrants regulatory action, there should be a pathway for that action to occur – because ultimately, where the evidence establishes criminal offending, nobody should imagine that their position, their connections or the size of the projects that they are working on somehow put them beyond the reach of the law.

I spoke about this recently here in relation to the IBAC legislation that we were debating, and that is what accountability means. This Carroll Labor government has not established a royal commission for appearances. The Premier's first act was to do this. We have established it to get answers, and we deserve that. Through this bill we are putting in place the machinery to make sure that where those answers reveal wrongdoing there can be some consequences. That is an important distinction. It is easy in politics to demand an inquiry – that is probably why those opposite do it so often – but it is much harder to establish one with the powers to uncover uncomfortable truths and then build a framework to enable it to act on what it finds. The independence built into this bill is incredibly important.

Those opposite can rest assured that the special prosecutor will not be subject to the direction or the control of the Premier or any other minister when performing their functions or exercising their powers. The government establishes this office, but the government does not get to tell the special prosecutor where to look, what information to pass on or whose conduct should attract scrutiny. This is precisely how an integrity process should operate, and that is exactly what we are instigating. The special prosecutor will also remain a public body for the purposes of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and therefore will remain subject to IBAC oversight.

Independence does not mean an absence of accountability. Both are built into this legislation, and the bill also makes an important change to the powers available to royal commissions more generally. Currently, a royal commission can compel a person to produce documents or things already in existence, but evidence does not always exist in a convenient document. Sometimes what is most important and what matters is what somebody knows. This legislation will allow a royal commission to require a person to provide information or a written statement, including by answering specific questions in writing. It means a royal commission can get directly to the information it needs. It can obtain written evidence without necessarily requiring a person to appear and give oral evidence at a hearing, where that is appropriate. Of course these reforms will endure beyond this particular royal commission.

I also want to make one point very clear: scrutiny of corruption and misconduct in the construction sector should never be confused with an attack on construction workers. The overwhelming majority of people working in Victorian construction sites get up in the morning, go to work, do an honest day's work, drink a few iced coffees and go home to their families. They are hard workers. They deserve to be well paid and they deserve to be well represented. I can assure you of that out in my electorate with the construction workers out there and the jobs that they have done. I will just rattle off a few things that have happened in the last seven years. There is the current building of the Melton hospital – I think there are about 500 or 600 construction workers onsite. It is an amazing building that is coming

out of the ground. There are the four level crossing removals along the Melton line. They have done that ahead of time; it is just incredible work that they have done. The new Melton railway station opened last week, and we had the minister come out to open it. It is a four-platform station. It is state of the art, and the construction workers that worked on that and the engineers and the way that they pieced it all together were just incredible. The six new public schools that we have built, one secondary school and five primary schools, are incredible – in seven years. Construction workers have done a hard day's work, been well paid and delivered good outcomes and good infrastructure for such a fast-growing area. A new TAFE college will start being built very shortly. Again, construction workers are really doing the hard work. Community facilities have been built. And of course we are constructing a stabling yard for new Metro trains and V/Line trains that will run along the Melton line as a precursor to electrification for Melton.

This is an important bill to introduce this special prosecutor that will assist the royal commission. It will hopefully get to the heart of the issues that may have occurred. There is no guarantee that there is anything that they will find, but you never know, and that is what it is all about. It is about a proper process. It is an important bill, and I commend it to the house.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (16:38): It is wonderful to follow the member for Melton and to make a contribution on the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. Many members have spoken on this bill already and canvassed its contents and provisions. I will return to them in a little while, but I want to position this in the broader sweep of the legislative agenda of the Carroll government. I remember on the Premier's first day as Premier he jogged up to Kmart in Airport West, where he had formerly worked, and announced that a Carroll Labor government would legislate workplace protection orders – and so it has. Workers in retail settings, transport settings and other areas where those WPOs will take effect will be safer as a consequence.

