



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 23 September 2026

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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

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Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

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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	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marsh, Anthony ⁹	Nepean	Lib
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim ¹⁰	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim ¹¹	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ¹²	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam ⁵	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{6,7}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ¹³	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Westaway, Rachel ¹⁴	Prahran	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib
Lister, John ⁸	Werribee	ALP			

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 Died 19 September 2026

¹² Resigned 7 July 2023

¹³ Sworn in 3 October 2023

¹⁴ Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 23 September 2026

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

Bills

Control of Weapons Amendment (Police Search Powers) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to provide greater powers for police officers to search persons for weapons and for other purposes.

The reason I introduce this bill in this Parliament today is obviously a reflection of what has happened around Jack's law here in this state. We have actually seen here in this very Parliament that the Victorian Labor Party have continued to try and stop legislation going through to give Victoria Police the powers they urgently need. Last year the then shadow minister for police the honourable member for Caulfield tried to introduce Jack's law here in this state. The reason he did that was because knife crime was out of control here in Victoria. The Labor government refused to even allow a debate on the bill, even though we had the Beasley family here with us at the time, who had lost their –

Members interjecting.

Brad BATTIN: It highlights the disinterest of Labor when it comes to protecting people here in Victoria that they can sit in this chamber and totally ignore the fact that we need this legislation and we need it urgently.

When Jack died in Queensland, the Queensland government acted and brought in Jack's law. That gave the police members up there the powers to stop and scan to ensure they could get knives off the street. There have been more than 2500 charges since that time. It is the opposite here in Victoria. Since the legislation was attempted to be introduced in November last year, we have continued to see more young people die at the hands of knife crime here in this state. We continue to see offenders walking around the streets with machetes. We saw just the other week another graphic image of a person who was attacked with a machete across the face. I met with a victim this week who is still going through surgery after a knife attack in his own home. He has had to get surgery on his arm continuously and will never be able to fully use that arm again.

This is what the Victorian Labor government do. Unless it is their idea, they think it cannot be done. But what is worse is that this week the Premier has come out and said if re-elected he will introduce Jack's law next year. I would say to the community: you cannot wait for that to happen. If it had been introduced in November and gone through, the police would have the powers and the wands, and we would have less knives on our street. We all know the machete bin stunt did not work. The only thing the machete bins did here in Victoria was highlight how incompetent Labor is with money. But the reality is that what we wanted to see was weapons off the street by using wands here in the hands of Victoria Police.

We all know Victoria Police do the best job they can with the resources they have got. I note the former Minister for Police sitting at the table who on many occasions in here has said, 'I will give and have given the resources to Victoria Police they need to keep the community safe.' Well, Victoria Police want Jack's law, and Labor stopped it. That is the absolute fact. Labor stopped Jack's law coming in. They had opportunities to introduce it themselves, to bring it through this Parliament to keep the community safe, but have decided they want to use it as an election ploy rather than a safety ploy here in Victoria. That is what happens under this government. The current Premier was part of the cabinet that made the decision to ensure that Jack's law would not go through. This is a Premier who talks

about a new direction, but the reality is all he is trying to do is backtrack and walk away from the many decisions he has made that have left Victorians less safe, whether it is less police here in Victoria or the closing of police stations. Even worse, not only did he come out and say he wants to keep police stations open, but a week later he closed four more here in the state. He closed the four around Collingwood, Fitzroy, North Melbourne and Southbank. That means we have got less opportunities for Victoria Police to go out and keep the community safe. We must see –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Brad BATTIN: They never did open Heidelberg West police station after they closed it back in 2010. But what we do know is that we need to see Jack's law here in Victoria. We need to see legislation to give Victoria Police the powers they need to get the knives off the street, because what we do not want to see, what we cannot afford to see, is more people being attacked with knives and more people being at risk because of the knives on the street, and we cannot afford to see one more death here in this state, because we have seen far too many because Labor has failed to act.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:39): The Premier has been very clear that a re-elected Labor government will support the implementation of Jack's law, but not only that. We would invest in a second police academy because it is all very well to say, 'Oh, we'll have thousands of police,' but if you do not actually have somewhere to train them and you do not commit to that, how are you going to get all these new recruits up to speed? Unless they are actually legit on this holistic picture when it comes to supporting our police, how can you take them seriously?

Jess Wilson: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: Members will come back to the procedural debate about the introduction of a bill by the member for Berwick.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, I am well aware – and I take your advice, Speaker – that this is a procedural debate, but it is the opposition who have raised the issue of Jack's law. We need police to be able to implement Jack's law, so we have promised a second police academy. That was the reason that I raised that issue, because you cannot say, 'Yes, we'll have 3000 police, but we won't train them. We'll just say a nice number for the purposes of perhaps disguising the actual intent behind the reforms.' We also have reservists that are helping with our police stations. I will say about Southbank that I was –

Jess Wilson: Speaker, I renew my point of order on relevance.

The SPEAKER: Come back to the motion before the house about the introduction of a bill by the member for Berwick.

Nina TAYLOR: Absolutely. We have many important matters to discuss this week as part of the government program. I will reiterate – and I think this is within the ambit of the discussion – that we have committed a re-elected Labor government to implementing Jack's law. It was in fact the member for Berwick that raised the issue of police in Southbank; that is why I raised the issue. But we might reserve that discussion for another day because we have got plenty more to get on with this week.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:41): I rise to support the member for Berwick in his introduction of Jack's law into the chamber. Unfortunately, this law not being in is costing Victorian people their lives. The inaction of a government that refuses to bring in a sensible law, a law that has been proven to work up in Queensland, is to the detriment of people here in Victoria. The Premier talks a tough game about how he is completely different from the previous government that sat here for the last four years. Today is the day that he can stand up and prove that by allowing us to debate the law to keep people in Victoria safe. I only have to reference and go back to one person, Dr Ash Gordon, who tragically lost his life after being stabbed multiple times on the streets of Doncaster a few years ago. I still, to this day, have conversations with his family. The one thing that I am very passionate about is making sure that weapons are not being carried by particular people on our streets by giving police the laws and the powers that they do need to be able to use wands and to tell someone

on the street, 'You need to be checked because we think you are carrying a concealed weapon.' That, unfortunately, goes to the fact that people are losing their lives on the streets of Victoria.

Jack's law is a sensible bill that we need to bring in. As I said before, it has been proven that it is working in Queensland; it is keeping the people of Queensland safe. We tried to bring the bill in last year, and the government voted it down. I am expecting that again. After we finish here they will vote that bill down again today, and in their defence they will say, 'We will bring it in if we are re-elected.' We need to bring it in now. If it is brought in after the election, it is going to be too late once again for some poor individual going about their daily routine, walking the streets of Melbourne or regional Victoria, where they are going to possibly or probably lose their life when they interact with a person that is walking the streets carrying a concealed weapon. Enough is enough. It is time this government stands up. It is a sensible bill. It is the right bill. It is the right time to bring it in and debate it. We have nothing else to debate in the chamber this week, so bring this on. Let us keep the people of Victoria safe. Let us keep young people, mums and dads and tradies that are on the streets going about their daily routines safe, because at the moment they are not.

When I walk the streets of Morwell, which has the highest crime rate outside metropolitan Melbourne, I can see with my own eyes individuals that I am not going to go near because I know they are carrying a concealed weapon. It is frightening that we are putting elderly people going about their daily routines – going to the shops and going to the supermarket to go shopping – under the stress of running into these individuals because the government is not prepared to debate this bill today to keep them safe in their homes and on the streets. We need to do the right thing. As I said before, Jack's law works. It works. It has been proven to work up in Queensland.

The one thing that you want to do as an MP in this place is keep your constituents safe. As I said, this is sensible. It is a great bill the member for Berwick has brought in, because he knows it works. We talked to the police. They know they need the powers to be able to walk up to individuals and say, 'We need to check you.' If they have got an issue with that, they are probably the ones that are actually carrying a concealed weapon that is going to be used to hurt someone, threaten someone or, as in the case of poor Dr Ash Gordon, kill someone and make their family go through birthdays and Christmases without them and live a nightmare every single day. Their beloved son, who was doing the right thing as a doctor and going about his daily routine, lost his life, and the government will not debate this law to keep people safe. As I said, we do not have anything else to debate today and tomorrow, so let us do the right thing by the people of Victoria. Let us keep them safe. Let us introduce this bill and once and for all bring it in. They tell us that they want to do it after the election. Well, after the election will be too late for one individual. Bring Jack's law in today. It is a great bill by the member of Berwick, and we should be debating it.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:47): I rise as the member for Pascoe Vale, of course, but also as the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Safety on this matter, because every single person across our state deserves the right to feel and be safe. Whether it is in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their streets, in their workplaces, in their retail precincts or in their school spaces, every single Victorian has the right to feel safe. That is exactly why we as a government have been taking that strong, real and tough action when it comes to cracking down on serious violent crime and tackling the root causes of crime. For the member seeking to move this bill, which I respect and I acknowledge, to suggest that we have been doing otherwise is totally, totally incorrect, because we have been taking that action.

Members interjecting.

Anthony CIANFLONE: And in many of the ways and on many of the occasions we have been progressing that action through this chamber, as you can hear through interjections here, the opposition have been constantly trying to create obstacles, obstruct, oppose and delay a lot of that tough action we were seeking to progress, whether it was banning machetes, the nation's first ban on machetes, which collected almost 30,000 machetes that were either seized or returned during the amnesty

period – yes, through the machete bins. That is almost 30,000 dangerous weapons that are now off the streets that would still be on the streets if the Liberal–National opposition had had their way. They did not support us introducing that strong measure.

We have introduced tougher reforms. We have introduced firearm reforms largely consistent with the national cabinet decisions that were introduced following that tragic incident and tragic massacre in Bondi. That includes the tougher background checks that we are introducing. I say that, as well, as someone who is the chair of the Victorian Firearms Consultative Committee, which brings together people from right across the shooting sector, the sporting sector and also the community safety sector. We are taking strong action –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the member is starting to stray.

The SPEAKER: Members have been speaking quite broadly on this motion. I remind members that these are fairly tight motions, so, if you could, speak to why the bill should or should not be introduced.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Speaker, of course I take your guidance. I am simply providing the context, before getting to that substance on that strong action that we have been taking. As the member for Albert Park said earlier, we have made a commitment to introduce Jack’s law, which is to introduce the expansion of search powers. By the way, to a large extent these powers already exist within designated zones at the decision and discretion of the Chief Commissioner of Police.

We have committed to expanding that, consistent with Jack’s law that has been introduced interstate, to provide police and PSOs with the use of hand-held wands to search in broader public spaces across Victoria where there are threats or perceptions of threats and suspicious individuals. We have made a commitment to introduce that as well. That will be accompanied by 1200 extra hand-held wands for our police and PSOs to undertake that work. But it is also important that, when we introduce this legislation, we get these measures right. I would have thought the party for civil liberties and freedom would be very conscious and cognisant of that, particularly as we work to refine and introduce this legislation in a way that is consistent with community expectations, with keeping us safe and also with the philosophy, largely, of the Liberal Party.

We are introducing and recruiting more police. We have made the commitment to set up a new academy in the western suburbs and in the Gippsland region as well. We have introduced tougher bail laws, which have seen remand at record highs and more people who have breached their bail conditions be held on remand as well. We are taking that strong action. We have established the violence reduction unit as well, with \$30 million to tackle the root causes of crime – which, if the Liberal–One Nation coalition got in, they would cut. They would cut the violence reduction unit. They have not made a commitment to retain it or expand it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, you have put to the member that he needs to contain his comments to the introduction of the bill. The member is now simply sledging, misusing the Parliament’s time. He certainly is not being relevant.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I ask you not to use a point of order as an opportunity to make a statement to the house.

James Newbury: I am not, but I am making the point that he is sledging.

The SPEAKER: I also ask you to cease reflecting on the Chair. Member for Pascoe Vale, come back to the introduction of the bill.

Anthony CIANFLONE: When it comes to community safety, we are taking action.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:52): I rise to support the member for Berwick’s call to introduce Jack’s law immediately into Victoria. 308 days ago we had Brett Beasley come to this Parliament seeking an urgent meeting with the Premier to bring Jack’s law into Victoria. We saw, day

after day, knife crime happening on our streets in Melbourne and the government doing nothing about it except for introducing \$13 million worth of waste-of-space machete bins. We saw a solution to knife crime, a solution which was brought about by Brett and Belinda Beasley after losing their son Jack in 2019 to a knife crime, where their son was killed outside a nightclub in Surfers Paradise. They have been campaigning since to bring in Jack's law right across the states and also overseas, including the UK. We have seen other states introduce this. We have seen WA introduce this. We have seen New South Wales and Queensland, obviously, introduce this right across their states. So we have seen a model that has worked.

We saw Brett waiting, trying to get a meeting with the Premier. He finally got 10 minutes with the Premier and the former police minister, with an undertaking that they would look at this. 308 days later, what do we have? We have a new Premier that says, 'Well, if we win the election, then we'll look at it then.' How many other people need to die before this Premier actually does something? We do not need more stunts; we need action. If this Premier was serious in his word, he would come in here and back our call to introduce Jack's law into this Parliament. That would show some guts and courage from a Premier that says one thing on the steps but something different in this Parliament. If this Premier was serious in his word that he is different from the former premiers that we have had under this government, then we would see some action. This is an opportunity for them to stand up and show some courage. We have seen something that works in other states – why not have this in Victoria? Why not have it? We heard the member for Pascoe Vale say, 'We've got other powers. We don't really need them,' contradicting his Premier, who is saying, 'We do need them.' If we do need them, then let us introduce them.

Every day we have Victorians waking up to another knife crime. This is a simple scan-and-search power that gives police the power to go up, use a very small wand and search somebody, and if they have a knife on them, use police powers to then deal with those individuals. That is the way to take knives off the streets, not these waste-of-space machete bins. Who handed in the machetes? Was it crooks on the way after they had committed a crime? Of course it was not. It was just a stunt. We know the machete bins did not work. We know they did nothing other than have retailers and good Samaritans hand in their agricultural knives and farming knives. The crooks still have the knives – the ones that we need to get off the streets.

How do we deal with it? We deal with it by introducing Jack's law, by giving scan-and-search powers to police to do their job. We know police want it. We certainly know that we have got a precedent for how these particular powers work. The government needs to get on with it. This is a really important test for this government, for the new Premier who calls himself a new dawn Premier with a whole lot of new leadership. Well, let them show some leadership here today. Let them show that this government actually cares about Victorians that are being attacked on the streets, in their homes, in their cars – that feel unsafe, with the worst crimes happening in this state for a decade. This government has completely failed to keep Victorians safe. They all talk the talk but do not walk the walk. This is an opportunity today.

I call on the Premier to back the member for Berwick and bring in Jack's law so we see it once and for all. The former police minister was all talk. He did not do anything when it came to actually introducing this. Here is the opportunity. Here is the opportunity to stand up, be counted and ensure Victorians are safe once and for all. Because you cannot say one thing on the steps of Parliament, 'We're going to keep Victorians safe,' but then when we have got an opportunity to do it today in this Parliament find every excuse under the sun. All we are doing over the next period is sledge motions. We have got a great opportunity today to bring in real powers, real laws to keep Victorians safe. I call on the government to do something and ensure Victorians are safe once and for all, and I commend the member for Berwick for bringing this important set of laws today.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:57): I rise in opposition to the procedural motion introduced by the member for Berwick today. I fully support Jack's law. All of us on this side of the house do. Victorians are appalled by knife crime, I am appalled by knife crime, and police must have more powers to get

knives off our streets. That is exactly why a re-elected Carroll Labor government will implement Jack's law. I say this as the member for Lara: every Victorian deserves to feel safe. My community is impacted by knife crime. I have met victims of knife crime and they deserve to feel safe, like every single Victorian deserves to feel safe.

But this approach is not the right approach. This is an important reform. We do need to get it right. We will not rush legislation. We will consult with the community, with Victoria Police and with victims of knife crime to make sure that we get this legislation right. Introducing laws like this is incredibly important, and I commend the member for Berwick, because I know this is something he cares deeply about. I commend him for his work in this space. It is very, very important. On this side of the house we fully support Jack's law, but we want to get it right. We want to make sure the reform is right. We want to make sure the legislation is right. We want to make sure that this is something that the community are comfortable with and that it is the right approach. So while I very much support Jack's law, I do not support the procedural motion introduced by the member for Berwick.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:58): (*By leave*) Just a brief contribution to put our position on the record. We do have some serious concerns about the laws that are being proposed. We do not support them as the evidence shows that these kinds of sweeping police powers do not keep the community safer. The evidence shows that they are disproportionately used to target people of colour and vulnerable Victorians. In 2023 some documents were released under freedom of information that showed that Victoria Police were 11 times more likely to stop and search people they perceived to be of Aboriginal appearance, eight times more likely for people to be perceived as African appearance, five times more likely for Middle Eastern appearance and four times more likely for Pasifika appearance. It showed that they also have an incredibly low success rate, but that force is much more likely to be used at a stop-and-search on people, for example, of Aboriginal appearance.

However, we do support the right of non-government members to be able to introduce bills and have them debated. Our view is let us have the debate. Let us bring these facts about community safety and the ineffectiveness of these laws to the floor and have a conversation about why we need more investment in community safety processes and policies and systems and services that actually do work to keep our community safe, because it is the government's responsibility to keep the community safe. We all agree on that. More needs to be done in community safety, but it needs to be things that evidence shows actually work: investment in mental health, for example, and investment in homelessness. Let us have that debate. We support the principle of non-government members being able to first read bills.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (29): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, 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, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (51): 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, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Business of the house**Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (10:05): General business, notices of motion 18, 19, 56, 57, 63 to 65 and 78 to 92, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matters to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions**Bairnsdale hospital**

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing 1733 signatures:

This petition, signed by the residents of East Gippsland, draws the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to the need to have the Bairnsdale hospital rebuild commenced as a matter of urgency, with a new emergency department being given the highest priority in stage one works, as the existing facility does not meet current need, contributes to ambulance ramping and cannot provide for smooth and efficient patient flow.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Country Fire Authority Lakes Entrance station

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing 191 signatures:

This petition, signed by the residents of East Gippsland, draws the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to the need to have the new Lakes Entrance fire station funded for construction as the current outdated facility cannot meet operational requirements or house the increased number of vehicles required by the volunteers on-site.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Country Fire Authority Metung station

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing 346 signatures:

This petition, signed by the residents of East Gippsland, draws the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to the need to have the new Metung fire station funded for construction as the current outdated facility cannot meet operational requirements in this growing community.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Wallan wallan regional park

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo) presented a petition bearing 215 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that immediate steps be taken to establish and deliver the wallan wallan Regional Park (the Parkland) as presented in the State Government commissioned study 'Feasibility for wallan wallan Regional Park Report' 2022. The Parkland will protect 3,000 hectares in the upper reaches of the Merri Creek in the face of accelerating growth in Melbourne's north, featuring wetlands and waterways for wildlife including migratory populations of threatened birds. Alongside the urbanising landscape, the Parkland will provide a place for the community to explore nature together. Shared trails will enable cycling from Melbourne to Wallan. Importantly, it will also mitigate the impacts of flooding by including space for water containment and treatment. Without this, disastrous floods may affect land from Wallan through to Melbourne. The State Government is moving ahead with housing and industrial projects in this region. The same focus must be shown to the provision of parkland and conservation of natural areas. Priority projects to deliver the Parkland should be included within the 2026–27 State Budget and following years, including studies in hydrology and Indigenous cultural values.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Government to commit to the establishment and adequate funding of the 3,000 hectare wallan wallan Regional Park and to complete research studies to address knowledge gaps and ensure well-informed holistic parkland planning.

Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) presented a petition bearing 398 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the need to strengthen Victoria's planning laws so that public health and community wellbeing are properly considered when decisions are made about new fast food developments. Communities and local governments should have greater power to shape their local food environments, particularly where new fast food outlets are proposed close to schools or in areas that already have a high concentration of fast food outlets.

The Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026, introduced into the Victorian Parliament by David Ettershank MLC, proposes important reforms to the Planning and Environment Act 1987. These include making public health an overarching consideration in land use planning; expressly enabling planning schemes to regulate or prohibit the development of fast food outlets; and requiring responsible authorities considering new fast food developments to take account of public health impacts, proximity to schools, the number of existing fast food outlets in the surrounding area and relevant local public health data.

These reforms deserve proper consideration and debate by the Victorian Parliament. Victorians should have the opportunity to see where their elected representatives stand on whether the planning system should better protect public health, children and communities.

Action

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly debate and support the reforms contained in the Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026 at the earliest opportunity and, if the Bill is transmitted from the Legislative Council, debate and vote on the Bill before the end of the 60th Parliament.

The petitioners further request that, if the Bill is not passed during the current Parliament, the Victorian Government commit to introducing equivalent reforms to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Victorian Planning Provisions in the next Parliament.

Committees**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 13*

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:07): I have the honour to present to the house the final report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee for this Parliament, being *Alert Digest* No. 13 of 2026, on the following bills and subordinate legislation, together with appendices:

Firearms Amendment Bill 2026

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026

Inquiries Amendment (Special Prosecutor) Bill 2026

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

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026 – house amendments

Multicultural Victoria Amendment Bill 2026

Sale of Land Amendment (Property Developer Integrity) Bill 2026

Workplace Protection Orders Bill 2026

SR No. 17 – Geothermal Energy Resources Regulations 2026

SR No. 25 – Retirement Villages Regulations 2026.

Ordered to be published.

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

Auditor-General:

Preventing Youth Crime – Ordered to be published

Public Lottery Licence Extension – released on 16 September 2026

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission:

Report 2025–26 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*Report 2025–26 under s 42BI of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*Report 2025–26 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Department of – Report 2025–26 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*Game Management Authority – Report 2025–26 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Chief Officer report 2025–26 to the Minister under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999**Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984* – Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 120 (*Gazette G38, 17 September 2026*)*Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014* – Practitioner Remuneration Order 2027*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

East Gippsland – C175

Greater Geelong – C433

Greater Shepparton – C258

Hobsons Bay – C147

Kingston – C232

Melbourne – C479, GC240

Mitchell – C179

Port of Melbourne – C7, GC240

Port Phillip – C235, GC240

Surf Coast – C151

Victoria Planning Provisions – VC313

Wodonga – C142

Public Interest Monitor – Report 2025–26 under s 64 of the *Human Source Management Act 2023*

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – SR 124*Supreme Court Act 1986* – SRs 122, 123*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124

Victoria Police:

Report 2025–26 under s 42BI of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*Report 2025–26 under s 37F of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*Victorian Fisheries Authority – Report 2025–26 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999***PROCLAMATIONS** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:*Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2026* – ss 178ZF and 178ZJ – 16 September 2026 (*Gazette S510, 15 September 2026*)*Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Act 2026* – s 9 – 30 September 2026 (*Gazette S510, 15 September 2026*)

*Bills***Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026****Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026****Multicultural Victoria Amendment Bill 2026****Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026***Royal assent*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:10): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Schools and Other Matters) Bill 2026, the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 and the Multicultural Victoria Amendment Bill 2026 and that the Lieutenant-Governor has given royal assent to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026.

Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026*Council's agreement*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:11): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Fair Work (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill 2026 without amendment.

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026*Council's amendments*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:11): The Speaker has received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

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

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:11): Under joint standing order 6(1), the Speaker has received a report from the Clerk of the Parliaments that she has made a correction in the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Coercive Control, Good Character, Risk Assessment and Other Matters) Bill 2026. Council amendment 6 agreed to by the Assembly inserts a clause adding new section 171AAA. New subsection 171AAA(a) refers to the 'Magistrates' Court 1989'. She has inserted the word 'Act' between 'Court' and '1989'. The correction ensures there is no ambiguity in the reference to the act.

*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) (10:12): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended today to allow the members for Sydenham and Murray Plains to make valedictory statements for a maximum of 15 minutes each at the conclusion of the grievance debate.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Motions by leave**

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition for her plan to cut \$40 billion –

Leave refused.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Liberal's reckless plan to cut \$40 billion from the budget.

Leave refused.

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bulleen –

Leave refused.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:13): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Brighton for supporting the Leader of the Opposition's –

Leave refused.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns –

Leave refused.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns –

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:14): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Leader of the Opposition's –

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Kew electorate road safety**

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:15): Road safety is a key concern that my constituents have raised with me time and time again. My commitment to the people of Kew is that a Liberal government will deliver pedestrian crossings on Barkers Road and at the Willsmere Road and Earl Street roundabout. We have had too many near misses and actual instances of local students and pedestrians being struck by cars. Petitions have received thousands of signatures at both of these level crossings. We have listened; Labor has ignored. Only a Liberal government can deliver these pedestrian crossings for Kew.

Only a Liberal government can fix the noise walls along the North East Link. The people of North Balwyn were promised these noise walls by Labor, who then scaled them right back. On a project that has been at the epicentre of Big Build corruption and blown out by more than \$16 billion, local residents deserve what they were promised. My commitment to the people of North Balwyn is that a Liberal government will restore the noise walls to what they were actually promised.

I am delighted that Yarra Boulevard in Kew will be the site of a noise camera trial in coming months. Hooning has had a shocking impact on this local community. I have met with the local residents. I

have advocated to the minister, and I thank the Minister for Environment and her predecessors in their role for their support in securing this outcome for local residents. I am optimistic that the trial will establish a mechanism in which we can reduce hooning along Yarra Boulevard.

Elaine Hazim

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit – Minister for Youth, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:16): Today I would like to recognise Elaine Hazim, the incredible principal at Victoria University Secondary College in Deer Park. Through my many visits to the school I have experienced the warmth and the passion of Elaine and her teaching of the next generation of leaders. Elaine has recently been recognised for her passion and dedication to teaching with the 2026 AVID International Educator/Leader of the Year award presented by the international program. AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, is an incredible program. The awards honour teachers who champion career readiness and self-determination and will be presented in December in Atlanta, Georgia. Elaine gives her absolute heart and soul to everything that she does at this incredible school. Congratulations to Elaine for this well-deserved award. On this side of the house we recognise all principals and all educators committed to helping Victorian students to get the best education possible. We particularly celebrate leaders like Elaine who advocate for students who may have become disengaged with school and help them get back on track. We believe that every student deserves a quality education, not just those in certain postcodes. Well done, Elaine, and good on you for winning the AVID International Educator/Leader of the Year award.

Road maintenance

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (10:18): There is an old adage that if you fix country roads, you save country lives. The roads in my electorate are an absolute disgrace, and it is appalling that this government has done nothing about fixing these roads. The tragedy on the Western Highway where that motorcyclist was killed should never, ever have happened, and more of that will come in the future unless the roads are fixed properly. That is why I look forward to a Liberal and Nationals government being elected and \$5 billion being put into fixing our roads – fixing our roads properly. We have a particularly bad stretch of road between Kerang and Lake Charm on the Murray Valley Highway. Every two to three weeks they come out and fix it. It breaks up almost immediately. I do not know why country roads cannot be fixed properly. There has to be a better way. We put our ‘Fix this bloody road’ sign on the fence next to that pothole just to make sure the department might do something about it. But, no, what happens? They put a bit of hot mix in; it comes straight out again. You stand there and watch. It is so dangerous, and that is just repeated right across my electorate. We need a substantial investment in roads. We need them fixed properly. That is why we need the election of a Liberal and Nationals government – to make sure our roads are fixed properly and we save country lives.

Felicitations

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:19): In lieu of a valedictory speech, I would like to thank a few people. To the incredible community of Narre Warren South who have placed their trust in me over two terms, thank you for the opportunity. We achieved so much together, from the smallest policy outcomes to the more substantial that made a huge difference to everyday lives. It has been the greatest privilege. To my 2018 and then 2022 campaign managers Nikki Hayes and Myles McMullen, thanks. We smashed it both times, fuelled of course by the Gary for Narre volunteers; a pool of loving family, including my now late mum Dawn; close mates; community; and labour movement comrades. To them I say thank you. To my staff over the years, Amrit, Isabella, James, Chalo, Nikki, Laura, Anya, Tamim, Di, Suzanne, Stella and the ballast to the whole operation from beginning to end, the mild-mannered Myles McMullen: thanks for your friendship, support, commitment, dedication and efforts for a better Narre South. Thank you to Myles for his deep intellect, organisational skills and sound political judgement. I am going to miss our daily chats. A heartfelt thank you to our clerks, Bridget and all of our parliamentary teams – the hospitality staff, Chris and our IT staff. To our security staff a very big thank you – thanks, Adam, and thanks, Suzi. Thank you, Hansard. To the committees I

chaired – the Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee, the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and the Integrity and Oversight Committee – thank you for the hard work and outcomes and thank you to the high-functioning secretariats that supported us. To my family, in particular my daughters Audrey and Harriet, thank you. I love you so much. To our Premier and caucus colleagues, thank you for your support over an incredible eight years.

State election

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:21): There are 66 days to go until Victoria gets the fresh start that they have been hoping for, and we absolutely need to bring confidence and hope back to this great state. You only have to talk to businesses and you only have to talk to people that are struggling to get a home to understand how much they desperately need that restart. Last week I was with the Victoria Tourism Industry Council with Lisa Patroni and Scott Chapman, the chair, and those in the room were desperate for that restart. We know regional Victorian tourism has been neglected by this government. They have been so focused on Melbourne that they have neglected regional tourism. We will make sure tourism is the heart and soul. It is an economic driver, and it must be seen as such. We need a 10-year plan because that is what VTIC have been calling for. We need to ensure we grow this to a \$70 billion industry, and that is what a Liberal–National government will do. We will ensure visitation comes back to Victoria. We will get Melburnians to go and visit the regions, because at the moment 70 per cent of Melburnians have not visited the regions. In housing we will make sure that Victorians can get a home. We have heard the Housing Industry Association, the Property Council of Victoria, Master Builders Victoria and the Urban Development Institute of Australia all come out today and say Victoria needs a reset because this government is not building enough homes. This government is all talk and no action when it comes to building homes. A Liberal government under Jess Wilson will build homes and give choice back to Victorians to get people into homes in this state.

Felicitations

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:22): As this is my last statement for the 60th Parliament, I want to take the time to thank a few people. Firstly, I thank Premier Andrews for inviting me to represent Melton and also for his strong and great leadership in very trying circumstances during the COVID period. I thank Premier Allan for her tireless work, her friendship and support and for allowing me to continue as her cabinet secretary. It was a great honour. To Premier Carroll, I wish him the very best for the upcoming election and for his leadership. Of course I want to acknowledge Broden Borg, the Labor candidate for Melton. He will do an amazing job.

I want to thank my parliamentary secretary staff, my cabinet secretary staff and all the ministerial staff. Your support and efforts have made my job much easier. To the Bacchus Marsh and Melton branch members, you have been wonderful to me and I thank you all. To my electorate office staff, thank you for helping hundreds of constituents and for your support in helping me to get things done in Melton. We have delivered a lot, and you should be very proud. Of course I cannot forget Bracks the dog, who has brought much joy to many in the annexe and the precinct. To all my colleagues during the 59th and now the 60th Parliament, you have been amazing to work with with your friendship, camaraderie and socialisation. I have to apologise for some of that.

Finally, I thank my wife Janet. She has been an incredible support. She was the one that said, ‘If you want to do this job, then get on with it.’ Thanks, Janet. Now we can head off in the motorhome and see the country. That is it for me. Thank you, everyone, and goodbye.

University of the Third Age

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:23): There is a lot to celebrate in the U3A world. Sabi Buehler was recently named Nillumbik volunteer of the year for her decades of volunteering, including founding the Nillumbik U3A in Hurstbridge in 2008. This has been an enormous success, with over 1000 current members and over 100 courses to choose from. The Healesville U3A have just clocked up 20 years, and they had a celebratory bash at the Memo last week along with the launch of their commemorative

book *A History in Photos*. With learning, friendship, creativity and community at its core, it is a welcoming place for all. With 17 courses initially, their offering is now at 56: music, cards, Friday at 5 – whatever you want. Local talent Karen Roberts wrote a song for the occasion, *20 Years and Going Strong*. Fifty-one people have done a stint on the committee over that time, and at each turn the organisation thrived. Congratulations to Ethne Pfeiffer and the committee for their great work.

Fawcett bushfire recovery

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:24): Whilst there is still a long road to recovery for those impacted by the Longwood bushfires, the community of Fawcett took time on Sunday to thank their recovery partners, those who helped and supported the community immediately after and then along the recovery path. They donated equipment, feed, materials, food and services – businesses, organisations and volunteer groups. The community of Fawcett stopped for a moment to say thank you, and it was a wonderful gesture by a lovely community.

Felicitations

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (10:25): Many to thank; time the essence. To my amazing electorate office team – compassionate, professional, relentlessly dedicated, with community at your core and centre – Rochelle, Claire, Maddie, Jo, Steph, Nanette, Sarah, Kim, Sierra, Leticia, Sam, Leonie, Lynda, Haniya, Glo-Ann, Danielle and Lesley, you have held people through their hardest days, celebrated the good ones, been messengers, connectors, conduits and go-betweens, always with respect, care and dignity. You have been family. A special mention to Rochelle, fellow Roos supporter: we have walked much of this journey together. I cherish your friendship, diligence and flow of coffees more than you know. To my local Bass branch: thank you for your tireless support, camaraderie and love. Whether on the doors, at the booths, shaping policy, check-in phone calls or standing together, I am deeply grateful for it all and for your belief in Labor's capacity to change lives for the better. Acknowledging the amazing people who keep this Parliament functioning with your smarts, smiles and warmth, thank you for getting me through. To the people of Bass across the electorate, past and present: thank you for entrusting me with this extraordinary responsibility. I am immensely proud of what we as a collective of people and communities have achieved and delivered and forever grateful for the opportunity to have served. And finally, to my wonderful, beautiful, funny, kind, curious and much taller-in-stature children, Luciano and Augustus, thank you for your love, laughter and hugs. You have kept me grounded, inspired and focused on what matters most. *Un abbraccio stretto stretto, mantenetevi forte e tante belle cose.*

Regional development

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:27): Regional communities have continued to miss out on their fair share under this city-centric Labor government. The government has ignored our pleas for a second river crossing. With over 25 per cent of the state's trucks registered in the region and being a major transport route, a convoy of trucks and heavy vehicles continues through the main streets of Shepparton and Mooroopna, impacting businesses and people's safety. The 2022 floods also highlighted the need for an alternative route to support communities, emergency services and transport operators. Goulburn Valley Health is the only major regional Victorian health service without an integrated cancer centre, and as a result patients have to travel long distances for care. This makes an already incredibly difficult time more difficult for the patient, their families and loved ones, as well as adding the stress of extra financial costs associated with travel and accommodation. The Shepparton Sports Stadium is a run-down facility built back in 1972 and is no longer fit for purpose. The coalition, both state and federal, have supported this much-needed redevelopment, yet Labor has denied the community this critical sporting facility upgrade. It has been over 18 years since we have had a bus review. Across the electorate we have towns with limited or no bus services at all. This has a significant impact on the community, jobs, education, health care, community services and tourism. On this side of the house, we will support regional communities and guarantee regional Victoria gets its fair share.

Felicitations

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (10:28): This will be the last time I speak in this place, I think it is fair to say. Unless I incur the wrath of the Speaker over the next couple of days, I will be stranded on 49 evictions from the house – a parliamentary Michael Clarke, who ended his career on 49.1. I have been a member of the party for 34 years. I met my wife on the doorstep of the ALP candidate for Aston in the 1993 election and we have been together ever since. Keating described the win as the sweetest victory of all. For me, that statement was prophetic. While we lost Aston, I gained my best friend, my wife and the mother of my five children. The party has been very good to me. Over the years Nicole and I campaigned together many more times. I worked hard on her council election campaigns and Nicole supported my decision to run for Essendon, but it could have easily been her giving this statement today. Justin Madden asked me during the preselection whether I thought I could win. I said I would. He asked if Nicole was running, would I be equally as confident. I said I would be in trouble. It has been an incredible journey with highs and lows in this place for me. I have to say I have been blessed. I have loved this job. I have had a nourishing and enriching journey, which has given me the greatest of joys. Nic, thank you for letting me have this experience. Thank you for the sacrifices that you made to allow me to pursue my career. I look forward to our next chapter and hopefully many more adventures together. I have been so lucky. I am so grateful. The last 33 years have been a love story. As Taylor Swift would say, we were both young when I first saw you.

Dendy Deli

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:29): Dendy Deli has been crowned winner of the outstanding restaurant category at the recent South East Melbourne Local Business Awards. Over 40 years ago, in 1984, Fred Seoud started the deli at 26 Church Street in Brighton. Fred arrived in Australia in 1956 when he was eight. He later met his wife Shamis when they were both 18, when he was visiting Lebanon. They married and both returned to Australia in 1966. Fred ran a number of businesses before the deli, including Fame nightclub, Pineapple Spot, Golden Tower, Chapelli's and numerous businesses along Swanston Street. The deli is now led by Fred's daughter Sally, with siblings Ron, Milad, Hilda, Shadi and Sam all part of the continuing family story. Congratulations to the whole deli team and the Seoud family.

Bayley House

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:30): Bayley House recently celebrated its 75th anniversary with a gala dinner. Bayley House is a Bayside-based not-for-profit organisation that provides exceptional support for people with intellectual disability. The gala saw Bayley Bird Faye Barrow singing, clients dancing and the chief executive officer Deb Stuart chart Bayley's bright future. Congratulations to the whole team for the celebration.

State election

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:30): On Saturday 28 November, Victoria can have a fresh start. Thank you to Brighton, Brighton East, Elwood, Hampton and Hampton East for lifting me onto your collective shoulders and electing me to be your voice. Thank you to my team – Elouise Ager, Victoria Morgan, Allie Amey, Edward Bourke and Meira Eppel – and all my love to my family. Vote for change; vote to fix Victoria.

Maramba Primary School

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:31): I had the absolute pleasure recently of attending Maramba Primary School's whole-school play *What a Wonderful World*. It was at Bunjil Place. It was an incredible experience. All the kids worked so hard and did such an incredible job.

Southern Football Netball League

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:31): We have just finished grand finals in the southern football league, and what incredible, amazing results we had for our women. Endeavour Hills

women won div 1 for the third time in a row. Narre Warren, in their first time having a women's team, also came home with the chocolates, winning the grand final in div 2. Congratulations to them.

Cultivating Creative Cultures with Communities

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:31): We recently hosted the 4Cs, Cultivating Creative Cultures with Communities, an amazing program that has been running for over 20 years in the south-east. It was started by the incredible Laitini, who has a huge heart. She started with the Pasifika community, but now it covers all our amazing multicultural community. These kids do such an incredible job. This year it was over four nights. A huge shout-out to my amazing two schools that performed – of course they were the best – Hallam Secondary College and Fountain Gate Secondary College. We have just invested \$24 million into Hallam Secondary College, and I had the absolute pleasure of taking my friend the Minister for Education on a tour recently. What an incredible school that is. I am so proud to represent my community of Narre Warren North.