The other first-day action of the Premier was to call a royal commission to fully, thoroughly and independently investigate the allegations that have been made about conduct in the construction sector. That is a good thing to have done, and it will be accompanied by, as the Premier announced, the instigation of a special prosecutor, the type of which has never existed in Victoria before. As other members have articulated, the royal commission is an important vehicle. The commissioner himself has been appointed, a former Chief Justice of South Australia, and he in turn has appointed counsellors to assist him in that important work – senior silks, including Christopher Carr SC and another KC. They will be assisting the commissioner in the investigations of the commission. The commission will then report. But it cannot, as other members have said, directly instigate charges to follow up on instances, allegations, evidence of wrongdoing and misconduct.

I first became aware of the term 'special prosecutor' in 1998, when I was passing through the United States. There was quite a lot of discussion on the television at that point, quite a lot of what I think Sunil Gavaskar might have referred to as 'naughty words', in the context of the Kenneth Starr investigation into President Clinton. That special prosecutor was a very different type of special prosecutor to the one that this bill countenances, insofar as that was a hyperpolitical inquiry into the conduct of President Clinton, which led to his impeachment. What this bill seeks to do is introduce a fully independent special prosecutor. Clearly it is subject to the legislation of this Parliament and so it will be a creation of Parliament, but in its conduct, in its operations and its actions, it will be entirely independent of government. I think, as the member for Broadmeadows very articulately put it, to maintain and sustain the confidence of Victorians it is important to have both that perception and reality of independence from government when the issues which are being investigated revolve at their heart around the expenditure of public money, which is obviously governed through the budget processes by acts of Parliament and by decisions of the executive in this place and the place upstairs. The special prosecutor is an important innovation to ensure that the allegations which have led to the royal commission are fully investigated and that action is taken, should that be deemed to be appropriate. The office of the special prosecutor, should this legislation pass, as I hope indeed it does, and I believe that there is a bipartisanship to see that it is passed, will work alongside the commission

to refer any individuals who are identified through the work of the commission to authorities for prosecution or indeed for regulatory action. So this is a very real, tangible sign of the Carroll Labor government's commitment to fully investigating any instance of wrongdoing in the context of the construction sector, where too many people who have done too much good work are being besmirched by the actions of a few.

I refer the house, in my contribution, to the impact of the construction sector in my own electorate, because the impact of the public works budget of this government has led to the creation of the first secondary school in Greenvale, for example. Greenvale Secondary College is a magnificent school that is physically brilliant, that was constructed on time and on budget and that has given young people in Greenvale a school from year 7 to year 12 that never existed before in a growing community that had had land marked out for a school for well over three decades, where no government had ever constructed a school before. But this government did. This government had acted upon the plans of generations to build a school to give young people the capacity to access an education, and that is a magnificent symbol of what can happen when public works budgets are expended effectively and efficiently. It may be the case that that has not always been true in every project, and that needs to be fully, fully investigated. That is exactly what the royal commission will do, and indeed the special prosecutor will increase the efficacy and efficiency of that process by acting upon any evidence of wrongdoing that the commission itself elicits.

It is not just in Greenvale where that public works budget has been expended with, I think, considerable efficiency and efficacy. I note every time I drive down Bell Street to the east to visit family or the Austin Hospital on occasion, there are two magnificent sites that strike you. There is, I believe, the Prix Versailles-winning Bell station in Preston, which is a magnificent structure. I was really taken by the member for Northcote's stunning depiction of that magnificent structure. But there is also, if you pass under that wonderful station from west to east, your own face, Acting Speaker Lambert, so beautifully depicted on the northern side of Bell Street. To have two such magnificent structures so well juxtaposed is testament to the investment that has gone into Bell station and the area.

Returning to the bill, the office of the special prosecutor is an important step in filling out the architecture that surrounds the royal commission and its important work. The member for Melton really powerfully said that this should not be taken to besmirch the work of tens of thousands of people across Victoria who have delivered those capital works projects; the example of the level crossing removal that I talked about before is just one of nearly 100 that have taken place across metropolitan Melbourne. These are city-shaping, state-shaping reforms. The Bendigo and Ballarat railway line enhancements, for example; the Ballarat hospital; the improvements to hospitals all across metropolitan Melbourne and indeed regional Victoria; the schools which I referenced before in the context of Greenvale – this has been the biggest capital works budget in the context of education in the history of the Commonwealth. Every single school across Victoria has had upgrades made to it, and more schools have been built in this state than in the rest of the Commonwealth put together. That is what needs to happen in the context of population growth that has been really significant, with some of the highest rates of population growth in the OECD. Governments have a choice in order to respond to that: they can choose to do nothing, in which case the quality of life of Victorians or any people in any jurisdiction deteriorates, or they can invest in the services and the infrastructure that growing populations rely upon.