State election

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:32): It has been 12 years since I was first elected as the Greens MP for Melbourne, and what an honour it has been to represent such a compassionate and diverse community. Over those 12 years we have achieved some incredible change. In my first few years in Parliament, together with the community, our campaigns saved Royal Park from the east-west toll road, banned gas fracking in Victoria, stopped a gas terminal in Western Port and won key rights for renters. In the last few years we have built on this and won funding to keep our community health GP clinics open, new schools in Docklands and North Melbourne, millions for upgrades in Kensington and Carlton, funding for our neighbourhood houses and action to keep big trucks off local Kensington streets. We used our balance-of-power position in the upper house to negotiate hard and win more homes on the rental market, with taxes on empty homes and real regulations for Airbnb; \$15 million per year for new bike lanes; \$60 million for climate action, including for Landcare and grants to get homes and manufacturers off gas; tax exemptions for conservation covenants, leading to dozens more bush properties being protected forever; and changes to make sure that residents, not businesses, get to decide who is elected in the City of Melbourne. Let us be clear, none of this would have happened without the Greens in Parliament. But there is more to do. This election we are fighting for so much more – free public transport, rent controls, public housing, free dental and an end to coal and gas – and we are fighting not to make the major parties better but to replace them with people that will fight for our community.

Point Cook electorate roads

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:34): I cannot believe it. Four times over the last two weeks, when I have been on the way to town, Google Maps has sent me to the Point Cook Road–Central Avenue intersection. The reason I am shocked is because this has been a wildly congested and dangerous intersection in the community for so long. But Google Maps is now telling me to go this way, because the work has been done and the lights are on at this intersection. I want to thank the workforce who have been doing this job at speed, faster than expected, beating the expectations. I thank them for that. I thank the community, because they have been putting up with these works for a little while. Really 30 years ago we should have done these works, but we are getting the job done on Point Cook Road.

We have started with a dangerous intersection: Sneydes Road–Point Cook Road. That dangerous intersection has lights now too. Of course it should, because it was so dangerous and members of the community, including me, avoided that intersection in the past. What is next? Central Avenue will get duplicated, and that has been a really important job. When Werribee were a council, they bought up that land and demolished the houses, and now we are getting on and duplicating that road. Next, Central Avenue all the way to Dunnings Road will be duplicated by a Labor government. I look forward to getting that done, just like the other works we have been doing on Point Cook Road.

Matthew Gallop

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:35): The community bank in Sandringham just would not be the same if it was not for a bloke named Matthew Gallop. Matthew has served as the manager of that community bank branch for the last 24 years. He is not just the epitome of decency, he is just a darn good fella who has taken community leadership to another level. He is deeply respected and highly regarded in our community. After 24 years of service, he is hanging up the boots. On behalf of the community I would like to thank Matthew for everything he has done for our community to strengthen it. As we know in this place, 80 per cent of the profits of the community banks go back into the community, so the best way that I believe our community can pay tribute to Matthew and to his service is to consider switching to the better bank, the community bank in Sandringham. We also welcome Chris Munro, his replacement.

Felicitations

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:36): As we come to the end of the 60th Parliament, I want to take this opportunity to thank my community for the opportunity that they have given me to serve but also to fight for better outcomes in our community, whether that be to fix local roads; to ensure the community gets the infrastructure investment that it deserves, like at the Highbett Road and Wickham Road level crossings, and for those crossings to be removed; further investment in Sandringham Hospital, the heart of our community. Whether it be for better schools, for better roads, for less potholes or for a great start in life, it has been a privilege, and I look forward to serving again.

Don Drummond

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (10:37): I rise today to honour a dear friend and Labor Party stalwart Don Drummond, who died aged 92 in June of this year. Together with his late wife Sheila, Don was at the centre of the Woodend Labor Party branch, and their book-filled home was a place of lively conversations and meetings. Don's remarkable knowledge of Labor history and policy was matched by his integrity and kindness. Don proudly had an ASIO file. He was our federal Ballarat candidate in 1958 and, despite a primary vote of 44.6 per cent, was done over in a dirty preference deal between the DLP and the Liberals. Don was an educator of distinction, a publisher and a proud family man. Don and Sheila enriched the cultural life of the Macedon Ranges as founding committee members of the Woodend Winter Arts Festival and through its Words and Ideas program, which brought so many thoughtful discussions and leading Australian writers to our community. Don believed in people, ideas and the power of community. He was much loved, and his contribution will endure in the organisations he strengthened, the friendships he nurtured and the ideas he encouraged. Farewell, comrade.

Kyneton Daffodil and Arts Festival

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (10:38): The 2026 Kyneton Daffodil and Arts Festival was yet another triumph, with huge crowds and more events than ever before, while crowd favourites the dog dash, the scarecrow trail, the art prize and ferret racing continued. Thank you to the committee president, the absolutely astounding Sharryn Smith, and to Mark James, Michelle Skipper, Bill Meeker, Peter Henderson, Chris Cregan, Julie Ryan, Jesse Hernandez and Katherine Rodriguez. You are all incredible.

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:38): I rise to express my gratitude to the people of Northcote. It is the greatest honour to represent the inner north, and it gives me heart to know I do not do it alone. Every day I fight for our community alongside the people, organisations, businesses, innovators and advocates who care deeply about our collective future. Together we have achieved remarkable things. Our public schools have undergone the biggest transformation in decades, with new classrooms, gyms, science hubs and performance halls giving kids more opportunities. A new Medicare clinic and a new mental health hub are making care fast and free. We are expanding the

Austin and building a new early parenting centre to help families. Free specialist women's health care is helping women be heard and treated. The Chandler is complete, the Bell Street boom gates are gone and PT is free for kids and teens. I have championed practical climate action like restoration along our creeks, urban farming, neighbourhood batteries and more home solar to lower bills and emissions. There are new cycling connections – like the crucial Alphington link, on the cusp of completion – and accessible tram stops will improve High Street in Thornbury. New social housing is giving more people a safe and secure home. Iconic street festivals bring joy and connection. Free TAFE and free kinder are changing lives. We have upgraded sports fields, pavilions, parks and playgrounds. I am proud to stand with our multicultural and multifaith communities to fight for landmark reforms to improve workers rights. Victoria now has a treaty with its First Peoples, shaped by decades of Aboriginal rights activism. This is the community that raised me. I love the inner north. I will keep listening, showing up and fighting for us with real action.

Felicitations

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:40): As this parliamentary term draws to a close, I thank the people of the Glen Waverley district for the privilege of representing them over the past four years. I thank our volunteers, our community groups, our sporting clubs, our schools and our local businesses. I want to thank my wonderful electorate staff Rachel, Dustin, Atharva, Finn and Yujie who have worked tirelessly for our community. I would also like to thank the whip staff Aidan and Laura for their guidance and support. Together we have secured upgrades for local schools. We have invested in sporting facilities and open space and seen construction begin on the Suburban Rail Loop at Glen Waverley. Many families from multicultural communities make Glen Waverley their home because they want a great education for their children. As the son of migrants, I understand that hope. I will always back those families, celebrate what they bring to our community and stand with them against division. There is more to do. I want to keep improving our schools, deliver better transport and community facilities and make sure that every family feels they belong here. I will keep fighting for the future of the Glen Waverley district families for what they deserve.

Mid-Autumn Festival

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:40): On another matter, I wish everyone celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival a joyful time with family and friends. It is a wonderful opportunity to share food, stories and traditions and to celebrate the communities that make Glen Waverley such a special place to call home. Zhōngqiū jié kuài lè.

Geelong Venom

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:41): Congratulations to Geelong Venom, who have won the Townsville Tip Off preseason tournament for the WNBL. Across the weekend they played two terrific games against Canberra and Bendigo, taking out the title. It is the first title of the club's history, and it is only their third year in the league. Venoms new point guard Maddy Rocci took out the Tiana Mangakahia trophy for MVP. Congratulations, Venom, you have made us so proud. Good luck for the season ahead.

The Good Neighbourhood Project

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:42): Last week was the grand opening of The Good Neighbourhood Project's Spruhan Avenue community site. This site has been many years in the making and would not have been possible without the resilience and commitment of the team at The Good Neighbourhood Project. This site is now home to a beautiful community space, which will bring neighbours together in a place focused on connecting and empowering community. Congratulations to Simon and Kaylene Reeves and to everyone involved in the establishment of this incredible space.

Northern Bay College

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:42): Northern Bay College's human library project is an incredible project. Students share their personal stories of how they came to Australia. Their journeys have not been easy. Students spoke with courage as they shared how they left family members, friends and the communities they grew up in, all to seek a better future. Their experiences as refugees and migrants, the challenges they faced on their way to Australia, have shaped these young people into resilient, determined, thoughtful and kind students who have bright futures ahead of them. Congratulations to the students who took part in this project, and thanks to Northern Bay College and CatholicCare Victoria for bringing this work together.

Lara electorate office staff

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:42): It is a special week in the Lara electorate office. We have two birthdays. Happy birthday to Kelly and Paris.

Felicitations

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:43): We come into this chamber as individuals, but we are held up by many. I want to take this opportunity to thank the many. My amazing staff: Amy Donaldson, thoughtful, compassionate, always willing to go the extra mile; Jesse Ramsay, stoic, steady, wise and ever diligent; Sharon Wallace-Storm, determined and passionate; Shalini Nair, kind and considerate; and Vic Bailey, creative and clever; as well as some of the best party members and volunteers you could hope for, including Brad, Darrin, Bob, Jean, Dom, Manny, Doug, Peter, Ryan, Sammy, Kylie, Glen, Raquel, Lyn, Phil and many more. My family: Mum and Dad, Ian and Les, for your love and guidance and for always being there no matter the day; brother and sister Dave and Kirst for the support and the many laughs as well as our extended family. But most importantly, my beautiful wife Jas: smart, funny, compassionate, kind and my rock. And finally, to our beautiful daughter Cleo: kind, energetic, hilariously funny. Cleo, you are amazing, so loved and the light of our lives. I am forever grateful for the support, commitment and belief shown by all of these people. I want to put on the record just how much I appreciate all of the team. You are indeed the best of us. Let us get this done and win in November.

Hastings electorate

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:44): I would like to thank the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for coming down to Hastings, jumping on the back of my motorcycle and going for a ride around my electorate to look at the roads so that he could truly understand what is happening. I call that going above and beyond, and that is brilliant. Talking about going above and beyond, I would certainly like to say thank you to all the volunteers in my electorate that volunteer for the SES and the CFA. You do an amazing job in keeping us safe, and I say thank you. Lastly, I am looking forward to sitting in this seat next year. I will see you all then. Have a great Christmas and keep safe.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports**Parliamentary Ethics Committee*****Inquiry into the Review of the Members Code of Conduct***

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:45): I speak today on the report of the Parliamentary Ethics Committee inquiry into the review of the members code of conduct. A newly established joint standing committee, this was our first statutory review of the code and our first inquiry report. I would like to start off by acknowledging the contributions of everyone who assisted our committee in undertaking this review. I thank the Parliamentary Integrity Adviser Professor Charles Sampford and the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission for their valuable advice and cooperation throughout the inquiry. I give my sincere thanks to the chair of the committee, the member for Rowville, for his leadership, his collegiate approach to this important work, his efficient and professional way in which he chaired our committee meetings and his ever-dry humour. I have learned

much from our meetings together, as I have from the chair of the other committee I sit on, the member for Wendouree. Both have exemplified wonderful qualities as chairs of two greatly constructive committees.

I have to say, the beauty of the committees – Deputy Speaker, as you would be well aware, and as all my colleagues in this place would be well aware – is that they give us all the chance to get to know our colleagues from other sides of the chamber in a better way and appreciate our commonalities, even at times when we may differ. They are particularly constructive, and I have found my time undertaking committee work incredibly valuable. To that point, I thank my fellow committee members: the member for Glen Waverley, sitting beside me; and from the other place, Mr Tom McIntosh, Mrs Gaelle Broad and Mr Richard Welch, for their constructive contributions and collaborative approach throughout the inquiry. As deputy chair, I have valued the opportunity to work alongside all these colleagues from across the Parliament. I have to say our work was conducted in a genuinely bipartisan manner, so thank you to them all.

I would particularly like to place on the record our committee's appreciation for the outstanding work of the secretariat. In particular I thank Paul Groenewegen, Keir Delaney and Larissa Volpe for their professionalism, advice and support throughout the review process. Their efforts were instrumental in the preparation of this report. With indulgence, I would like to extend my thanks to all across the Parliament who undertake this work. The professionalism, the expertise, the incredible patience exemplified by the staff of this place is unparalleled. I hope they know that all of us here are on a unity ticket when it comes to our appreciation for the work they do every day to keep this place running as it should, even though members of Parliament sometimes do their level best to frustrate it. Thank you to them, and thank you in particular to Bridget and Vaughn as well.

To the members code of conduct – the committee believes that it continues to play an important role in guiding the conduct of members and strengthening Parliament's integrity framework. While no changes to the code are recommended at this time, the report highlights the importance of ongoing education, awareness and continuous improvement. The code of conduct is an important part of Victoria's parliamentary integrity framework. It provides guidance to all members of Parliament on how we should conduct ourselves in carrying out our public duties. The code is underpinned by a statement of values that includes serving the public interest, upholding democracy, integrity, accountability, respect, diligence and leadership. Importantly, recent amendments to the legislation strengthened the code by introducing explicit provisions relating to appropriate workplace behaviour and upholding parliamentary standards and integrity. These additions reflect the community's expectation that members of Parliament not only act ethically but also help foster respectful and safe workplaces.

In speaking of integrity in this place, I must make special mention of the incredible member for Brunswick who we sadly lost last week and condoled in this place only yesterday, himself a champion for integrity in this place and amongst us all. My sincerest condolences to his partner Ange and their children, his Greens colleagues in this place, his staff, his wider family and all who knew and loved him. I note the flowers that sit there in his chair today.

The committee approached this review with a simple question: is the code working as intended? To help answer that, we consulted with a range of stakeholders, including integrity bodies, parliamentary officers and members of Parliament, receiving submissions from members of Parliament, the integrity adviser and the Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission. A significant focus of our work was on education and engagement. Before undertaking a formal review, we believed it was important that members had a practical understanding of the code, so education sessions were delivered across the Parliament, and the feedback was quite valuable. While many members were somewhat familiar with the code, they identified a need for clearer and more accessible guidance.

We come to the three recommendations that we have made: first, that no changes be made to the code at this time; second, that ongoing annual discussions occur between the committee, the Parliamentary

Integrity Adviser and the Parliamentary Workplace Standards and Integrity Commission to consider de-identified issues arising; and, third, that new members are introduced to the code as part of their induction programs. It is a worthwhile read and it is a quick one, and I commend it to the house.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-Demand Industries

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:50): I also rise to address a committee report. The committee report I address today is from the Legislative Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, a committee I served on in the 59th Parliament, and is on their inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries. It is clear to me, having reviewed this report, that more needs to be done to strengthen the ability of students to be their best and to achieve their best within their school education in order to address a number of matters, including addressing and arresting the skills gap we have in Victoria. It is an impost upon the future of Victoria's economy and our economic potential as a state to grow wealth, to grow opportunity and to grow our presence, not only in Australia but globally as a destination for investment. But more than that, it goes to the responsibility that the education system has to not just teach for the sake of teaching or educate for the sake of educating but to prepare young people to fully contribute to life and to the economy once they leave that educational setting. This is something which, from an opposition perspective, we have considered quite deeply.

With reference to the committee report and with regard and reference also to some of the policy considerations being undertaken by the coalition, I do want to address that committee report and its sentiments specifically through the lens of some policies that I, as the state Shadow Minister for Education, have recently announced. The bottom line is that we do have an obligation to the next generation. Under a Wilson Liberal government we will not be striving for mediocrity. We will not be striving for average. We will be striving for excellence. We need to understand the potential of young people in school communities. We need to enable them the opportunity to do their very best and to be their very best.

That is one of the reasons why we have announced successful school starters, effectively a statewide neurodivergence screening program for every prep student in every prep classroom, to embed allied health professionals, both speech pathologists and occupational therapists, into the primary school nursing program so that young people if they are neurodivergent can be on a pathway to assistance at an earlier stage and so that at the very start of their schooling they have the supports in place to be and achieve their best. This will help teachers as well to understand the particular individual needs of those students. It will help parents in a supported framework to understand the needs of their children and to support them in that process too. It is a policy which we have announced, which we are particularly proud of, to get the best out of every young person, to support teachers and to support parents.

The fact that there are around 30 per cent of Victorian students who leave Victorian schools without adequate literacy and numeracy skills is of deep concern to the opposition. It is for that reason that we have announced a literacy and numeracy guarantee. We will achieve better standards in literacy and numeracy over a number of years. We have an interim target of a 15 per cent increase on current levels over 10 years and across all domains of NAPLAN. We will do that by instigating a time- and scope-limited review of Victoria's curriculum. We will do that with a focus on professional learning opportunities for teachers in the areas of classroom mastery and of student behaviour management and on embedding even further explicit instruction into our classrooms and supporting our teachers to do that.

We will give Victorian students more choice. Just on the weekend, we announced that we will establish three additional select entry schools. I want to be really clear about this: yes, we will establish these schools and will convert six existing high schools to partial select entry, but equity needs to be at the heart of this. It does not matter what your postcode is and does not matter where you live or what your socio-economic status is, the responsibility of the Victorian government should be to offer every Victorian student the very best opportunity.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee*Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance*

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:55): We have had a power of work come back from some of our committees, and I want to thank the member for Monbulk for the inquiry into the review of the members code of conduct from the Parliamentary Ethics Committee. The Economy and Infrastructure Committee has also returned two reports – the *Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-Demand Industries* but also the report that I would like to speak on today, which is the *Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance*. I was proud to serve on this committee, and I want to acknowledge my fellow committee members, including the member for Bellarine as the chair, and everyone who contributed to the inquiry – the university staff, student unions, student organisations, university leaders and, importantly, our committee secretariat for their considerable work.

Victorian universities are some of our most important public institutions. They educate the next generation. They undertake world-class research, create jobs and make an enormous contribution to Victoria's economy and community, but with that important role comes responsibility. Universities must be accountable to the public and to the people who make these institutions work every day – their students, the academics and the professional staff. Throughout this inquiry we heard evidence about transparency in decision-making, staff underpayments, the use of consultants, complaints processes and, importantly, whether staff and students have a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect them.

One witness I want to particularly acknowledge is Felix Hughes, the president of the National Union of Students. I declared at the hearing that Felix had previously worked in my electorate office before taking up what I jokingly described as a better job representing students nationally. But on a serious note, Felix was an exceptionally impressive witness before our committee, who came before us representing the interests of about 1.6 million undergraduate and postgraduate students nationally. What impressed me was that he did not treat university governance as an abstract discussion about board structures or constitutions. He brought it back to what governance actually means for students.

One of the important points arising from the evidence was that giving students an opportunity to speak is not necessarily the same as genuinely listening to them. Felix spoke about his experience at Monash University, where student representatives could engage with senior university leadership but did not have representation on the university council or its sub-councils. He described the danger of consultation becoming effectively a tick-box exercise, where students are asked what they think only after a decision has essentially been made. He gave the committee the example of changes to law faculty tutorials. His evidence was that students had not been consulted before those changes were announced, with more students in fewer classes and fewer opportunities for active participation. Perhaps even more concerning was his evidence that when student representatives subsequently raised the matter, his understanding was that senior university leadership had themselves not been aware of the decision.

That example goes to the heart of why governance matters. Governance is not simply about who sits around the council table. It is about whether information moves properly through an institution. It is about whether decision-makers understand what is happening on the ground, and it is about whether people affected by decisions have the opportunity to influence them before rather than after they are made.

Felix made another important point. Staff working conditions are student learning conditions. When academics are overloaded, when class sizes increase and when staff are stretched too thinly, students feel the consequences. There is less time to ask questions, less opportunity for individual feedback and less capacity for the interaction between teacher and student that is fundamental to quality education. Felix also reminded us of the practical contribution made by student organisations. He spoke about the free breakfasts, the free dinners, the affordable meals, the clubs and societies, safe spaces and support for international students, mature-aged students and students living in residential accommodation. For a student struggling with cost-of-living pressures, those things matter.

Sometimes they can make the difference between a student being able to continue their education and having to walk away. We also considered complaints processes and the need for clearer and more independent pathways for staff and students.

Ultimately transparency builds trust. Universities cannot simply ask their communities to trust their decision-making. They need structures that demonstrate how decisions are made, who has been consulted and who is accountable. That is why this inquiry matters and why witnesses like Felix made such an important contribution. His evidence reinforced a simple proposition: students should not merely be consulted after decisions have been made. They deserve a genuine voice in making them. If we want to make stronger universities, we need strong governance, and that means giving the people who study, teach, research and work within our universities a meaningful place at the table.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (11:00): I hope you are ready. It is committee report of fortune time, and I am reporting on the 2026–27 budget estimates. Let us have a look where we will end up first, shall we? Education. That is wonderful, given that I have got the Shadow Minister for Education sitting behind me, who I believe – he can confirm or deny – is actually going to make his first visit to the tropical north of Victoria. He is not listening to me, which is quite rude. Anyway, we have got some schools to go and see. It was interesting during these hearings of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, of which I am thrilled to be a part. It is some of the best use of time over, well, it is usually two weeks. This year we condensed it into some very long days over 10 days. But there was some interesting dodging of questions throughout the education portfolio.

Brad Rowswell: Tell us more.

Jade BENHAM: I certainly will – why don't I – particularly around why regional schools have not been getting their fair share, and they certainly have not. I have raised many times in this place the state of schools like Chaffey College in Mildura and the state of Mildura West Primary School, which I was at last week coincidentally. That building has actually been rectified. It was being held together by chipboard for a long, long time. Apparently they got rid of the termites, and they have managed to fix that with the school's own operating budget. But there are other schools that are certainly not getting their fair share. Last week I was also at Mildura Senior College. H block at Mildura Senior has closed down. It has been condemned, and they cannot use it. The staff and the school council there have told me that there has been no vision. There is no master plan. The department cannot tell them what is going on. So as far as education goes, and the dodging of questions and what schools are in poor or very poor condition, we know that Chaffey College is one of those public schools in Victoria that is in very poor condition. And without a plan, Mildura Senior College, now that it has had H block closed up and it cannot be used, will not be far behind it. That has nearly taken half of my time.

We will spin the wheel again, shall we, and see what we can come up with. Let me get a heading first: TAC, which leads me to roads. Let us talk about the Transport Accident Commission and roads. We know that when the now Premier was the Minister for Roads and Road Safety he cut funding to road maintenance and in fact ceased resealing roads altogether. I am not a roads engineer, Acting Speaker De Martino, and I assume neither are you, but we know basic common sense tells us that you need to reseal the roads to stop the water getting in. You also need to keep up that road maintenance on the sides of the roads because the water needs somewhere to go during particularly wet winters and wet summers, which of course we have had now. What is also alarming is that while I was driving around this state and the 16 per cent that my electorate covers – 16 per cent of the landmass, which I know is big – I saw that the roads are horrific. I had to stop a couple of times. I do not know how the trucks are coping on the Calder Highway, particularly between Sea Lake and Berriwillock. All the way down to Culgoa there are culverts that have literally sunk into the ground. They are now ditches. They are not even potholes anymore. There are gashes that run right up the middle of the road. There is no signage

to the south, so in the dark, people that are driving those roads are hitting them and blowing their tyres out. It is absolutely appalling.

I am only going to get to two subjects, because I want to get this on the record. While I was driving around last week, I had contractors calling me, very alarmed that they have only been contracted to do one cut of roadside vegetation in bushfire prone areas. In our area we are headed towards a bumper harvest for wheat, barley and cereals. One cut. I know it is wet now, but that is going to dry out very, very quickly. The weeds themselves are taller than the member for Lowan, which I know is not a huge feat, but it hides kangaroos. I had a kangaroo jump out at me last Wednesday evening, and because the weeds are so long you cannot see them until they are literally in your passenger side door. I did not flinch. There were two trucks coming the other way. I am a very skilled driver; however, I am not skilled enough to battle Victorian roads. It is time. This report illustrates that we are not getting our fair share, and that is what the Nationals will guarantee.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (11:05): I rise to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's report into securing the Victorian food supply and the government's response to it. I think it is really important that I do because this really impacts housing, and we have noticed that those opposite have gone very quiet on their housing policy as it relates to us in the outer suburbs. So I think it is important that somebody speaks about it in this place.

The inquiry, as you would well know, looked at the future of food production in Victoria and at the pressure urban development places on productive agriculture around Melbourne. For the communities that I represent, this is something that is right at our doorstep, on the eastern side of Yan Yean Road – we are talking about Yarrambat and Plenty – and then the strip between Doreen and Whittlesea and then up further around Wandong. You can stand on Yan Yean Road and on one side is suburban Melbourne and on the other side is open landscape and green wedge. People choose to live here because of that character, they do not want to see Melbourne simply continue spreading north. And this is the really important part: Labor is the only party that has committed to keeping Whittlesea and Wandong as country towns, Labor is the only party that has committed to keeping the green wedge and the urban growth boundary.

The committee heard about the importance of protecting rural character and about stopping speculative development, and the committee's recommendation is clear – recommendation 11 calls for a strong and unequivocal commitment to maintaining that urban growth boundary, and Labor has delivered that. But the Liberal Party has not committed to the green wedge. They have not committed to keeping legislation for the green wedge. I invite the Leader of the Opposition, if she wants to, to come back into the chamber and correct me. But the fact is that their spokesperson the member for Caulfield refused to commit to keeping the green wedge as it is. In fact, to quote the member for Caulfield, they will be returning planning decisions to locals. So what does that mean? That means no legislative protections. Currently, if there are going to be any changes to the green wedge, both the lower and upper houses have to allow it. But we have heard directly from those opposite that they will return it to the locals – that is, they will take away parliamentary protection of the green wedge. The housing policy of those opposite is to speed up housing in the outer suburbs. That is in contrast to Labor's policy, which has been to slow down and space out new estates coming so that we can make sure that our infrastructure is keeping up with the population.

I invite those opposite to come to Wallan and come to Donnybrook and to tell residents that they want housing built even faster in our areas. If we look at Wallan at the moment, we are building the Wallan ramps and upgrading the northern intersection with Watson Street to make traffic better for people that are living in the estates of Wallara Waters and Newbridge. We are making sure that happens first before new estates are opened up further east. But the Liberal Party's commitment is to ignore those infrastructure needs, ignore the traffic dramas of a morning and just get more houses built in the outer

suburbs, including taking away protections for our green wedge and our urban growth boundary. And why do they want to do that? They want to do that because they do not want more housing in the areas where they live, in the inner suburbs, which have a lot of transport connections, health services and the like. They want all the housing, faster, out where we live.

Well, Labor says no. Labor has drawn a line. Labor says Whittlesea will remain a country town, we say Wandong will remain a country town and the green wedge on the eastern side of Yan Yean Road stays protected from housing development. We do not want to see Melbourne gradually creep up around our borders. Returning decisions to the locals, as the Liberals say, is something we view with great scepticism in my area, considering we have had local Liberal members holding meetings with landowners about subdividing and getting rid of the green wedge for our beautiful area.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2026–27 Budget Estimates

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:10): Today I am speaking on the 2026–27 budget estimates, and I will be focusing on a couple of chapters, starting out with chapter 2. This report proves how poorly the Labor government has managed the finances in Victoria and that under the Labor government they have failed on every economic measure. At page 22 the ‘Fiscal strategy’ under Labor shows debt is soaring to near \$200 billion. In Victoria debt represents nearly a quarter of the economy, at near 25 per cent. Unemployment is the highest in the country in Victoria under this Labor government, now at 5.1 per cent, much higher than what is in this report. And on taxation, this Labor government, with its soaring debt and interest bill on its debt, is taxing Victorians more – nearly \$50 billion – in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. This Labor government, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, has introduced or added 70 new or increased taxes and charges – that is, 70 new or increased taxes and charges hitting families, hitting renters, hitting businesses and hitting farmers – and Victorians are paying more because of Labor’s financial mismanagement and the \$15 billion of Big Build corruption under Labor, and that is not even in this report. Our plan, our promise, is no new or increased taxes. We will scrap the emergency services tax to immediately reduce costs and take pressure off local businesses so that they can grow. We will reduce stamp duty, and that is for our first home buyers, for young people, supporting young Victorians and restoring the dream of home ownership.

At page 24 of the report, 2.1.2 ‘Taxation’ really shows that under Labor land tax and payroll tax are hurting Victorians. They are up under Labor. Under Labor land tax has more than quadrupled, and every extra dollar raised is pushing up rents, home prices and the cost of new housing. We will reverse Labor’s land tax hikes, saving hundreds of thousands of Victorians up to \$975 a year. And the Victorian Liberals will lower payroll tax, and that will reduce costs for tens of thousands of Victorian businesses, restoring their confidence to hire more people and to help grow our economy. As Shadow Minister for Finance, I have worked with our Liberal leader and with the Shadow Treasurer. Our 10-year economic plan is about restoring confidence, about fixing the budget, about growing our economy and about bringing down the cost of living. We will be disciplined, we will be honest and we will focus on what matters – that is, delivering for Victorians, like getting the basics right, fixing potholes, recruiting thousands more police and investing in a health system that Victorians can rely on.

At page 26 of the report 2.1.3 ‘Dividends’ refers to the Transport Accident Commission. This Labor government, to put up its fake surplus, raided the TAC of \$1.1 billion. That is not going to fix potholes or make roads safer for our motorists or for our motorbike riders, but Labor just raided the TAC to prop up its fake surplus. Victorians deserve a government that respects their money and puts it towards the essentials. That is why under our Liberal plan, the Liberals will introduce a charter of budget honesty. We want to be honest with the Victorian people about how their taxpayer money is being spent. We will have a public expenditure tracker so that Victorians can see how their taxpayer dollars are being spent. We will respect their taxpayer dollars, and that is why, with our Liberal leader Jess Wilson and our Liberal team has a real plan for real change, and that is exactly what Victorians are

calling for. They want their economy and their finances fixed, so that we can put that money towards the essentials. Under the Liberals, we will guarantee our Victorians essential services that they need and rely on, and that is why we have to fix our economy. That is why we have to make our economy stronger, lower taxes, lower the cost of living and ease that pressure on Victorians.

Bills

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 16 insert –
 - “(aa) to amend the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** to remove group voting tickets from the election of Councillors; and”.
2. Clause 1, page 2, before line 17 insert –
 - “(ab) to amend the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** to reduce entitlement to be enrolled on the voters’ roll without application; and”.
3. Clause 1, page 2, line 21, omit “valuation.” and insert “valuation; and”.
4. Clause 1, page 2, after line 21 insert –
 - “(c) to amend the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** to enable a vacancy in the office of Deputy Lord Mayor to be filled by appointment.”.
5. Clause 2, line 23, omit “Part and Division 1 of Part 2” and insert “Part, Division 1 of Part 2 and section 44E”.
6. Insert the following New Clauses to follow Clause 18 –
 - 18A Internal arbitration process**
After section 141(2)(d) of the Principal Act **insert** –
“(da) any requirements of guidelines published under section 149(1)(ca);”.
 - 18B Application for an internal arbitration process**
In section 143(3) of the Principal Act, for “3 months” **substitute** “6 months”.
7. Clause 21, after line 3 insert –
 - “(a) after paragraph (c) **insert** –
“(ca) publish any guidelines in relation to the interpretation and application of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct for the purposes of internal arbitration process applications that the Principal Councillor Conduct Registrar has determined to be necessary;”.
8. Clause 21, line 4, omit “(a)” and insert “(b)”.
9. Clause 21, line 10, omit “(b)” and insert “(c)”.
10. Insert the following New Clauses before Clause 45 –
 - 44A Section 6B repealed**
Section 6B of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** is **repealed**.
 - 44B New section 7A inserted**
After section 7 of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** **insert** –
“7A Application of Divisions 6 and 7 of the Local Government Act 2020
 (1) To avoid doubt, Division 6 of Part 8 of the **Local Government Act 2020** applies to the election of a single Councillor.
Note
 See also section 18 in relation to the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Lord Mayor.
 (2) To avoid doubt, Division 7 of Part 8 of the **Local Government Act 2020** applies to the election of 2 or more Councillors, including for the purposes of a general election.”.

44C How votes to be counted

Section 18(2) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** is repealed.

44D Schedules 1, 2 and 3 repealed

Schedules 1, 2 and 3 to the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** are repealed.’.

11. Insert the following New Clause before Clause 45 –

‘44E Filling of vacancies

(1) In section 24(1) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** omit “or Deputy Lord Mayor”.

(2) After section 24(1) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** insert –

“(1A) If the office of Deputy Lord Mayor becomes vacant 6 months or more before a general election is due, the Council must appoint a Councillor to fill the vacancy.

(1B) If the Council appoints a Councillor to fill a vacancy under subsection (1A), an extraordinary vacancy occurs in the office of the Councillor on the date of the appointment and section 259 of the **Local Government Act 2020** does apply.”.’.

12. Insert the following New Part after Part 4 –

‘Part 4A – Further amendment of City of Melbourne Act 2001**46AA Persons entitled to be enrolled without application**

Section 9A(3), (4), (5) and (6) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** are repealed.

46AB Persons entitled to be enrolled

(1) In section 9B(2) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001**, omit “section 9A(3) and”.

(2) In section 9B(3) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001**, omit “section 9A(5) and”.

46AC Section 9D repealed

Section 9D of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** is repealed.

46AD Limitations on right of entitlement

In section 9E(1) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001**, omit “9A(3), 9A(5),”.

46AE Section 9F repealed

Section 9F of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** is repealed.

46AF Request that address not be shown

In section 10(1) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** omit “9A(3), 9A(5),”.

46AG Chief Executive Officer to prepare voters’ list

In section 11A(2) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** omit “9A(3), 9A(5),”.

46AH Public notification

Section 11C(1)(b)(iii) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** is repealed.

46AI Preparation of voters’ rolls

In section 11D(4)(b) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001**, for “9A(3), 9A(5), 9B, 9C or 9D” substitute “9B or 9C”.

46AJ Compulsory voting

Section 19(5) of the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** is repealed.’.

13. Long title, after “**2001**” insert “to remove group voting tickets from the election of Councillors,”.

14. Long title, after valuation insert “, to enable a vacancy in the office of Deputy Lord Mayor to be filled by appointment”.

15. Long title, before “and for other purposes” insert “, to reduce entitlement to be enrolled on the voters’ roll without application”.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Renters) (11:15): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

I rise to speak on the amendments to the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026, moved in the other place. These amendments improve what is already a substantial reform package designed to strengthen integrity, accountability and governance in local government. It responds to recommendations from IBAC's Operation Sandon, reflects issues raised through the Whittlesea commission of inquiry, supports fairer and more secure work through the framework for a local government fair jobs code and regulator and improves council operations and decision-making across our sector. At its core, this bill helps ensure councils are transparent, better governed and more capable of serving their wonderful communities, and so do these amendments moved by the government in the other place. This bill is about stronger communities through stronger local government. The Legislative Council amendments sharpen that objective by improving electoral fairness, strengthening integrity and accountability, making governance arrangements clearer and more workable and increasing public confidence in the City of Melbourne's electoral and leadership systems.

The City of Melbourne Act 2001 is long past its review time, and issues with the act's functionality and fairness have been raised with me since I was sworn in as the Minister for Local Government and, I am sure, with ministers for local government before me. These issues have a long history and require careful consideration and consultation to resolve in full, but I am very proud that this Labor government has taken very positive steps to strengthen the operation of the City of Melbourne.

These amendments abolish group voting tickets, the last use of that system in the Australian local government system, and of course we had the abolishment of group voting tickets only a little while ago in Victoria. Preference flows will no longer be controlled through opaque group voting ticket arrangements. These reforms follow more than two decades of a voting system shaped by arrangements introduced by the Kennett government in the 1990s and respond to the community and council's own repeated calls for reform.

The government is so proud of its amendments already passed and is committed to further reviewing the City of Melbourne Act 2001 in this term of government. Work to commence this review is already underway. I am really proud as the minister. I am eager to see these deliver positive outcomes for residents of the City of Melbourne and strengthen democracy in this great city of ours, including by taking steps to ensure that each vote in the City of Melbourne is worth the same value. This practice was established under the Kennett government in 1993 and has played a significant role in disempowering residents in the City of Melbourne. By 2020 businesses and nonresident property owners made up the majority of the City of Melbourne's electoral roll, leaving resident voters, around 43,000 people with a median age of 28 years, in the minority of those entitled to vote. I think everyone can agree that this practice is not befitting for a city that is more than a business hub and that is a community. Through the review of the City of Melbourne Act, the government will receive advice on how best to achieve these reforms to increase fairness for the residents of the City of Melbourne. The City of Melbourne has advocated for a review of the City of Melbourne Act as well, and I am pleased to be commencing this work as the Minister for Local Government. More information will be distributed to stakeholders in the coming weeks, but it is an exciting and pivotal time in the City of Melbourne's journey, with the work that is being done.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the advocacy of Melbourne councillor Davydd Griffiths. As a Labor-endorsed councillor candidate for the City of Melbourne in 2020 and 2024, he consistently called for reforms to the enrolment and voting rules in the City of Melbourne. Davydd is a tireless advocate for the Melbourne community. I wish him all the best in his campaign going forward. I also want to acknowledge the Leader of the Greens political party as well for advocacy in this space and work in the upper house, and all those that contributed to the debate and discussion, even the work

that was put forward by my counterpart, the Shadow Minister for Local Government Bev McArthur in the other place. While we do not agree on all these changes and reforms, this is how the work of our Parliament best serves Victorians: to tease out these ideas, vote on them, have these amendments put through and lead to a better outcome for Victorians.

Amendments moved by the government in the other place further strengthen the integrity provisions of the bill by requiring published guidelines for arbitration decisions. The guidelines will ensure consistency and give arbiters clarity on what they must take into consideration when making a finding of misconduct or directing or suspending a councillor. This will provide clarity and confidence in councillor conduct processes. These amendments also extend the time for councillors to make an application for an arbitration process. This will ensure that poor conduct by councillors, where they breach the councillor code of conduct, is held to account. Across our 79 municipalities and the work our councillors do, we want to raise the standards and also ensure that Victorian communities across our municipalities are getting the very best outcomes from their councillor elected representatives.

I am grateful to my colleagues across the Parliament for the work they have done in collaborating on the bill and with the government and I particularly give a shout-out to the minister in the other place, Ingrid Stitt, who does a power of work in this space. We passed the legislation through in the Assembly, and it takes a lot of work to get to that point, so I acknowledge the incredible work of the minister, not only in her portfolios but across her duties in the other place. The government in the other place supported the Greens political party's amendments to end automatic enrolment of businesses and nonresident property owners. I acknowledge that amendment that was moved in the other place and the work of the member for Melbourne. The government's intention was to pursue this reform through the City of Melbourne Act 2001 review, but we accepted the Greens political party's amendment because fundamentally both the government and many of our colleagues across the Parliament want to ensure the electoral roll is built through active enrolment rather than automatic inclusion.