That is what this government has done. It is what we have done in the context of Mickleham Road stage 1, which has been delivered, and stage 2, which has been fully funded. And because of this government's commitment to ensuring that precious taxpayer money is spent with the greatest value for money possible, savings have been achieved on certain other projects that now enable us to make a commitment that a re-elected Carroll Labor government will deliver the \$494 million Somerton Road upgrade – the full duplication of Somerton Road all the way from Fleetwood Drive in Greenvale right up to Roxborough Park Drive in Roxborough Park, with new intersections along the way through Roxborough Park, Meadow Heights and Greenvale. That is the kind of work that needs to happen to

ensure that infrastructure and service delivery can keep pace with growing communities. It is not good enough for governments to just shrug their shoulders when they have rapid levels of population growth in peri-urban areas that place acute pressure on existing infrastructure. Governments have to respond to that and deliver the infrastructure that people rely upon to get to work, to get to school and to get home on time and not be stuck in traffic. That is what practical, productivity-enhancing investments actually look like. That investment, that infrastructure, matters.

Where there has been any instance of any single dollar being expended in a way that is corrupt or relates to misconduct in any way, that needs to be fully investigated by the royal commission, which is entirely independent of government. I am confident that the commissioner will do that. And if there are instances of misconduct that are identified, then the special prosecutor created by the legislation on the table will enable that to be followed up. I commend this bill wholeheartedly to the house.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (16:48): I rise today to speak in support of the Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026. I think at the heart of this bill is something that every Victorian, especially community members from the Bellarine, would agree with, and that is that integrity and accountability are important, as is making sure that when something does go wrong it is fully investigated and we do something about it – that we act. Every Victorian would expect any government to act in their public interest, and that is what we are here to do: to serve the public and our communities. Then when we make decisions and invest billions of dollars in projects, we ensure that that money we are spending is spent properly and those who are going to deliver the projects and the businesses who spend that money do it honestly and lawfully.

As I have said, if there is a sign of corruption or criminal conduct or serious misconduct, then that will be dealt with. It will be uncovered. It will be investigated. Importantly, as previous members have spoken about, we are making sure that we have an independent organisation such as a royal commission and a special prosecutor to ensure that that is done without interference from government. That is why, when Premier Carroll stood up and made his first decision around what he was going to do to take this state forward, it was to call for a royal commission into the Victorian building and construction industry. In doing that, he could not have acted any stronger. He stated at the time that nothing was off limits. I will quote him. He said:

I did that because 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.

The terms of reference were very broad to ensure that that could happen, and the commission will obviously investigate and examine the nature and extent of corruption or criminal conduct that might have been on the civil construction projects in Victoria. I make the point though that we need to look at the contributing factors and circumstances so that we can make sure this does not happen again, but we also need to give the commission the right tools and powers to have the ability to examine that conduct with anyone who might have been involved in corruption or that serious misconduct and examine the circumstances. That purpose is pretty simple: for the royal commission to find the answers that Victorians absolutely deserve to have.

This brings me to this bill, though. Obviously the royal commission is one thing, but it also needs the tools and resources to do its job. We need to strengthen those tools to ensure that we then can have a strong royal commission that will find the things that we need to. But this bill today does a second thing: it establishes the office of the special prosecutor to work alongside that royal commission. The royal commission will have those powers, as I have said, to compel information, but the special prosecutor is going to be able to work alongside the royal commission. The royal commission can compel evidence, require people to attend hearings and obviously require documents to be produced. It can make investigations and findings, but importantly the royal commission cannot charge or prosecute. It is an investigation body; hence we have the special prosecutor. This is going to build on existing processes. The special prosecutor will work cooperatively with the commission and assist with referring information. That information could be referred to Victoria Police. It could be referred

to IBAC or other relevant institutions or Commonwealth bodies. It means if there is evidence that there has been potential wrongdoing, as it emerges there will be someone with that legal expertise and specific responsibility to help make sure that the information is going to go to the right authorities. Importantly, as I have said, that special prosecutor will be independent of government. That independence, I think, is critical. I think that independence is really important to our Victorian communities. They need to make sure that they have confidence in this system. Because we are dealing with allegations of corruption and serious misconduct, Victorians do need to have confidence in that process.