The opposition moved amendments to reform the process for filling a vacancy in the office of deputy lord mayor, requiring the council to appoint a councillor if the vacancy arises six months or more before a general election and then treating that councillor's former office as an extraordinary vacancy. That obviously deals with the current circumstance of the Liberal candidate for Western Metropolitan Region Roshena Campbell and is an important step around ensuring continuity and support for the City of Melbourne going forward as well. It maintains leadership continuity, so important when ensuring any resulting council vacancy is dealt with under the established statutory framework. These amendments are practical, fair and necessary. They improve the operation of the councillor standdown provisions, they reduce the risk of unnecessary instability in councils and they support the broader purpose of the bill, which is to strengthen integrity, accountability and governance in local government.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary work done by the Department of Government Services. Their teams are some of the most amazing people you could meet. The work that they have done in preparing the bill for the Legislative Assembly, down to the minutes of changes to legislative proposals, bills and drafting, is just truly extraordinary. I will not name them, but they know who they are. They are some of the best people in the public service, and I want to thank them for all their work, their diligence and care, because this bill will greatly change the outcomes for local government and, in its name, strengthen communities. I commend the bill to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:23): I rise to make some comments on the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. I want to put on record some key points in the bill that we will be opposing, which we pushed very hard in the upper house. I want to commend the Shadow Minister for Local Government Bev McArthur, who has worked tirelessly with stakeholders to ensure that we get this particular bill right. There are a number of things that we do support, and I acknowledge the Minister for Local Government's contribution. Strengthening local government is really important. We should be striving towards that in the best possible way we can.

I will say, however, that what we have seen in the upper house is symbolic of what we would see from a Labor–Greens government should they be re-elected. We hear a lot about coalitions, and the coalition that we must be really concerned about is a Labor–Greens government. A Labor–Greens government is disastrous when it comes to restarting our economy here in Victoria. If you ever want to understand just how bad things are, just talk to business, or just talk to industry. Just talk to anybody and they will say that it is so hard to do business in Victoria. There is a saying, ‘ABV’ – anywhere but Victoria – because this government has been ideologically opposed to business and ideologically opposed to investment. We have got the Minister for Small and Family Business at the table now. She understands that, because she would be hearing this each and every day when she visits small businesses. They would be saying that this government just has complete disregard for business. This particular bill today is symbolic of that, because we have had a longstanding historical commitment to ensure those businesses that actually employ people in our great CBD of Melbourne are able to vote and are on the roll. That has been –

Ellen Sandell interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Melbourne can interject as much as she likes, but the member for Melbourne knows that she has done a deal with the Labor Party to ensure that the voices of Melbourne businesses have been lost because of this particular bill. What has happened –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, members are required according to the standing orders to be factual. The member for Caulfield is not being factual. Businesses will still get to vote in the City of Melbourne after these amendments.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): The member for Melbourne knows that is not a point of order. It is a matter for debate. It is not the Chair’s responsibility or purview to determine the facts of the matter.

David SOUTHWICK: As we know, thanks to the member for Melbourne and the Greens and the Labor Party, businesses will each and every time have to enrol to stay on the roll to vote; otherwise they will be taken off the roll. Thanks to the member for Melbourne and the Greens, who hate business, hate the economy and hate anyone trying to have a job, who are ideologically opposed to government, this is what we would have under a Labor–Greens coalition government. Welcome to Melbourne. Welcome to Victoria. We have Melbourne, the most livable city seven years in a row. These businesses have had to deal with a pandemic. They have had to deal with lockdowns, they have had to deal with protests – they have had to deal with issue after issue because of a government that has completely neglected them. This government just needs to walk the streets of Melbourne and talk to the businesses that have struggled to keep their doors open. Now what this government wants to do is take the voice away from many of these hardworking businesses that employ people and bring visitation back to our great city and our state. The City of Melbourne is the heart of our state. When that is not beating, the rest of the state struggles, and that is what has been happening under the last three premiers.

Natalie Suleyman interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The minister for small business wants to talk down my feelings and sentiment for this great state. The minister for small business keeps interjecting, but the minister for small business has not spoken to small business. It is ironic. You have got a portfolio of small business, but you walk around with your head literally buried in the sand.

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have been listening for a short period of time to the member’s contribution on the other side. I do point to the matter that is before the Parliament. I do want to say that there are more businesses that are opening their doors in Victoria and Melbourne, and we are seeing more investment and more trade opportunities in Melbourne.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Minister, is there a point of order?

Natalie Suleyman: The point of order is the matter before Parliament. It is totally out of context.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Is the point on relevance?

Natalie Suleyman: That is right: relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): In terms of relevance, it is a wideranging debate. I encourage all members speaking on this, though, to stick to the bill before us, the amended bill from the Legislative Council.

David SOUTHWICK: The minister has been here long enough to know that vexatious points of order are irrelevant points of order when we are talking about something so important, about small businesses that have lost their voice thanks to the now Carroll Labor government. They have lost their voice, because prior to this legislation and amendment here those businesses would be on the roll automatically. They would not have to go with another level of bureaucracy to re-enrol each and every time there was a vote. But hang on a minute, wait, we know this government loves bureaucracy and red tape. We know because they have just added another one. They have added another one and made it harder for these businesses. The Minister for Small and Family Business should know how hard it is to run a business, how much regulation and red tape these businesses need to comply with each and every day, and yet the small business minister is backing more regulation and red tape for small business. What a joke. This shows that this small business minister has no idea about how hard it is to run a business, no idea about the regulation and red tape that these businesses have to deal with. The minister is allowing yet more regulation and red tape and the very businesses that keep our city thriving and open to close –

Anthony Cianflone: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, in terms of being factual, the shadow minister should be factual with the business community about the impact the \$40 billion in cuts is going to have on decimating businesses and small businesses across our community, sacking one in seven workers –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Order! That is not a point of order.

David SOUTHWICK: It is obvious that the government is very touchy about this, because what we have is a confidence issue in this state. What we have is people that are choosing not to invest in this state because we have the worst government we have seen, one that has been so ideologically opposed to investment and to small businesses having a go and getting started in this state. We have seen it each and every time. This is so symbolic of what the Labor and Greens parties would do should they be elected in November. That is why they must be absolutely put down the bottom when it comes to voting at election time, because this is what they would do. The dirty deals that Labor and the Greens have done have again slammed businesses in the CBD, once the most thriving city that this state, this country and the world had ever seen. It was the world's most livable city for seven years running. We have lost the title because we have a government that hates small business.

Do not forget this government has presided over week after week of protests down in the city despite these businesses calling out for the government to do something. A lot of these individual businesses stood there strongly to say it is important that they have a voice. It was council, as a result of many of those businesses standing up, that employed a private security firm to help with some of the law and order issues in this state. Why? Because the government have run out of funding to fund police in the CBD of Melbourne, so we have now got private security to deal with it. How did this happen? It happened because a lot of those businesses cried and called out for more protection. Because we see knife crime and stores vandalised. We have seen graffiti attacks. We have seen the city being turned to rack and ruin because the government have not invested in it and the government has not provided a law and order response. That is why it is important for businesses to have that voice and to work with council, because when you see a government that does not support this great city, unfortunately, in this particular instance, the council has had to stand up, because there has been a huge gap as a result of the government's lack of action. That is why it is really important. I commend the Shadow Minister

for Small Business in the other place, who said that the new Premier, who said we were going to have a reset and ensure that we had business at the table because they had been forgotten under the two previous premiers, has in his very first test shown his true colours when it comes to what he thinks about business, the nightlife economy, the tourism that the businesses provide, the commercial opportunities and the amount of people that come and work in the city. A lot of that has been slashed because the government have not invested and supported them.

This is another example. This is why it is really important that the businesses that pay taxes, that pay huge rates to the city and to the council, have their say in how the council is run and do not have to apply to the roll each and every time. We are not asking residents to reapply for the roll each and every time, but we are asking businesses to do that. We have got a two-tier system when it comes to voting, and we know why the government has done that – because the government hates business. The government hate business and say, ‘You know what, we want to get you off the roll. We want to ensure that you vote wherever we can get more Greens councillors on board, more Labor councillors, but at the end of the day, let’s ensure that businesses do not get a say.’ Businesses are struggling hard enough without having to do more regulation and fill in a voting paper to say ‘I want to vote’ and register to vote before having to vote. Let us not make it harder for business, let us actually make it easier for business. If you want an example about what we would do on our side versus what Labor do on their side, we would make it easier for businesses to have a say, we would make it easier for businesses to run their business and we would make it easier for businesses to employ more people. The largest employer of anybody is small business; 90 per cent of people that are employed by business are employed by small business. They are the backbone and the engine room of the economy. That is why we need to back them, not sack them, like this government has done when it comes to voting.

On other legislation points, we have supported a number of those amendments because we believe this is really important. We support the removal of group voting tickets from City of Melbourne elections. That is certainly consistent with what we have done in the other place when it comes to group voting tickets more generally. They are clauses 1, 10 and 13. We also support clauses 3, 4, 5, 11 and 14 when it comes to the deputy lord mayor vacancy being filled by appointment. That amendment avoids a costly by-election for City of Melbourne ratepayers. Of course this is sensible stuff. Why send people off to another election? When, again, what we have is a fine deputy mayor, by the way – Roshena Campbell – who has done an outstanding job when it comes to tourism in the city and when it comes to planning in the city. She will do a great job when she comes into the other place as well, and she will teach a thing or two to many –

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: Many on the other side of the house are quite jealous because they will not be returned in November, whereas Roshena Campbell will be, with real experience, with real know-how, with a can-do attitude and, guess what, for those opposite, she actually knows a thing or two about business and will back business. There will be confidence back in this state under Roshena Campbell, and we are looking forward to having Roshena join us in the other place. She will contribute greatly to the debate and greatly to the future of this state and will ensure that we have small businesses properly represented. I acknowledge that and, at the same time, I acknowledge the government’s support of our amendment with this to ensure that we avoid a costly by-election, which of course is ridiculous when it is only a few months out from an election.

We also support new clauses 18A and 18B, on arbitration guidelines and extending the application window from three to six months and on publishing guidelines to give councillors more certainty in arbitration. The longer window gives more scope for vexatious complaints, but the change is modest. Again, we have seen this happen many times. We have vexatious claims on councillors. They need to be sorted out. When it comes to cost, these are additional costs that are incurred. Dealing with those matters is important where we can do those. The last one that we are also supporting is clause 21, which is the principal councillor conduct register, to publish model code arbitration guidelines. We

supported that in the Council. Dealing with arbitration issues and largely being able to sort those out again minimises the cost involved in doing it in any other proposed way.

There are real issues in this bill when it comes to businesses having their say. I acknowledge that it really demonstrates the lack of care of this government and certainly its lack of acknowledgement of the great contributions small businesses make in our city and in our state. We do not support that. We will back business to the hilt. They are the engine room; they drive small business. The CBD of Melbourne has been through hell and back. Those businesses have been through hell and back. We have seen a 4 per cent vacancy of small businesses, and we are in double digits when it comes to general occupancy in this state. We have got to change that. We have got to reset. It starts with Melbourne – it starts with confidence – and we will work with business to ensure we reset and restart our economy and restart the CBD. We will not work against them. It is a commitment under a Wilson-led government that we will ensure that Victoria gets back the reputation it had.

I cannot wait to get our most livable city reputation back in this state. But you will not get that under this Labor lousy lot, and you will certainly not get that when you have got a Labor lousy lot with a Greens coalition. That is the worst, worst outcome that Victorians could have come November. Victorians need to really think long and hard: do we want a Labor government with Greens coalition? Do we want that? Can we risk that? I think the answer is no, because if you think that we are heading towards a rust-bucket state, you wait and see if you get the Greens in coalition with Labor what they would do to this great state. I will tell you what, they will sell us down the river – that is what this government intends to do. That is why we must think long and hard when it comes to November, ensure that our vote counts, forget about those Greens and absolutely send Labor a message: it is time for a fresh start, Victoria.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:42): I actually do not like hearing my city trashed. Melbourne is ranked as Australia's most livable city and third in the world, according to the *Global Liveability Index 2026* by the Economist Intelligence Unit. I think Melbourne is bloody fantastic, but it is being endorsed globally. Those opposite take any opportunity to talk our beautiful city down.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Maybe they do. And, hey, they want to join up with One Nation. I would not be too proud of that. So, take them apples. But anyway, I rise to speak on the amendments to the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026. These amendments improve what was already a substantial reform package designed to strengthen integrity, accountability and governance in local government. It responds to recommendations from IBAC's Operation Sandon, reflects issues raised through the Whittlesea commission of inquiry, supports fairer and more secure work through the framework for a local government fair jobs code and regulator, and improves council operations and decision-making across the sector.

The other thing I just want to mention about how we support businesses, perhaps in the CBD particularly but not only, is our major events calendar – our jam-packed major events calendar. The Australian Open, Cartier exhibition, Boxing Day test, grand prix, NFL and AFL combined contribute \$3.64 billion to the state's economy. When you talk about how we back in our businesses, this is a key way that we do it. Again, putting it down to one councillor that has done all this magic – I am not taking anything away from the work of the City of Melbourne, but the state also plays a major part in helping to support our businesses in our wonderful city of Melbourne.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (11:44): I also rise to speak on the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Act 2026 and in particular those amendments that would make elections in the City of Melbourne fairer, more transparent and more democratic. These are simple, they are sensible and they are overdue. I am proud to say that they came from the Greens in negotiations with the government. I would also like to thank the minister, the government and the Premier's office for their negotiations in good faith over something that will strengthen our democracy.

Two of these amendments for democracy in the City of Melbourne would not have happened without the Greens. They were not proposed by the Labor government initially and they happened because the government did need the Greens votes to pass this bill, and our support was contingent on changing the incredibly archaic City of Melbourne voting system that sees residents' votes watered down in favour of big business, which skews democracy in our central city. Yes, this is what you get when you have Greens in power. You get more democracy, you get more transparency and you get more say for residents, and all of those are good for people in Victoria, because for too long residents who live in the City of Melbourne have had less democracy than everyone else in the state. That is not fair. It is not fair that just because you live in the City of Melbourne you get less democracy than everywhere else. It is fundamentally undemocratic, and I am so pleased that we are going some way towards changing that today.

The first amendment abolishes group voting tickets in the City of Melbourne. This Parliament has only recently gotten rid of group voting tickets and preference whispering at state elections for our upper house. We did that because this Parliament recognised that it is fundamentally undemocratic for parties and backroom preference whisperers rather than voters to decide where their preferences flow at an election. Once we removed that archaic system at our state elections for the upper house, the only place in the entire country where these dodgy group voting tickets remained was the City of Melbourne. But we in the Greens fundamentally believe that voters in the City of Melbourne deserve democracy the same as everyone else and that residents of the City of Melbourne deserve to be able to determine where their own preferences go. They should not be determined by backroom political party deals or paid preference whisperers who use our democracy as a way to make money.

When a voter puts a 1 in a box above the line on their ballot, their preferences could travel through deals that they never witnessed, that they did not know anything about, to candidates that they had never heard of and may never have supported. In fact they might vote for one party and have their preferences end up with a party that had fundamentally the opposite view to the first party that they voted for. That is not democracy; it is people profiting off and gaming a flaw in our election system, a flaw that everyone else in the country had gotten rid of except for Victoria and except for the City of Melbourne. My colleague Dr Tim Read campaigned tirelessly against these dodgy group voting tickets. When the state reforms passed the Assembly, he said he hoped to see them also removed from the City of Melbourne but that he worried that that might be something that was kicked off into the future as a matter for another day. I am very glad that he got to live to see these amendments pass through the upper house and that we are finally finishing that job today. I am proud that it is something the Greens have long campaigned for and that we were able to use our powers to effect this change to improve our democracy.

The second amendment ends the automatic enrolment of businesses and nonresident property owners to ensure that it is residents in the City of Melbourne who get to decide who is elected to their council and the key position of Lord Mayor, not businesses and not landlords who do not live in the city. In every other Victorian council, nonresident owners, such as people who own property but do not actually live in the council area, get to vote in council elections but they have to opt in. They have to enrol to vote. Yet the City of Melbourne, because it has its own act, works differently. Businesses and nonresident landlords are enrolled automatically and then fined if they do not vote. What that means is that the City of Melbourne actually has to spend huge amounts of time and money trawling through lists of businesses who have their headquarters in the city, including overseas businesses and interstate businesses. In fact officers are even employed to walk up and down the streets of our suburbs in the City of Melbourne to note down the names of businesses that are there. Then they automatically put the names of two directors of these businesses onto the electoral roll without them knowing about it, without their consent, and they send them a ballot. These people might be in Singapore, they might be overseas, they might be in Queensland – we do not know. They are just the top two directors, often, on the business's board. They send them a ballot, and then they send them a warning that says they will be fined if they do not return that ballot. Not only is it undemocratic, it is actually a huge cost to the ratepayers of the City of Melbourne to have to undertake this exercise at every single election.

I was interested to hear the contribution of the member for Caulfield, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, because I thought that the Liberal Party would not want ratepayers money to go to something as wasteful as this. I thought that the Liberal Party was all about reining in wasteful spending, yet his contribution indicated that the Liberal Party wanted to continue to have the City of Melbourne use a huge amount of ratepayer money on this unnecessary and incredibly costly exercise. It does not make any sense to me. In this instance it is actually the Greens who are the fiscally responsible ones who are trying to rein in waste and save money and also protect our democracy.

The effect of this automatic enrolment of businesses and nonresident landlords and investors is, in effect, to compel large numbers of disengaged landlords, investors and businesses to vote, even those who have absolutely no stake in the decisions of council. I want to give you one example that one of my constituents sent me that she found on Reddit. There was a Reddit thread that was titled 'Melbourne city Council election. Sydney voters?' and this is the message. It says:

My friend has no affiliation with a business or residency in Victoria. They aren't even a citizen of Australia. Why would they be asked to vote on the Melbourne city council elections?

They are asking Reddit why their friend has been sent a ballot and told that they have to vote in the City of Melbourne. Then they did some digging and came back with an answer. They said:

Solved! Their Melbourne based accountant created a family trust company in their name, using the accountants address –

and clearly that accountant was in the City of Melbourne –

Pretty crazy that entitles a non citizen to vote.

This is the kind of thing that is happening in the City of Melbourne. Potentially this one accountant was doing this with their one address in the City of Melbourne for dozens or hundreds of different people, creating family trusts and then needing an address, innocently putting down their City of Melbourne CBD address as the address that was linked to that family trust, and then all of a sudden those family trusts get two votes in the City of Melbourne, they automatically get sent ballots and then they get fined if they do not vote. These are people who live interstate or overseas, and in this case someone who is not even a citizen. This is what was happening in the City of Melbourne and the aberration to our democracy.

What it resulted in was the number of businesses, nonresident investors and landlords outweighing and diluting the voices of people who actually lived in the city, people who actually used its services and are affected by the decisions of council. Those of us who actually live in the City of Melbourne – I am one of them – are the ones who are affected by the decisions of council about how our rates are spent, who is elected as lord mayor and who is elected to our council. We are the ones who feel those decisions in our maternal health services, in our local parks, in all the services that the City of Melbourne provide. This dilution and outweighing of the residents' vote was very, very stark. The minister mentioned in his contribution that nonresident owners of property and businesses made up nearly 60 per cent of the electoral roll in the City of Melbourne. That means that residents in the City of Melbourne only got 40 per cent of the votes in the City of Melbourne, which is just outrageous when you think about it. When you combine that with a system that already gives businesses two votes to a resident's one – remember that in the City of Melbourne businesses still get two votes and residents only get one – it compounds this problem and you get a structural, built-in corporate bias in how the city is governed.

Let us be clear, under these amendments businesses still get to vote. We accept that small businesses that operate and are based in the City of Melbourne have a stake in what happens in the City of Melbourne – the decisions that are made. They still get to vote. All they have to do is enrol, just like in every other council area in the entire state. This means that this system was fundamentally undemocratic. Even New South Wales acknowledged this. They recognised it years ago, because they had a system that was similar to this, and they reformed it. They changed it at the City of Sydney.

They removed automatic enrolment of nonresident and business voters. The minister who did that at the time described the old arrangements which still existed in the City of Melbourne as something North Korea would be proud of. I do not think we want a voting system that North Korea would be proud of. I think we want a democracy here in the City of Melbourne. If our neighbours in Sydney could fix it, so could we, and I am glad that we are.

They are not new ideas; the Greens have moved these amendments before. Council candidates from across the spectrum – many, many different political parties – once they run for council, realise how broken the system is and they join the campaign to try and fix it. Many council candidates and lord mayor candidates have asked for this system to be overhauled. Labor's own state conference in fact called for one vote, one value in the city in their own motion last year. So the question for us in this house is: if we believe in democracy and integrity in our voting system; if we believe that voters, not deals, should decide elections; and if we believe that residents should not be outweighed by businesses and corporations and absentee investors, then it is incumbent upon us to support the amendments that are before us today. One resident, one vote, one value – that is how democracy should work, and we have a chance to do that today in the City of Melbourne.

There were two other amendments that the Greens moved in the upper house that Labor and the Liberals would not support. One was to ban donations from property developers and other corporate interests to councillors and put a cap on donations to councillors and council candidates. That was one of them, because these reforms, we believe, are part of a bigger conversation about integrity in the City of Melbourne. At the 2024 council elections Lord Mayor Nick Reece, who is a former member of the Labor Party, received close to \$1 million in donations, including tens of thousands from donors with property interests – property developers and those with pending developments in the City of Melbourne. Because of that, Nick Reece, the Lord Mayor, and his team that were elected with him have had to recuse themselves from planning decisions in the City of Melbourne council at least eight times. That is incredibly disruptive to our council. It is bad for our democracy. It is bad for good governance and decision-making when half a council have to walk out of the council chamber when a decision is before them because they have a perceived conflict of interest.

I am not suggesting that these donations influenced any specific decisions that he or his team made, and those decisions were perfectly lawful when he accepted them – and to his credit, he has argued for the system to change. But isn't that exactly the problem – that it is lawful to take these huge donations from property developers who have a clear interest in what happens in council decisions, where council decisions can enrich a property developer? We have seen IBAC reports specifically recommend that this needs to be changed because of the corrupting influence that donations, particularly from property developers, have on our council decisions. When the rules allow these kinds of donations, they create, at the very least, a perception of conflict of interest, and that perception alone damages public trust in our democracy.

Residents deserve a system that is fair in practice and also fair in appearance. That means not just fixing who gets to vote and how preferences flow, as we are doing today, but also who gets to bankroll campaigns when it comes to council. For state elections we have rules that no single person or business can donate more than about \$5000 in one election cycle period, and that is to ensure that big money cannot influence our politics. Labor, when we did those donation laws a number of years ago, promised to also institute these laws for council. But unsurprisingly, Labor backtracked and broke that promise. Now they have also voted against Greens amendments to ban dodgy property developer and corporate donations to council. It is disappointing that we had the opportunity to fix this with this bill and Labor refused to. They will continue to allow big money to influence our council politics, which is terrible for our residents, terrible for Victorians and terrible for democracy.

The other amendment that we attempted to move but that was blocked by the Labor and Liberal parties was to remove the double vote that businesses get. I think Victorians would be absolutely appalled to learn that while residents in the City of Melbourne are entitled to just one vote like everybody else, businesses get two votes in the City of Melbourne. That is right, a business vote is essentially weighted

double that of an ordinary resident. The Greens believe that businesses and nonresident investors should not really get any votes, but as I mentioned, they still will get votes under this system. Businesses do not get to vote at state or federal elections. Why do they get to vote at council elections? But even if we have a disagreement on businesses being able to vote, surely we could all agree that just one category of voter getting double the votes of everyone else is an absolute abomination. This plural voting was a feature, apparently, of 19th- and 20th-century councils in different places. It was officially abolished in Melbourne in 1969 but then reintroduced in 1993 by Jeff Kennett, and really that says all you need to know about the intentions behind the double business vote.

We live in a democracy. That means people get to decide who they elect and that people get to decide what happens in our halls of decision-making, not people who have a huge amount of money and not corporations. Corporations are not people, people are people. How much money you have, whether you have a business interest or whether under capitalism you have been able to amass an amount of capital to buy a business, should not determine that you get more votes than anybody else in this state. That is a fundamental principle of living in a democratic society, and yet we do not have that in the City of Melbourne. I think that is incredibly archaic.

I would say that it is incredibly disappointing that Labor refused to get rid of the double business vote in this bill while they had the chance, and it is certainly something that I will be fighting hard to get rid of as we head into the November election. Let us be clear, the Greens are fighting to get rid of the double business vote in the City of Melbourne at this state election. Labor and the Liberals want to keep the double business vote. Labor and the Liberals want to keep the system, an abomination of our democracy, where businesses and corporations get two votes in the City of Melbourne while everybody else – residents – gets only one each. This is a perversion of democracy. A fundamental principle of democracy is one vote, one value – that everyone's vote should count for the same value. Only the Greens are fighting to end this double business vote abomination, and anyone else who believes that we should have a principle of one vote, one value in our democracy should vote Greens at the November state election, because we are the only ones who are fighting for residents to have an equal say in our democracy.

Fortunately, though, the Greens amendment that went through that got rid of automatic enrolment of businesses will go some way to levelling the playing field of our democracy. While businesses will still get two votes to residents' one, it will get rid of the bizarre practice of two directors from a business automatically getting added to the roll, and that will significantly weight power back into residents' hands where it belongs. We were also able to get the government to agree to a review of the City of Melbourne Act 2001 in this term of Parliament, not contingent on the election outcome and not after the election, and we hope that these issues, the issues of getting rid of dodgy donations to councils and the issues of the double business vote, will be taken up as part of this review. I would like to thank my Greens colleagues, volunteers, council candidates and branch members for their hard work on this and my Greens MP colleagues for their tough negotiations to make democracy actually work for residents in the City of Melbourne, something that nobody else has been able to achieve since Kennett introduced these reforms.

We will also be supporting the amendment that means we do not need a costly by-election if the deputy lord mayor steps down – for example, to run for election, as the Liberal deputy lord mayor is doing. Our democracy is precious. We need to defend it. These Greens amendments go a large part of the way to fixing some of the biggest holes in our democracy in the City of Melbourne, and I very much commend them to the house.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the decision of the house.

*Motions***Dental services**

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (12:04): I move:

That this house:

- (a) commends the Carroll Labor government for committing to free dental care for all Victorians;
- (b) recognises this investment will ease cost-of-living pressures and improve access to essential health care; and
- (c) condemns Liberals' and One Nation's \$40 billion in cuts, which threaten essential services relied upon by Victorian families.

Right across Victoria families are putting off going to the dentist for the simple fact that they cannot afford it. They know something is wrong; they know they need to get something looked at. But the rent or mortgage is due, the groceries have to be bought and there is very little left at the end of the week, so they put themselves last. Parents make sure their children are looked after first then put their own health later. People go to work in pain because they cannot afford the bill and they cannot afford to do something about it. Putting it off can mean a bigger problem, more pain and a bigger bill. That should trouble every member of this house, because behind every appointment put off is someone who needs care and a family trying to make ends meet.

A government ought to understand that pressure, and a government ought to do something to ease it. That is why a re-elected Labor government will deliver free dental care for all Victorians. We believe being able to get health care should not depend on where you live, the size of your wallet or whether you can afford it. This is a Labor value. This is a Labor belief, the belief that gave us Medicare, and it is why we cannot accept that so many Victorians are going without the dental care they need. Almost 10,000 Victorians a year are raiding their superannuation to pay for dental work. The average withdrawal is \$25,000. Think about that: money a person has worked for, put aside for their retirement and spent because they cannot afford otherwise to get their teeth fixed. We have a responsibility to do something about it.

Our commitment starts with 10 free public dental clinics right across Victoria. They will be open to everyone: adults and children. They will operate every day, with every Victorian resident able to attend a free check-up each year. Once up and running, these clinics will treat more than 100,000 Victorians a year. Ten clinics is just the start. This is a new statewide service that will put families first and a statewide service that families can rely on. A parent will be able to book that check-up instead of putting it off again. A worker will be able to get their teeth looked at before a small problem becomes a painful, expensive bigger one. Families will have one less bill to worry about. That matters. It means more money left for groceries, the rent or something the kids need. It means people getting in earlier and spending less because they are getting the care they need at a time when they are in grave pain. It means a government taking some of the pressure off working people who work hard every single day doing the right thing but still struggle to make ends meet. Nothing could be more Labor than that.

I know this investment has a cost, and I believe it is worth every single cent. You cannot build a strong community or a strong economy without healthy families. Government must invest in the care families need and the services that give them a better life. Those opposite have a very different idea. The Liberals and One Nation want to rip \$40 billion out of the services families rely on every single year. They should stand up in this house and explain where that will come from – which hospitals, which schools and which services they think families can manage without. We know what happened last time the Liberals were in government. They cut \$1 billion from health. They cut \$1 billion from education. They went to war with our paramedics. They even cut Free Fruit Friday. That is how miserable they are. They stole fruit off kids. That tells you every value. They put a press release out on a Sunday highlighting the schools that they would cut. This is what they will do. They will highlight the schools they will cut. They will also cut more services that everyday Victorians rely on. And, you know what, they will do it with One Nation. A Wilson–Pickering government will cut the very social

fabric that Labor has built up in this state. People know you cannot help a family when you are cutting the services they rely on. You cannot do anything you want to do. Working people deserve the support they need.

That is why the choice is very clear: a Labor government fighting for working people or a Liberal–One Nation government that will hurt working people, go after education and go after health and everything they can. Working people rely on working governments. A Labor government will always make life easier for working people. Only a re-elected Labor government will deliver free dental, because we are on the side of health care. We protected Medicare. We will protect free dental. This is the Labor way, not \$40 billion of cuts and not cutting over 30,000 jobs from hardworking Victorians.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (12:10): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion, to make some reflections on what is at stake in November and to follow on from the Premier and his contribution about what we see from those opposite and what we are looking at when it comes to these matters. We know that those opposite – I am sure throughout the journey of the motion that is before the house this afternoon – will categorise this motion as irrelevant, perhaps saying it does not matter or perhaps saying it is not important, but we know on this side of the house that nothing could be further from the truth. That is because, as the Premier has just outlined, this is a government that focuses on investment – investment in health, investment in education and investment in Victoria for Victorians.

What we just heard from the Premier and what we covered last week was the startling report, the damaging report, that came out in relation to the proposition that we see from those opposite. Let us just have a look at some of these numbers, if we can. A Liberal–One Nation government will strip \$40 billion from Victorians, and that will have a serious, tangible and practical effect. That is saying cuts to schools, cuts to hospitals and, as the Premier just outlined, 30,000 jobs gone. That is in an environment where we see a growing population in this state. We see more pressure on services. I can see over there the fantastic, hardworking member for Melton, my electorate neighbour, and we know, being out there in the growing corridors, we need to make sure that we keep investing. That is why, whether you look at places like Sunbury, whether you look at places like Melton or whether you look out in the south-east or in the fast-growing west, we on this side of the house know that that investment makes a difference. That investment is about building new schools, about creating new jobs and about investing in transport. What we see –

Brad Battin: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Josh BULL: I will continue where I left off. It might be tricky for those opposite to hear and understand what those cuts are going to mean for Victorians. For those that rely on our hospitals, our roads and our schools, this investment is indeed critically important. What is also very important, as was well canvassed by the Premier, is our investment in dental care. To have the Premier make such a significant and important announcement in Tullamarine in my electorate about a month ago, to see the difference when you speak to people in local communities when it comes to dental care, is something that is genuinely important to communities. Dental hygiene, we know, is so important. With dental care, putting off that really important work that you need when you or a member of your family is in a significant amount of pain and making that choice between, as the Premier said, perhaps tapping into funds that you rely on and that you need –

Brad Battin: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house. If Labor members cannot stay in here, you cannot hold quorum.

Quorum formed.

Josh BULL: I am pleased to make a continued contribution for the second time now and to go to some of the matters that are in the motion before the house this afternoon. What I think is really clear

is that we on this side of the house are not focused on cheap stunts but focused on Victorians. The Premier knows and I know that every single member on this side of the house is not focused on the theatrics of the house. He is focused on talking to Victorians about something that is really important, and that is their dental care. He is focused on talking to Victorians about better schools and better hospitals and on making sure that we are delivering for those Victorians. I think what we see before the house time and again are so many of those cheap stunts that we get from those opposite, which are in stark contrast to the facts and the figures and the hard work that is done by this government.

I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge those that have put in the significant amount of work that goes into these commitments. I had the opportunity to have the Premier in my electorate just some time ago to meet with some amazing people at Omnia Community Health who do some extraordinary work when it comes to dental care in our state. To be able to listen to those staff and to be able to understand the important work that they do in dental health is something that I know this government very much values and will continue to value each and every day.

Those cuts which have been outlined in the report by the Australia Institute will be put to Victorians in November. What I think we are now seeing is the stark contrast as the contest sharpens and Victorians really turn their mind to what they are going to see from a Liberal–One Nation coalition versus a government that continually invests in health and education and the things that matter. This is something that is indeed very important to those on this side of the house, but more important than anyone in this chamber is every single Victorian that relies on these services. We know – this side of the house knows, the Carroll Labor government knows – that we need to make sure we continue to do this work. This is important work. The opportunity to be able to get the health care that you need without going broke and the opportunity to be able to walk in and to be able to go to an urgent care clinic or in the case of this motion – this commitment – a dental care opportunity for you and your family are all things that are vitally important. If those on the other side of the chamber do not see that, then that is their loss. We are focused on making sure that we are there providing the care that local communities need, and we will continue to do that important work each and every day.

What we saw in the Australia Institute report were, frankly, some devastating figures: the 30,000 job losses that the Premier mentioned and the significant and important cuts to health and education. We are not going to stand for that. Whether it is today, tomorrow or all the way as we march to November, we are going to be talking about this because it matters to Victorians, and this is the important work that is done. I want to acknowledge, as I said earlier, the important opportunity that this presents for this government to be able to explain to local communities, whether you live in Melton, whether you live in Sunbury or whether you live in Greenvale, that these are important matters. I commend the motion to the house.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:20): I am really happy to stand up and talk about something that matters to working families in my community, and that is dental care, because right now there are people in my community that are in pain because they are putting off going to the dentist. The reason they are putting it off is because they cannot afford it. It is as simple as that. It is a bit of a self-indulgent story, but when I lived in Myanmar, I developed gum and tooth pain, and I had no way to get the treatment that I needed and I had to wait until I was in New Delhi for a meeting to finally be able to go to the dentist. Isn't it crazy that for some people in Victoria they may as well be in another country because they cannot get access? Even though they are surrounded by dentists and dental clinics, they do not have access to the dentists. The barrier is not a border between countries and is not the status of the country they are in, it is simply a lack of funding. They may as well be in remote Myanmar, where I was. But we are in Victoria, and it should not be that way, which is why we are making dental care free.

The other week I met a woman in my community who had recently had two teeth removed. She was serving at the shop in Mernda. Having those teeth removed, she told me, had cost her \$1200. As she was there serving me, she was in pain on the other side of her mouth, so I asked her, 'Are you going to go back to the dentist?' No, she is not going back. It is not the pain of having her teeth dealt with

that she is scared of; it is the cost. She is too scared that she will be up for that amount of money again. So there she is at work, struggling with the pain in her mouth and serving customers. For her, dental care is also out of reach. That is something that this government is not willing to accept, which is why we have announced 10 free dental clinics across the state. This is happening right across Victoria.

You can imagine, if a budget at home gets tight, what is getting paid first. It is the mortgage or the rent, and then it is the food, school needs for the children – shoes et cetera – electricity and petrol. They are the things that get paid first. Pushed down and down the list of course is the dentist. It gets put off. That toothache does not care about the family budget. It is not influenced by your family budget. That toothache is there. Infection does not wait until payday. That pain is there until it is dealt with. That is why we are doing something so significant in bringing forward something that should, we believe, be available across the nation. Of course Victoria is leading the way, as we have seen in so many other sectors, to make dental care free and available for adults and children. We expect more than 100,000 Victorians to be able to access this care once it is fully operational. It is real cost-of-living relief. It is not a voucher. It is not a one-off thing. It is something that is structurally there that you can build into your family budgeting and assumptions, to know that the government has got your back on this really important part of your health care. It is a permanent public service.

I think about Smile Squad. Smile Squad is in my community at the moment, I believe, at Mernda Park Primary School. They have recently been at my child's local state school doing the teeth there. Moving around my community, when I see the Smile Squad van at the schools, I feel really, really pleased. I have spoken to the dentists and dental technicians that work in my local schools, and they have told me that some of the kids they are seeing really needed to see a dentist. It is not the case that our young people have perfect teeth. They need the dentist, even from a young age, and we are providing that free dental care. I am also really pleased that free dental care is being expanded to low-fee non-government schools, because we know a lot of families that are doing it a bit tough do make sacrifices to send their child to their school of choice, usually due to religious belief, so I am glad that we are also enabling those children to have access to free dental care. I know it will mean a lot to their families.

Part of the difficulty with the dentist is not just the cost but the time and the life admin. If you think about the short window after school and getting kids to the dentist, they are the appointments that fill up fast. Trust me, Acting Speaker Walters, this is something you will come to know well. They are fought over, those appointments, 4 o'clock or 4:30 at the dentist. Oftentimes it is the case that Mum or Dad need to take time off work to take their child to the dentist, and then there is the cost. The cost is measured not just in money but also in the time that is taken by families away from work, potentially with reduced income, to make sure their children get dental care that is needed. Smile Squad is a great benefit for not just the child but also the families. All of the benefits that I have just laid out are at risk. They are at risk because those opposite are focused on stripping back, cancelling and cutting services that working families depend on and that working families are looking forward to receiving under a re-elected Labor government. They do not care. Famously they are the party that cut Free Fruit Friday. They are not going to think twice about cutting our Smile Squads, and they certainly have not come forward to match our commitment on free dental care for Victorians.

With those opposite you are on your own. It is each person for themselves. You are on your own. If you listen carefully to their rhetoric, they are very much focused on what they call 'reward for effort'. I was about to go down a big biblical gospel analysis path, which I will not. But there is a sense that if you are having a good life and things are working out well for you, you have probably put effort in, and if your life is maybe a bit tougher, if you just pulled yourself up by your bootstraps a bit more, maybe you too would have a good life. That is the basic Liberal promise, and it is a fallacy. We know that people that work incredibly hard cannot always make ends meet, and it is not through a failure of effort and it is not through a failure of character; it is through a failure of government. I am looking at those opposite because they refuse to provide a steady foundation under the feet of people who deserve support. They make aspersions about people's character. They wish to make sure that the interests of their backers are put before working families, and they have an absolute ignorance when it comes to

the reality of daily life for families and what the day before payday is like for a family, when it is 2-minute noodles for dinner or duct tape to tighten up the school shoe when the sole comes off. They are not interested. They do not care about this reality for families.