I just want to talk a little bit about the first phase of establishing that special prosecutor. The government has deliberately taken the time to get the model right. Obviously we want to make sure, as we are introducing additional powers and functions of the special prosecutor, it is done carefully in consultation with the royal commission and other relevant bodies. We want to make sure this is sensible legislation, and it is important to get it right. But we also should not be creating an overlapping of powers or undermining any work that other agencies might already have responsibility for. We must make sure that this system actually is going to work together.

Currently a royal commission can compel the production of documents and can require a person to attend a hearing or give evidence, but that information does not always sit neatly just in a document. Sometimes information is someone's personal knowledge, and sometimes a commission may need a particular piece of information. With this bill, the royal commission will be able to require a person, through written notice, to provide information or a written statement by a specific time and on a specific matter. It sounds like a really small procedural change, but it is not. It actually can make a really significant difference to how effectively and how efficiently a royal commission can operate. Instead of waiting for formal hearings or waiting to establish what a person knows, it can require that written statement beforehand. Obviously that goes to unnecessary delays. These powers are also subject to the same processes, checks and balances that apply to existing compulsory powers under the Inquiries Act 2014. That is ensuring they have the practical tools necessary, as I have said.

Ultimately I think this bill is really about confidence – confidence that public money is being protected and spent properly and confidence that major projects are being delivered with integrity. I think that this is ultimately about trust and trust in our institutions – it is a trust in government and importantly a trust in the people who put themselves forward, like we do in this place, to serve their communities. I think about that, I suppose, in my own role as a member of Parliament. When I am talking to constituents or people have come and reached out to talk to me about things that matter to them, I am very conscious that with the responsibility that comes with that, there needs to be a trust in the process, a trust in your member and a trust that comes with having the privilege of being in government. I strongly think that we can probably do better at explaining to the community about how government works and why politicians are here. I would say that everyone is here to do the best for their communities, but we have a responsibility to do better, because I know that the trust factor in the community with politics is probably at its all-time low.

I just want to put on the record, though, that this is certainly not an attack on the majority of workers that are on our construction sites who do a terrific job. They do a hard day's work. They build our state, literally, and they put food on their table. It is a great job and a great career for their families, and they do the right thing. I think about some of the projects in the past on the Bellarine. The Big Build has built the Drysdale bypass. Many in the community said that would never happen, but we got on with it. We certainly committed to doing that, and it was delivered a few years ago now. It is really important infrastructure on the Bellarine that makes sure that our community can move around. It absolutely futureproofed our communities across the north of the Bellarine, and it created more than a hundred jobs at the time. We know that these construction sites do create wonderful jobs and well-paid jobs, but we obviously need to ensure that everyone is doing the right thing. If they are not, then there will be a mechanism for accountability.

In conclusion, this establishes an independent special prosecutor to work alongside the commission. It is going to strengthen the commission's ability to obtain information but also to do that further work if there is someone who has not done the right thing, and there are consequences for doing that. I think, for me, this is what good government looks like. There is accountability, there is action and there is a process, and it is not just about talking about integrity but about structures being in place to make sure that we protect that going forward. We want to rebuild that trust in the community, and this government is absolutely taking action to do that. I commend the bill to the house.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:58): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to make a short contribution on this very important piece of legislation. I want to acknowledge the contributions that have been made by members of the government on this side of the house, who are so committed to these matters and making sure that those that do the wrong thing, no matter what work they do right across our great state, need to be punished for criminality. I want to acknowledge the contributions that have been made by members on this side of the house, because I know, speaking to these fantastic members, just how important the matters within this piece of legislation are and I know the journey of the passage of this bill through this house and through the place over there, which we do not have too much to do with. They of course will do their business. I do want to make the observation that the work done to beef up and improve the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission legislation and the work that is contained within this bill go to integrity and go to making sure that those people who do the wrong thing are punished and those people who do the right thing are thanked and acknowledged. With those short comments, I commend this bill to the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

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.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

*Motions***Health infrastructure****Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:**

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for her plan to make \$11.1 billion in cuts and calls on them to rule out cutting, downgrading or closing the pipeline of new hospitals to fill their budget black hole.