But looking around on this side of the chamber I see a group of people who go door to door in their communities, meet people where they are, care for them as they are and are not asking them to change and fit into the mould of those opposite or a monoculture. We are a group of people that seek to be that support for Victorians, for working families and for those that are doing it tough, because we believe that the social contract is worth something and believe that we have a responsibility to provide for Victorians the quality of life that they deserve, and Victorians do not deserve to have that mob opposite come into power and take away what they rely on for a good life. Those opposite care about their own personal lives, their personal careers and their trajectories, while those on this side care about making sure that people in our community have what they need when they need it, and they know that the government is always there ready to support them with their next step in life.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (12:30): If you do not care about your teeth, then you should vote for the One Nation–Liberal coalition. If you do not care about your teeth, that is what you should do. We are at a sliding doors moment in Victoria. We are at a point in time where we have free dental care right in front of us for every Victorian, or we have the anti-fluoridation mob who reckon there is some sort of world global conspiracy, some 15-minute city-type people. When they got into power in Queensland under Campbell Newman, that is exactly what they did working together, One Nation and the Liberal Party. It was a social and economic disaster for the people in Queensland who missed out on fluoridation. Twenty years ago they said in Queensland that it was costing the state a billion dollars not having fluoridation across the state because it had a health impact. One in four kids going to Queensland hospitals at that time was because of problems with their teeth and dental hygiene – one in four kids. Imagine that in your health system, one in four kids having to turn up for that reason. In the six years after fluoridation was added to communities there was a 40 per cent reduction in tooth decay. Of course there was. People listened to the science.

But that mob opposite, those who seek to be in Parliament and those people opposite who seek to lead the state, have no idea. They will be at the whim of conspiracy nutters, if they are not the ones actually sitting in Parliament themselves. That is the real issue here. That is what is at stake for Victoria. If Labor is re-elected, we will have 10 free public dental clinics across the state, with three in regional Victoria. Last time the Liberal–Nationals and One Nation delivered anything for regional Victoria, my God. What they delivered in Queensland was bad teeth, more hospitalisations, more cost to the economy and more pain. All of us know the pain of a problem with your teeth. We all know that. It is debilitating. Yet as policy those opposite are up for that. They are up for pain and suffering in this state, pain and suffering in particular of children and older people, because of their weird thoughts on science, they are anti-science.

For tens of thousands of Victorians who cannot afford a dentist, we will make that available. We expect that these dental clinics will see 100,000 Victorians a year. They will be open from 9 to 9 on weekdays and 9 to 5 on weekends – available. At least 30,000 Victorians currently raid their super to get dental work done. This is unacceptable and this is why we need to act. For the community that I represent in Point Cook, we are building a community hospital. One of the top three things that I asked Western Health to deliver was more public dental chairs. They agreed because we are down in the western suburbs and we need to do that catch-up. I hope to see, and I expect to see, one of these public dental clinics in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It is the right place to locate it. Maybe I will say one at minimum. We will have that advocacy from me. The member for Melton and the member for Werribee are nodding along with me right now on that advocacy. The member for Lara will join me. Of course wherever they are located they will improve the lives of the community around them.

I want to talk a little bit about why dental care and free public dental care matter. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare updated their report in August of this year. They talked about how good oral hygiene and health and wellbeing are fundamental. The ability to speak, to eat and to

socialise are all impacted by dental hygiene. One of the few indicators of class in this country is to look in somebody's mouth. It is one of the few indicators of class that we have, because bad teeth say you are poor. Bad teeth say you will not get the job that you are interviewing for. Bad teeth define your experience in this country, and that is why free dental care is so important. I hope our federal colleagues hear this as well: 4.2 per cent of all the burden that nonfatal diseases placed on the community in 2024 was because of poor dental hygiene. The health deterioration – and I am quoting from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report – over a lifetime is shocking: five- to 10-year-olds have 1.5 teeth decayed, missing or filled. Fortunately, six- to 14-year-olds get that down to 0.5 in that transition from baby teeth to adult teeth. There are some great programs in Victoria that we have really led on, including dental care in schools. That has been a real game changer, serving over 175,000 Victorian students. Fifteen- to 34-year-olds have 4.1 teeth decayed, missing or filled and 35- to 54-year-olds have 10.3 teeth decayed, missing or filled. When you hit 55 to 74, on average 19.4 teeth are decayed, missing or filled. That means on average you have got 12 good ones. When you hit 75 years old, 24.4 of your teeth, on average, are decayed, missing or filled – seven good teeth over the age of 75. That is not right. That is not something that we should stand for. There are many reasons for this to happen. We know that 56 per cent of Australians saw a dentist in the last 12 months. Fifteen per cent of people aged over 75 – that is those people with seven good teeth – had not seen a dentist in the last five years. For the whole population, 11.4 per cent had not seen a dentist in the last five years. Of course we should do something about it.

That is why there is this risk of One Nation and the Liberal Party joining together and not only not delivering free dental care but actually taking dental care backward by decades – this anti-fluoridation mob. Do not listen to what they say before the election. Should they get the honour of forming government, look at what they do. They did that in Queensland, and this mob from Queensland are going to do exactly the same thing here. I have not heard the Liberal–National parties stand up and talk about free dental. I do not think ever in this chamber have I heard them talk about dental care at all. I rarely hear them talk about health care, but certainly they have not been talking about care for your teeth. What is the link between poor oral health and chronic disease? It goes to cardiovascular disease and heart attacks – a friend of mine had that occur to him because of poor oral care; oral cancers; diabetes; stroke; adverse pregnancy outcomes; and lung conditions. All of these are a result of poor dental hygiene. They have massive impacts on individuals and massive impacts on our economy and our community. This is what One Nation member Rosa Lee Long said when she was a member of Parliament up in Queensland:

A lot of our populous is dead against fluoride being put in the water. They've let us know loud and clearly that we don't want it.

I personally don't think it should be forced on anybody. I think if you like fluoride and are really keen on the idea, you should go and get the tablets.

I don't like dictatorship.

For her good health care – health care that protects children and protects our community – is the equivalent of a dictatorship. What are these guys thinking? Where did they come up with these ideas? I now quote from the Labor national platform:

Labor sees oral health as the missing element of Medicare. Our goal is to provide universal access to affordable dental services for all Australians.

This is a great step in that direction. Just like our urgent care clinics were nation leading, these are nation leading too, as they should be. We see the problem, and we are going to do something about that problem. That is what Labor has been doing in this state for the last 12 years. Should we get the honour and the privilege of being elected again, Victorians should expect the same: that we will work on those issues that are issues for every Victorian, not just those people with high levels of private health insurance. For every Victorian it should be a universal right. I invite the federal government to take a look at this, and I hope that Victorians in November will support the things that will make their futures better.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:40): When we are talking about dental care, it really is a critical part of health care. If you are going to have good nutrition, you have got to be able to eat a wide variety of foods. If you cannot chew properly, that will not only gravely impact your quality of life but also the ability to be able to have a wide variety of nutrients as well, unless everything is going to be pulverised, which does not sound very appealing. But I am just making a broader statement about why dental care is critical and is about a question of fairness and also about staying healthy throughout your life. We know that if something goes wrong orally – and I am talking about to do with your teeth – the ramifications for health can be even above and beyond that of nutrition et cetera, leading to other greater toxicity and other matters. This is where one would need to be a doctor to speak to those matters, but I am just saying that we know the ricochet effect can be dramatic and profound.

Only a re-elected Carroll Labor government will deliver free dental and boost Victoria's dental workforce. Labor's 10 free public dental clinics will create new jobs across the state – that is an important part of this reform – as part of our \$230 million investment. This includes 180 full-time equivalent roles created to operate 10 clinics. These clinics will be an Australian first, delivering structural cost-of-living relief to Victorians, because I have to say, unfortunately, it is a strong cost-of-living issue. This is why many people defer going to the dentist, simply because of the sheer cost involved. We know on the other side of the equation that having those regular cleans and check-ups is certainly a good preventative method in terms of hopefully being able to retain your teeth for as much of your life as possible. There is also that further equity proposition that has also been put to the chamber, and that is with regard to your capacity to successfully get through a job interview, because unfortunately a mouth without an appropriate coverage of teeth – and I am not sure how else to frame that, but I think we know what we are talking about – can have a severe and profound impact on your hopes of getting a job, which is also a further element of unfairness. That is what Labor is about in terms of righting the wrong and making sure that there is genuine equity in access to good dental health and support in our state.

I have to say, as I have been doorknocking around my seat, that when I talk to many people this particular reform is seen as having merit because you cannot escape having to go to the dentist – we all have to go – and it can really be a game changer when it comes to the issue of 'Do I pay my rent or do I go to the dentist?' You do not want to have to choose between those two key elements. Even just getting a check-up is one thing, but if you have to get a root canal you are looking at possibly thousands of dollars. That can be simply out of reach for many Victorians, and that is just not right. I am really actually proud of this reform as a collective because I know the difference it can make for so many Victorians. I think it really is the right thing to do, and I further that element that it would be good if our federal colleagues would take heed of these reforms as well.

When it comes to accessing good dental care, it should not be dictated by your postcode or your bank balance. That is why we are investing the additional \$12.9 million to grow and retain a strong workforce throughout the clinics. I should say that when you are looking at the cost-of-living issue, it is not just affecting the Victorians who need dental care; it is also making it harder for the next generation of Victorians hoping to pursue a career in dentistry. We do not always think about that, but of course we need to have good dentists and that succession planning et cetera for the future. The additional funding will secure a pipeline of future dental workers by investing in traineeships and study programs. This includes support for 30 dental assistant trainees and 20 dental graduates for the next two years as well. I know, having had, if you like, the privilege of being able to have regular dental care, it is a very delicate and nuanced space, and obviously it needs the utmost expertise, whether it is the dentist or the staff that are supporting the processes. It is also quite an anxiety-driven space for many people. I know I am probably going on a little tangent here, but it is not exactly the most pleasurable activity. Hence we do need to make sure that we have well-trained staff and good succession planning to be able to deliver on these reforms.

Thinking more broadly about the healthcare workforce, under Labor Victoria's health workforce has grown. This includes more than 40,000 additional nurses, midwives, doctors, allied health

professionals and hospital staff, while the on-road paramedic workforce has grown by 50 per cent. Only Labor is fighting for working people. Why am I mentioning these matters? I think it is really important for Victorians to know exactly what we are doing and why we are doing it but also for us to say, 'We've done this. We'll also bring about the dental care reforms.' Labor know that if you have not got your health, the quality of life just plummets in a nanosecond. It is absolutely vital; no-one gets out of needing to have good dental care. But above all else it certainly breaks my heart to think that some people in their lifetime hardly ever get good dental care. I just cannot imagine what that would be like. I certainly do not take it for granted. I feel a sense of gratitude that I can go to the dentist when I need to, and I want every other Victorian to have that right as well. We will actually all be better off because more prevention and more good dental care – as a continuum, as opposed to just going to the dentist when you are absolutely in the most critical stage in your life – is also a good thing. Certainly from an economic point of view it makes good sense as well, before matters get to a very serious stage.

Having said that, you cannot always predict which way your body is going to respond, and things do not always go as we plan, of course. This is why having this investment in free dental care in Victoria is so important. It is so that you do have somewhere to go, and it is good because it is going to operate seven days a week, which is actually important, because you do not know when you are going to have tooth pain. You cannot predict that necessarily will be on a Tuesday; it might be on Saturday night. Who knows when it is going to arise. Therefore having the convenience, in terms of the time and accessibility, is a really important part of this reform as well.

You can see it is a really practical reform. I have to say, as I referred to a little earlier on the many conversations that I have had on this issue in my local area, people certainly can see the why. They can absolutely see the why and appreciate that this is a good investment by our state Labor government, and it is certainly something that we absolutely will honour should we have the privilege of being re-elected as the Victorian government for this fine state of Victoria. It is certainly something to be proud of, but also it has been well thought through to make sure that we facilitate the free dental care and that it is accessible. It is not only in metro areas but also the regional areas. I think there are seven for the metro areas and then three for the regional areas.

We are also making sure that we do foster the pipeline of jobs that will be needed to support the dentistry and support the dentists themselves to be able to deliver that optimised health care for Victorians, because they deserve it. It is simply unfair to not be able to access good quality dental care in our state. As we know, with the way that we have significantly and substantially boosted the health workforce and furthermore nurse-to-patient ratios, this aptly reflects that we are good for it, because we have done it before and we will do it again. In terms of further profound investment in health care around our state, it is the right thing to do, but it is also leading to a healthier Victoria.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (12:50): It is a terrific pleasure and in fact it is with extraordinary enthusiasm that I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion. This motion is incredibly important, and I do join with others, the speakers and my colleagues on this side of the house, in commending the Carroll Labor government for committing to free dental care for all Victorians. I would like to do that by taking you on a journey back in time. In a previous life, a life that I led certainly before coming into this place and indeed when my children were young, I held a role in recruitment. I was supporting people to get into paid employment, and I loved everything about that role. I loved seeing people's aspirations met. But in fact perhaps on reflection the element of the role I enjoyed most was working with people who did not really see themselves as having the confidence to be able to undertake professional paid employment that would be able to contribute to their families. In particular for a few years I was working for a company that served a lot of people who were struggling with seeking paid employment, and I can tell you there were many themes to those people, who had often extraordinary attributes, amazing aspirations, diligence and commitment to hard work and, more than anything, a commitment to be able to support their families.

The barrier for so many people was poor oral health. In the most extreme cases – and there were more than I would like to be able to count – people were missing teeth and were in such dire health because

of the nature of their oral ill health that in every conversation they had with somebody, including me as a person trying to get them into work, they held their hands over their mouths. They were ashamed. They were ashamed that they were missing teeth, often missing more than one tooth, sometimes missing several front teeth. I think back in particular to a woman I met who had been working diligently in her family's business as a bookkeeper, had been supporting her young children on the kindergarten committee, had been helping out in all sorts of other places and was a single parent and really needed to get work. But she was missing her front teeth, and her mouth had so much decay that she was in constant pain. That matters. People need to get access to high-quality clinical dental care so they can live the lives that they deserve.

This motion is incredibly important, but more than that, the choice at this election has never been starker. Dental care is often treated as separate from health care, but for families this very real health cost has a cost-of-living implication as well. My colleagues and friends on this side of the chamber have already spoken with great eloquence, notably the member for Albert Park, about the clinical costs to people's physical wellbeing in having oral ill health. The member for Sunbury and of course the Premier in particular have spoken about why this is emblematic of a Labor commitment to the people of Victoria. And of course the member for Point Cook contrasted the scientifically based humane and decent approach of considering dental care and contrasted that with the consequences of a loopy, to be frank, One Nation party that would be forming the front bench, taking up seats in the cabinet with the Liberal–National coalition if they were to form government after November. The contrast could not be more significant.

We know that Medicare does not cover the cost of dental treatment, and that means families cannot have access to the type of medical care that they deserve. For growing communities like Cranbourne, access to affordable health care matters, because families are balancing mortgages; balancing rent; balancing the costs of groceries, transport, child care and all the other rising costs. Could there be anything that parents want more for their children than to be able to fulfil their aspirations? And could there be anything parents want more than for their children to be healthy?

Cranbourne has a special place in the history books as it relates to the Smile Squad, because the choice that we made to introduce the Smile Squad to provide free dental vans in government schools, and again to expand it to low-cost independent and Catholic schools, was born in Cranbourne. The first clinic – the first announcement that celebrated the importance of the Smile Squad – was in Cranbourne. It was with a group of young children, now eight years older than they were at the time, standing there with their toothbrushes in their hands and looking forward to what it would mean for our communities and the communities of so many people across the outer suburbs, regional Victoria, the inner suburbs – north, west, east, south-east in particular – to have access to high-quality dental care.

We have done it before. We said we would do it and we did it. We have rolled it out across schools across our state system in Victoria, then we have expanded it across into our low-fee Catholic and independent schools. The next step now is for us to make a commitment that we know we will fulfil for 10 clinics across the state. The member for Point Cook said that he will be fighting tooth and nail for his community to have access to one of these dental clinics. I can say I will be joining the member for Narre Warren North and other colleagues from the south-east to ensure that we have the services that we need in our community. I am sure, Acting Speaker Walters, that as the committed member for Greenvale you will be doing likewise, ensuring that your community has access to the quality of services and health care in particular that is needed.

We know that one of the key impediments to access is having dental care close to home. With these 10 dental clinics that the Carroll Labor government will be rolling out across the state – three in regional Victoria – we will be able to ensure that more people have access to this extraordinary and life-changing care, making sure that check-ups do provide treatment for fillings and for really important cleans as well. This can all be undertaken by professional oral health clinicians. This is going to be, as the member for Albert Park also identified, a key workforce commitment that will be fulfilled, as we have fulfilled other commitments that we have made around dental care. Those opposite might

say, 'You know, for the deserving poor the money will trickle down.' The money will trickle down despite the \$40 billion in cuts that have been planned and celebrated by those opposite. But we know on this side, as we form government, that we need to look to working families to ensure that people can have the access to the health care that they need.

Just in the final minute, I do want to pick up one of the elements of the debate that the member for Point Cook touched on, which is One Nation's views on health care. Often potentially amusing in previous decades, I think now we know the risks of some of their views on health care, particularly fluoride. The Secretary of Health and Human Services in the United States – I am conscious that One Nation want to Trumpify our healthcare system – has asked that there be a review of fluoride going into the water in the United States. In fact Utah, I just read recently, has stopped putting fluoride in water. Those opposite would need to form government with One Nation, and these are the kooky policies that they will endorse.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. \$15 billion was siphoned off the Big Build while the Premier sat around the cabinet table. Will the Premier write to the royal commissioner and ask to appear as a witness prior to the 28 November election?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. Member for Berwick! Members will still be removed from the chamber, even though it is the second-last question time.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:03): The Leader of the Opposition said she would have a royal commission up by Christmas. I called for one on day one, and it is being delivered on day one, and everyone is accountable.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Brighton can leave the chamber for half an hour. Other members will be asked to leave as well. Members, I am on my feet. Premier, I ask you to address your comments through the Chair.

Member for Brighton withdrew from chamber.

Ben CARROLL: I announced the royal commission on the very first day I became Premier and, if anyone has not noticed, hearings have started today. The Leader of the Opposition promised a royal commission by Christmas. On radio last week she said she would hand down the harshest mini-budget in Victoria's history by Christmas.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, does 'everyone' include you, Premier?

The SPEAKER: Member for South-West Coast, you are warned. That is not the correct way to raise a point of order.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): I will take it as a no. The Premier said that integrity will no longer be optional. If integrity is no longer optional, why won't the Premier offer to appear before the royal commission before Victorians vote?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:06): I do not know where the Leader of the Opposition has been since I have been Premier, but the royal commission is up and running and I have also said I will appear.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the Premier has not gone to the direct question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Public Transport will come to order. The Premier has only been on his feet a short time.

Ben CARROLL: This is a royal commission that has been endorsed by every integrity expert – Transparency International – with the broadest, most robust terms of reference, up and running in record time. Unlike those opposite, who do terms of reference with every single name in them, we do independent royal commissions.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I think the Premier should know better than to debate the question. The Premier is debating the question. I would ask you to bring him to order.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: education system

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Education, Minister for Skills and Training, Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Women and Gender Equality) (14:07): Victoria under Labor is the Education State. We have topped the nation two years in a row on our NAPLAN results, a credit to our hardworking educators and support staff, which is why we need to honour their work with the pay and conditions that they deserve. On Thursday last week a record was set. Over 93 per cent of education staff voted in favour of this government's pay deal – 93.1 per cent, to be precise. This pay deal makes Victorian teachers the best paid in the country with the best conditions. When we back our teachers, we deliver for Victorian students and we get results. But great results do not happen by accident; they come from investment and from commitment. Labor has built 121 schools, and we are delivering more support for students in and out of the classroom. This includes breakfast clubs, dedicated tutoring, explicit instruction, phonics and even more. These investments are benefiting all Victorian students and their families, setting them up to learn and achieve.