And James Newbury's amendment:

That the following words be inserted to the end of the motion: 'while noting the impact of \$15 billion of corruption on services for Victorians'.

Assembly divided on amendment:

Ayes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Amendment defeated.**Assembly divided on motion:**

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Motion agreed to.**Leader of the Opposition****Debate resumed on motion of Nick Staikos:**

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition's personally appointed representatives for recklessly promoting conspiracy theories and sowing division at a time when Victorians want to be coming together.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenney, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Motion agreed to.**Budget papers 2026–27****Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this house takes note of the 2026–27 budget papers.

Motion agreed to.**Neale Daniher AO****Debate resumed on motion of Jacinta Allan:**

That this house expresses its deep sorrow at the passing of Neale Daniher AO – footballer, coach, Victorian of the Year, Australian of the Year and co-founder of FightMND – who faced motor neurone disease with extraordinary courage and grace, transforming personal hardship into hope for millions, and whose legacy will endure in Victoria and across the nation.

Motion agreed to.**Community leaders****Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:**

That this house records its sincere thanks to community leaders across Victoria, particularly those who have stood with Victorians targeted by vilification and division arising from recent anti-immigration protests, for their steadfast commitment to a safe, united and multicultural Victoria.

And Matthew Guy's amendment:

That the word 'anti-immigration' be omitted.

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved the motion as set out on the notice paper. The member for Bulleen has moved an amendment to the motion. He has proposed to omit the word which appears on the notice paper. The question is:

That the word proposed to be omitted stand part of the motion.

Those supporting the amendment by the member for Bulleen should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (52): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenney, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng

Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

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

Question agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Berwick electorate telecommunications infrastructure

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:17): (1839) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek from the minister is a formal briefing for Casey and Cardinia councils in relation to the mobile phone towers throughout particularly Clyde North, Officer and Berwick. We have seen for too long people in those areas failing to get applications through for towers in that area, and the community are wearing the consequences, with phone reception in some of those areas non-existent. And when we say non-existent, there is literally no reception at all in many parts of the growth area. For those that have the statistics, statistical area level 1 areas generally have around about 100 to 150 homes in them. We have got some of the SA1 areas that, according the Australian Bureau of Statistics, have four residents, but they are actually at about 3500. They are some of the areas that do not have the towers within those communities, and they have tried to get them put through.

I know for a fact that Casey has worked pretty hard on getting these towers put in place, whether on sports fields or other areas, but many of the challenges that they face are specifically in relation to planning. I note there may be a candidate in my area whose motto is going to be 'No excuses, just action', and the first post he put out was an excuse as to why they do not have phone towers throughout Casey and Cardinia, blaming Telstra, Vodafone and all the other phone networks. But the problem is that they have put in application after application to put phone towers up. It takes between 12 and 18 months to go through the system, and at the end of it they get knocked back. Who do they get knocked back by? They get knocked back by council, based on legislation from the state government.

It is really important that we do go out there and start listening to these communities, because they cannot continue without phone reception. It is now an essential service. It is something that everyone should have and is entitled to, and I will be working hard, not just here but post the election, to ensure that we can get them delivered and that those people have the access that everybody is entitled to.

Health workforce

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:19): (1840) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Health and concerns the state Labor government's recent investments in our healthcare system. The action that I seek is that the minister provides an update on how these investments benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South. The Carroll Labor government is working hard to support our healthcare system by bolstering services and backing hardworking health professionals. Over the last decade we have grown the health workforce by over 50 per cent. That is more than 40,000 nurses, midwives, doctors, allied health professionals and other hospital staff in the state's health services. We are supporting more paramedics to join the frontline, responding to the increase in demand that our emergency services have faced in recent years as our population continues to grow.

More MICA paramedics and graduate paramedics are set to join the on-road health workforce. More people can get the care they need when they need it, and more planned surgeries are being completed in our hospitals in record-breaking numbers. There is always more to do of course, but a state Labor government will always protect our world-class healthcare system because we know just how important and precious it is. I thank all the healthcare workers in my community for their incredible work, as well as all of the unions who advocate for stronger protections across this workforce. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Waste and recycling management

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (17:21): (1841) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to explain to the constituents in my electorate what she is doing to help progress the waste-to-energy project proposed for Maryvale. The waste-to-energy project presents a rare opportunity for the Latrobe Valley to be a leader in this space. It will take waste from landfill that is at capacity across Victoria and importantly provide much-needed economic stimulus and jobs in the region. In the valley far too many opportunities and new industries have been lost to us through government inaction. We lost the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, which pioneered the conversion of brown coal to gas and would have provided 2000 desperately needed jobs. We lost the proposed \$2 billion urea project, which would have made fertiliser from brown coal, also worth up to about 2000 jobs. And we were told that we would become the centre of electric vehicle manufacturing in Victoria with a new facility that promised 500 jobs. Project proponents, council and the local community are in limbo waiting for the government to provide clear information about the regulatory path forward for waste to energy. Minister, will you explain to the constituents in my electorate what you are doing to help progress the waste-to-energy project proposed for Maryvale?

Gowrie train station

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:22): (1842) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the hardstand area at Gowrie station to be line-marked. Despite the increased services on the 536 bus route, which I have been very proud to deliver, and the new bus timetables that better connect with the train schedule, parking is at a premium at Gowrie station. The lack of line marking on the large hardstand area leads to confusion and lost parking space, with drivers parking haphazardly and not leaving enough space for others to utilise. Line marking would make drop-offs and pick-ups easier and lead to the available parking space being efficiently utilised. This small improvement would also enable even more people to take advantage of our half-price public transport for the rest of the year, the 77 new services on the Upfield line that have just started and the fabulous X'trapolis trains proudly made in Victoria, whose carriages provide more capacity and improved comfort and accessibility for passengers. I thank local resident Daniella De Pretis for raising this issue with my office, and request that this matter be addressed as soon as possible.

Warrandyte electorate community sport

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:24): (1843) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Sport, and the action I seek is that he meet with the premiership-winning teams in my electorate. It has been a massive season for all our local footy clubs competing in the Eastern Football Netball League. To the Park Orchards footy club women's team, who I promised I would give a massive shout-out to if they won their third premiership running, they have done us so proud by making history with their eighth consecutive final and now three premierships at the highest level – yeah, the girls! A big shout-out to their amazing director of women's sport Vicki Knight and to coaches Dave Boell, Siv Panza, Wayne Taylor, Simon McAuliffe and Greg Heymanson. One of the most wholesome things in watching this game was to see that every single one of those coaches is the dad of a girl in that team. It is so special to see, and it was one of the proudest moments to see those dads run onto the field, swelling with pride, as the proudest girl dads you ever did see as they coached their girls to a historic win for the third year running. These girls are elite at their sport, including our homegrown talent Jorja Livingstone, who has just been drafted to my beloved Dees.

At the Warrandyte Footy Club, which I encourage again the Minister for Sport to meet with, for the first time this decade all three teams made it to the grand final – the under-19s, the reserves and the seniors – so it was incredibly special this Sunday when every one of those teams won the flag, game after game after game. What was amazing to see was the four sets of brothers that played that day and the two brothers that coached the seniors team, as well as the women's netball red team, who won their grand final, as well as the Warrandyte women's team making it to their first grand final, with six teams and four premierships. Then it was off to Mad Monday, which I did not participate in, but I am told it was a lot of fun – not to mention, in the junior footy, the under-18 girls taking home the flag. In the words of Duncan Loydell, the president of the Warrandyte junior footy club, we should have called a public holiday in town on Monday. It is a pretty good win for a suburb of 4200 people.

Then it was a joy to see the Donvale footy club win the premiership against The Basin – what a win. This topped off an amazing Saturday where the reserves won a fourth consecutive flag. A big shout-out to the president John Giles and his leadership team and the Donvale women's netball team, who also won the division 1 premiership. I look forward to seeing your new scoreboard and lights that we have committed to the club. Finally, a big congratulations to the North Ringwood footy club, who now have three women's teams, with the division 3 team winning their grand final.

Glen Waverley Secondary College

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (17:27): (1844) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Glen Waverley Secondary College, affectionately known throughout our community as Glenny. Glen Waverley Secondary College is one of the best secondary schools in Victoria, and it has been for decades. Under the leadership of successive principals the school has built an outstanding reputation for academic achievement, dedicated teaching and a culture that encourages every student to aim high and reach their full potential. I particularly want to thank principal Suzanne Plant for her outstanding leadership along with the entire team of teachers, education support staff and school leaders. Their commitment to their students is what makes Glenny such a great school. It is a school our local community is incredibly proud of. Families choose to make Glen Waverley their home knowing their children will have access to an exceptional local government school. It is fair to say that Glen Waverley Secondary College has played an important role in making Glen Waverley the community it is today. But while the school's reputation and enrolments have continued to grow, its facilities have not kept pace. Today nearly 2500 students are learning in facilities that are increasingly stretched for space and no longer provide the modern learning environment that students and staff deserve. I have been listening closely to the school community and advocating for the investment needed to take this great school forward. I invite the minister to visit Glenny; meet principal Suzanne Plant and her team; hear directly from students, staff and families; and see firsthand what is needed to take this outstanding school into the next chapter.

Narracan electorate ministerial visit

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:28): (1845) My adjournment this evening is to the Premier, and the action I seek is that the Premier actually visit my community firsthand to see what needs to happen in my electorate. I am raising this again because I have already raised this once and the Premier has not responded to me. To quote the Premier, he has told everyone he is not Daniel Andrews and he is not the former Premier, the member for Bendigo East. I would like him to prove it, because neither of those premiers visited my electorate. If he is what he says he is, it would be great to see him turn up and come to my community. He should not be scared just because it is a Liberal seat. He should get out there. To quote the government at the last election, they said, 'We're here for all Victorians.' Prove it. It is very simple. Come to the electorate, have a look at the hospital and understand why I keep bringing up the issue of the West Gippsland Hospital in this chamber. Have a look at the condition of our roads, which are in a terrible state of disrepair. Have a look at our schools. We have not had a new school built in over 50 years. Have a look at our sporting facilities, which are bursting at the seams because there has been no significant investment from the government in this space. These are all the issues that matter to my community. In one sense I am calling for the Premier to prove that he is not

Daniel Andrews or the former Premier, the member for Bendigo East. Here is his opportunity to stand up and do that. Have a look at the traffic congestion. Have a look at every issue I have brought up in this Parliament in the last four years which the government has not acted on, and if he comes out this government may have a little bit more sympathy for my community.

Ian Potter State Theatre

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:30): (1846) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Creative Industries. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate and join me in celebrating the reopening of the Ian Potter State Theatre. The state theatre is a vital part of Victoria's cultural life and a significant home for the performing arts. Its reopening, six months ahead of schedule, is an exciting moment for the resident companies, performers and audiences across Victoria, and I know it will be warmly welcomed by my local community. I would also like to invite the minister to visit the Albert Park electorate to mark this important milestone for the \$1.7 billion Melbourne arts precinct transformation project that our Labor government is delivering for Victorians. The completion of the state theatre is only the first stage of the expansive arts precinct project, which has created 11,000 jobs and will continue works on the Arts Centre and the new NGV Contemporary gallery and urban garden. The official state theatre reopening is an opportunity to recognise the considerable work that has gone into restoring and revitalising this important cultural institution. The refurbishment includes expanded accessibility accommodations and improved sound systems and temperature management, all while retaining the heritage design that the theatre is known for. I therefore ask the minister to join me for the reopening of the Ian Potter State Theatre and welcome the opportunity to meet with local arts organisations and members of my community to celebrate this significant occasion.

Ovens Valley electorate river management

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:32): (1847) My adjournment is to the Minister for Environment on behalf of Frank Primerano of Whorouly. Mr Primerano has a farm at Whorouly, located on the Ovens River. Approximately five years ago the bank of the river was severely damaged and eroded and basically was washed away by a major rainfall event, and that happens. Frank and his neighbour Ed Costenaro invited me and the North East Catchment Management Authority to go and have a look, and it was a \$40,000 rebuild to the bank. We argued with NECMA that the river belongs to the community so the river maintenance should be a community cost. Well, that did not happen; NECMA said they had no money as usual. So they went ahead and they fixed the damaged river at their own cost. You will not believe it: flooding this year has washed all that rock away, and they have now got another bill that will be \$50,000 to \$100,000 to fix that river. It really is outrageous that NECMA and the state government will again tell the farm owners, 'It's your cost.' So the action that I seek is that NECMA and the minister stop buck-passing, come and visit the site and fund the repair works, because it is a community asset. It does not belong to the farm owners. Yes, they do get benefits out of being on a riverfrontage, but at the end of the day the river does not belong to them, it belongs to the community, and the community should pay to have it repaired.

Gambling regulation

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (17:33): (1848) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and the action I seek is for the minister to require rewards clubs, like LMCT Plus, which operate under the trade promotions provisions of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, to publicly divulge their payout ratios. I touched on this earlier this week when we had a discussion in this place about gambling reforms – of course there are a lot of gambling reforms you could do – but I just want to state again for the benefit of the house what extraordinary businesses these large rewards clubs are, even compared to other gambling businesses.

To give you a stylised example, some of these large rewards clubs might take \$100 million a year in revenue from their members and then pay out about \$20 million a year in prizes. They then incur about \$10 million a year in other expenses, mainly Facebook advertising but a little bit of rewards club stuff, and then that gives them, roughly speaking, a \$70 million per year earnings before interest, tax,

depreciation and amortisation result. To add to that, some of these businesses boast that they have no employees. They contract out some advertising and social media work – presumably they pay for their accountant and other professional services – but they essentially pay no payroll tax at all. And because they are largely outside of that contracted work, merely engaged in transferring their members' money into their own bank accounts, they have no plant, they have no property, they have no equipment, they have no assets, they have no depreciation and they have no interest, because you do not need to borrow money with a business like that. Essentially that \$70 million per year EBITDA result is pure profit. Then they of course have to pay company tax, but they get all of that back as franking credits. So you have what essentially is a sole trader operation that returns \$35 million per year to that sole trader as post-tax income, and as those who have done a little bit of finance would know, if you have a business that generates that much money, you can call yourself a billionaire.

As I said earlier this week, I am not one to stand up here and defend Gina Rinehart or Clive Palmer, but at least they earned their billions by going out to remote locations and extracting iron ore and nickel and other commodities from the ground that everyone, all of us, need in our day-to-day lives, whereas these new rewards club billionaires have made their money by making Instagram reels that fleece people on the internet. So when some members of the Liberal Party stand up and say this is the new, great Aussie innovative entrepreneurialism, I disagree with that. I think that we should force these businesses, through legislation, to reveal their payout ratios: how much they take in, how much they pay out and how much they have retrospectively done that. If I had my way, we would force them to reveal how many millions and millions of dollars they have taken from hardworking Victorians and transferred into overseas bank accounts. I thank the minister and his department for their consideration.

Responses

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) (17:36): The member for Berwick raised a matter for the Minister for Planning seeking action on a briefing for the Casey and Cardinia councils with regard to mobile phone reception. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Health in the other place, seeking an update on investments in our healthcare system and how these will benefit his constituents. The member for Morwell raised a matter for the Minister for Environment seeking action to explain to his constituents progress on the Maryvale waste-to-energy project. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking that the hardstand area at Gowrie station be line marked. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Minister for Sport, and the action she sought was that the minister meet the premiership-winning teams in her electorate.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Education seeking action on a visit to Glen Waverley Secondary College – or ‘Glenny’, as it is known in his local community. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Premier seeking action on a visit to his community so he can see firsthand what needs to happen in his electorate. The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the Minister for Creative Industries seeking that she come to the reopening of the refurbished Ian Potter State Theatre in her electorate. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Environment seeking action on the North East Catchment Management Authority and that the minister fund and oversee the repair works on the Ovens River with constituents in his electorate. And the member for Preston raised a matter for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place to require rewards clubs to publish payout ratios. I commend all those matters to you, Deputy Speaker, and the respective ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stay classy, Victoria. We are adjourned until Tuesday week.

House adjourned 5:38 pm.