Compare that with the announcement we saw over the weekend. Without consulting any of the schools concerned, the opposition have announced that they will close six existing government schools, leaving students and their families –

Matthew Guy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, question time is not a time for ministers to reflect on or attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order on this occasion. I believe the minister was referring to an announcement that has been made.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: They have announced that they will close six existing government schools, leaving students and their families in the lurch. They have said that they will look after the cleverest kids and abandon the rest.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 requires ministers to be direct, factual and succinct. The minister's claim is unfounded and factually inaccurate.

The SPEAKER: That is a matter for debate, member for Sandringham.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: They have said they will look after the cleverest kids and abandon the rest. Labor knows that a good education system uplifts and empowers all.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulleen will leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now misleading the house.

The SPEAKER: There are appropriate ways to deal with people misleading the house. That is not one of them.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: They have promised \$40 billion in cuts, and they are starting with schools. Only Labor builds the Education State.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Premier. If integrity is no longer optional, will the Premier guarantee that his government will not rely on public interest immunity to withhold documents required by the royal commission into corruption on the Big Build?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:10): A royal commission is the most independent inquisitorial inquiry Victoria can have, and it will be up to the royal commissioner to set all the rules.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): If the Premier has no intention of using public interest immunity to withhold documents from the royal commission, why didn't he support amendments that would have allowed it to access these documents?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:11): The royal commission has commenced its inquiries today and held its first public hearings. It is clear that it will be examining every single issue and nothing is off limits.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the question was very specifically about the actions of the government, not the royal commission, and I ask you to bring the Premier back to answering it.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question. He was relevant. The Premier has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: regional health services

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Rural and Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Water) (14:12): I rise today to update the house on our Labor government's continued commitment to increase access to health care right across regional Victoria. Every Victorian deserves access to high-quality health care, and for too many regional families, accessing dental care can be difficult – waiting for appointments or simply putting off treatment because the cost is too high. That is why I am so proud that we will establish three free dental clinics in regional Victoria. But it does not stop there. Labor is investing in our regional hospitals. We are redeveloping the Ballarat Base Hospital, Barwon Women's and Children's Hospital at University Hospital Geelong and Warrnambool Base Hospital. \$75 million from our Regional Health Infrastructure Fund is upgrading infrastructure right across rural and regional health services.

We understand that access to housing can be a barrier for recruiting healthcare professionals, and that is why we have the wonderful initiative the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund. We are investing in accommodation for our essential workers. Earlier this month I was proud to open 33 new worker apartments for Goulburn Valley Health, right in the centre of Shepparton. These projects make a real difference in attracting and retaining the workforce our regional communities rely on.

In the bush those opposite are talking about empty guarantees, and in town it is all cuts, cuts, cuts. And we have seen it before – cuts to hospitals and services cut. Regional Victorians have not forgotten when the opposition sold off Mildura and Latrobe and prepared the Austin for sale. They closed 12 hospitals in country Victoria.

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume her seat. If members actually addressed their comments through the Chair, they would see that I was calling for the minister to resume her seat.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition, and I would ask you to sit the minister down.

The SPEAKER: The minister was referring to a previous government.

Michaela SETTLE: That is correct. They closed 12 hospitals in Eildon, Koroit, Mortlake, Murtoa, Red Cliffs, Macarthur, Clunes – *(Time expired)*

Construction industry

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:14): My question is to the Premier. Will taxpayers fund the legal bills of former premiers Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan for the royal commission into corruption on the Big Build?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:15): Let us be very clear. The successive arrangements on both sides of politics will apply to this royal commission.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:15): I am pleased the Premier has confirmed that they will. Why is it Carroll government policy to pay the legal bills for former premiers, who each receive \$300,000 a year from a taxpayer-funded pension?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, it gives me great pleasure to remove you from the chamber for an hour and a half.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:15): The royal commission has commenced its inquiries, and it would be fully appropriate that I do not make any comment on or interfere in anything and let it get on and do its job.

Ministers statements: residential tenancies

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Renters) (14:16): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's portable bond scheme. This Australia-first program puts money back into the pockets of people, allowing them to transfer their bonds directly from their current rental property to their new rental property. That means they do not have to save thousands of dollars for a second bond before their first bond has been refunded. It is practical, it is simple and it works, and more than 1600 bonds have been ported since 1 July this year. All Victorians deserve the dignity of a safe and stable home, and that includes the one in four Victorian households that rent their home. That bond reform is one of more than 150 changes that Labor has made to making renting fairer in Victoria. They include banning rental bidding, requiring minimum standards before advertising, allowing people who rent to have pets, ending third-party fees for rental applications, banning no-fault evictions, a standard application with protection of personal data, longer periods for notices to vacate and rental increases, and creating and funding Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria.

These changes are all at risk. Alternative policy approaches will shred these reforms. As the Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs told this house:

Rental reforms have gone too far.

Or as the member for Murray Plains has said:

I think that the balance has gone too far.

Or as the member for Polwarth has said:

... you are putting the settings in the wrong direction.

Or as Pauline Hanson, the Leader of One Nation, has said:

Landlords are being forced to accept pets.

They are coming after the pets, the One Nation–Liberal coalition. They are coming after the dogs. They are coming after the cats. This One Nation–Liberal coalition will absolutely smash renters. Labor is on their side.

Residential tenancies

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:18): I thank the Minister for Renters for that introduction to my question, which is for the Premier. Premier, new rental data this week has come out. It shows that 38 per cent of evictions here in Victoria are because renters cannot afford the rent. For years and just today this Labor government has claimed to support renters while overseeing skyrocketing rents and forcing renters to lose their home, to cut back on food and heating or to make impossible decisions between going to the doctor or paying their rent. I have asked every Premier in this house over this term the same question, and I am asking this Premier now: will you finally freeze and cap rents?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:19): I thank the member for Richmond for her question. In her question she actually outlined the difference between Labor and the Greens. We are a party of action; they are a party of commentary. We just heard the minister outline all the reforms that have happened for renters under Labor. They talk about cost of living – free kinder, free TAFE, half-price public transport. I am proud to be a Premier with a Minister for Homelessness.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:19): Do you know what I am proud of? I am proud of all these reforms that only came about because of the Greens. That is why Labor acted. These reforms are only working if renters are protected, and the truth is that right now 70 per cent of renters live in fear of asking for their basic standards to be met, because they know that their landlord will give them a rent increase in retaliation. The Premier still expects a renter to risk taking their landlord to court just to see if their rent increase is perhaps excessive. As long as your landlord can punish you with a rent increase, why does the Premier think unlimited rent increases are fair?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:21): A party of action delivers 150 rental reforms – the strongest rental protections in the nation under our Labor government.

Ministers statements: police resources

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:21): Keeping Victorians safe is my number one priority, and if last week has proven anything it is that only Labor has a real plan to keep Victorians safe. Labor has already delivered over 3500 additional police officers, and only Labor has a plan to get Victoria Police back to 17,000 officers. Applications for the police academy are at the highest level in five years, but moving or losing hours to the commute is a real barrier for Victorians. The answer to this is not more legal studies classes. It is a permanent academy in the west, and only Labor will build it. Guess what happened on the day we announced it: those opposite said it was not necessary. According to them, it is not necessary to make it easier and cheaper for Victorians who live in the west to join Victoria Police. They think it is not necessary for a few recruits to train closer to home, closer to their families and closer to the communities that they want to represent. I reckon that is rubbish, and I think the people on this side of the house believe it is rubbish too. I say the Liberals are wrong.

Getting back to a full force means focusing on more than just recruitment. We must also focus on supporting those officers we already have. Police officers see things most Victorians should never have to see, and that can take its toll. They cannot be expected to carry on and push their own needs

to the side. That is why programs like BlueHub exist, and it is why they should be made permanent. I was proud to stand alongside the Premier last week to announce that Labor and only Labor will not only expand and support the BlueHub system but make it permanent. It was downright heartless when the Liberals cut the police band. Now they have failed to back BlueHub and they have failed to back Victoria Police. Victorians know that under a One Nation–Liberal coalition everything is on the chopping block because Victorians know they will get less under Jess.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Police can leave the chamber for half an hour. I remind members that there is a degree of respect expected in the chamber. It is not appropriate to call members by names other than their correct title.

Minister for Police withdrew from chamber.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:23): My question is to the Premier. When asked about Victoria's potholes, the Premier said, 'I'm the Premier, not the roads minister.' When he was roads minister, why did he cut road maintenance funding by nearly \$200 million in a single year?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:24): It is a bit rich from the Leader of the Nationals when his party stood quiet when Jeff Kennett privatised road maintenance.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:24): The Premier now says he takes 'full responsibility' for the state of Victoria's roads and that integrity is no longer optional. If that is true, will he admit that the roads are in such poor condition because of his own cuts?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Public Transport is warned.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:24): I have always been very clear about this: that we need to be better. That is why I have delayed three level crossings, made significant savings on the SRL and am putting all that into roads. We are delivering on 500,000 potholes to be fixed. We are not out there with spray paint and having selfies with them. We are not out there admiring them; we are fixing them.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the question went directly to the Premier's former cuts as roads minister, and I ask you to bring him back to that.

The SPEAKER: I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question. He was being relevant. The Premier has concluded his answer.

Annabelle Cleeland interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Euroa is warned.

Ministers statements: government achievements

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (14:25): It is wonderful to be on this side of the chamber, where every day we fight for working people. We stand up for working people. They close schools; we have built 121 of them. For two years in a row we have had the best NAPLAN results in the nation. We have the highest paid teachers in the nation, every specialist school has been upgraded and we have two years of free kinder. When it comes to health, they said they will recruit more protective services officers for our hospitals; we have recruited 17,000 nurses and midwives. We are also going to deliver 10 free dental clinics. The Leader of the Opposition promised a royal commission by Christmas; we promised it on our first day, and it is up and running right now. We are also delivering 1500 more police and a brand new police academy in Melbourne's western suburbs. We have also

announced on the weekend what will be the toughest penalties and law reform for victims of family violence, and I commend the Attorney-General for her work.

While those opposite play hide-and-seek with One Nation, we will get on and do everything we can to support working people. They took away the right to work from home; we will legislate it. In Kew they are for renewables; in Spring Street they are for fossil fuels. They closed country train lines in Ripon; we reopened them in Ararat and Maryborough. Last week they threw in the towel on Melton electrification. They said they will bring in hybrid trains from Spain. We are delivering Melton electrification.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing orders the Premier is required to be factual.

The SPEAKER: Members are all required to be factual, and that is a matter for debate.

Ben CARROLL: They threw in the towel on Melton electrification; we will deliver it, as well as our level crossings. Hybrid trains that do not fit in the city loop made in Spain, not made in Ballarat, are not the future for Victoria. A Wilson–Pickering government is not the future for Victoria.

The SPEAKER: The time for questions has ended. Before we move to constituency questions, I would like to remind ministers that as we reach the end of the sitting week and the 60th Parliament there are many unanswered questions on notice. I am advised that answers are coming in quickly and that it is difficult to provide the house with an exact figure on how many outstanding questions there are. However, I ask ministers to treat answering them as a priority.

James Newbury: On a point of order, on the advice that you just gave the house, Speaker, can I confirm that the responses received are received electronically, which I presume are automatically counted as they are returned?

The SPEAKER: No, we have to cross-check them, member for Brighton.

Constituency questions

Gippsland South electorate

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:30): (1828) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and I ask: when will the government undertake fuel reduction activities, either burning or mulching, around the township of Loch Sport? As the minister will be aware, we had an early-season fire at Seacombe, near Loch Sport, threatening Golden Beach, Paradise Beach, Seacombe and Loch Sport on Sunday. This is exactly the same time of year as the fire that threatened Loch Sport three years ago. The community there are very concerned that not enough is being done to protect them. This includes at the eastern end where the national park is, which is a real concern for that community. At the western end there has been mulching over recent years, which I have pushed for and asked the government to do, but not enough has been done. The Loch Sport community, with just one road in and one road out, is very concerned that it remains a ticking time bomb and the government has not done enough to reduce the bushfire threat.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:31): (1829) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. How will the relocation of the Royal Children's Hospital's south-west mental health service benefit locals in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing? The Royal Children's Hospital's south-west infant, child and family mental health and wellbeing service has been relocated to Penrose Promenade Community Centre in Tarneit. The relocation returns the service to its catchment and provides more space to deliver specialist mental health support for infants, children and families closer to where they live. To support the relocation, the Carroll Labor government provided \$2.2 million for the community mental health expansion program. The move includes clinical accommodation to support the continued delivery and future growth of specialist infant and child mental health services in a more accessible community

setting. The new location includes eight consulting rooms, one speech pathology assessment room, one paediatric consultation room, two large consulting and observation rooms and 38 workstations to accommodate current staff and future service growth. This service will strengthen local infant, child and family health services in my electorate.

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:32): (1830) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the state Labor government stop First Avenue Homes and its operators from preying on the community? For eight years the state Labor government ignored the behaviour of First Avenue Homes, operated by Anthony Karlovic, who have preyed upon families while running up over 160 legal appearances as well as falsified compliance certificates, fraudulent invoices, false statutory declarations and major structural defects, weaponising the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 as a falsified debt weapon and using violence and intimidation against families – all reported to five state bodies. No-one acted. Days after VCAT orders in which Mr Karlovic was personally named in legal proceedings, the company was put into voluntary liquidation. The orders died with it and the debts died with it – millions in taxpayers costs and millions taken from honest families. Despite a suspension registration, Mr Karlovic is now using his father's company, Hudson Rise Developments, to work around phoenixing laws. Assets, titles and cash have been moved into family trusts and self-managed super to defeat clawback.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:33): (1831) My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. How is the Victorian government supporting new and emerging multicultural communities so that they can build connections in our community and create spaces that are safe, welcoming and respectful of cultural traditions? Geelong's north has historically attracted many migrants and refugees, and one of these communities is the Hazara community, who I recently met with. I had a tour of their brand-new community centre, which the Hazara community have worked incredibly hard to secure through a massive fundraising effort. It is so important that we continue to support our multicultural communities so that they can have hubs in the community just like this. These spaces are important so community members can come together, honour their heritage, observe their faith and build connections. On this side of the house we have a long history of helping to ensure all Victorians can participate safely in community life, free from racism, vilification and discrimination, and I am proud to be a member of a government that backs our multicultural communities.

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:34): (1832) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Will the minister give the community of Bunyip North the same opportunities and considerations in regard to the recent environment effects statement submission for the Bunyip North quarry? The response timeframe is not the standard 40 days that other developments of this type in the past have received. Also, they seek the same grant moneys available so they can respond to the EES report, with 115 recommendations about the environmental responsibilities of the people that are trying to deliver this quarry, yet the government has made no money available for that community to put those submissions in. This is a significant and sizeable quarry in Bunyip North that will impact the community out there, and they are just seeking the same opportunities as other submissions have had for this type of development. I ask the minister to give this urgent consideration.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:35): (1833) My constituency question is for the Minister for Renters, and I am delighted that he is in the house at the moment for me to ask this question. As a part of the Victorian government's renters rights program, a new service has been established in Ballarat to strengthen, support and improve access to services that help renters understand and exercise their rights. Many renters in my electorate are seeking advice about tenancy issues, rental standards and

dispute resolution but are not always aware of the assistance available to them. How is Victoria's renters rights program improving access to information and support services for renters across my electorate of Wendouree? And let me be very clear: the Victorian Labor government has delivered over 150 rental reforms to make renting fairer and safer for Victorian renters, while the Liberal–One Nation coalition has not committed to protecting renters at all. The choice is really clear: if you are a renter, vote Labor.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:36): (1834) My question is to the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts. The latest move in this Labor government's disastrous plan to wipe out housing has hit Richmond. Labor will demolish 220 public homes, the open space with a community garden and a new playground at the south end of the estate to give this public property to private developers to build 800 mostly expensive private apartments – luxury corporate rentals which get massive tax concessions but go for between 20 to 70 per cent above market rate and drive up the rent costs for everyone else. But it gets worse. There will be zero public housing rebuilt at this site and 70 fewer community homes than there were public. Gough Whitlam would be turning in his grave to watch this Labor Party and what they are doing to public housing. So my question is: Minister, why is your government completely abandoning public housing?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:37): (1835) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It is a very important question. Is it true that my electorate of Pascoe Vale may be home to some of the steepest residential streets in Melbourne, if not Victoria? Locally they are known amongst cyclists as the Gaffney Four – that is, Gaffney Street, Bolingbroke Street, Pardy Street and O'Hea Street. For generations these hills have been part of the character of Pascoe Vale, either climbed or flown down by local kids on bikes and used by families walking to and from school and home. Generations of motorists quickly learned the importance of a very good handbrake. Measurements undertaken by the Climbing Cyclist estimate maximum gradients of around 16 per cent for Gaffney Street, at 300 metres high; 20 per cent on Bolingbroke Street, at 200 metres high; 25 per cent on Pardy Street, at 200 metres high; and an extraordinary 30 per cent on O'Hea Street, at 200 metres high, prompting speculation that O'Hea may even be Melbourne's steepest residential street and possibly the steepest in the world. Essentially, gradients like these make Parliament's front steps very much feel like an escalator. I would really welcome and the community would welcome information to finally settle this great question and debate across our local community.

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:38): (1836) My constituency question is to the Premier. Premier, why doesn't regional Victoria ever get its fair share under Labor? This year country Victoria got just 12 per cent of Labor's state infrastructure investment, despite 25 per cent of Victorians calling country Victoria home. For 23 of the past 27 years successive Labor governments have ripped off our country people and left people behind. Hamilton hospital emergency department still has not had the major redevelopment that it needs. Horsham, Ararat and Ballarat are still waiting for the promised mental health and wellbeing locals. Our roads are falling apart to the point of being deadly, and the Western Highway duplication has been delayed for more than a decade. We have schools right across the region that are falling apart and desperately need redevelopment. We also have other health services and sporting organisations, all parts of our community that are so important but have missed out under successive Labor governments. It is only the Nationals in government that will deliver a fresh start and our fair share for regional Victoria.

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:39): (1837) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Will the Victorian government declare the establishment of the wallan wallan regional

parkland to protect the health of the Merri Creek waterway, which runs downstream to Northcote? This proposed regional parkland would allow for the preservation of these natural wetlands, which filter and slow water, providing vital flood protection to the Merri. Along with my Labor colleagues in the north, who have consistently advocated to protect and restore the Merri Creek corridor, and working alongside the Friends of Merri Creek and the Merri Creek Management Committee, we have met with the wallan wallan Regional Parkland Alliance to understand and convey the vision and necessity of this parkland. A petition has been tabled in Parliament with over 3000 signatures. Time is of the essence, as a precinct structure plan is in the works to guide development in the area. We need to ensure that new homes and jobs are not at odds with but sit alongside the preservation of natural habitat. As Melbourne's north continues to grow, now is the time to safeguard the entire Merri Creek corridor and deliver lasting benefits for our community, our waterways, our wildlife and our futures.

Bridget Vallence: Again, Speaker, I raise a point of order on quite a number of unanswered questions, and I would like you to please follow these up. Questions that are unanswered by the Treasurer are questions on notice 3237, 3239, 3240, 3256 and 3649. Questions that are overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Finance are questions on notice 3420, 3422, 3423, 3431, 3435, 3436, 3439, 3502, 3503, 3504 and 3505. A question that is unanswered and overdue for the Minister for Skills and Training is question on notice 3453. Questions that are overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Jobs are questions on notice 3486 and 3488. Questions that are overdue and unanswered by the Minister for Education are question on notice 3210 and constituency question 1718. And a question still unanswered and overdue for the Premier is question on notice 3316. I will hand the list to the clerks. I respectfully request answers for my constituents.

Motions

Dental services

Debate resumed.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:41): I rise to make a contribution on the motion on the notice paper moved by the Premier and perhaps particularly to speak to part (c) of the Premier's motion, which condemns the Liberals' and One Nation's \$40 billion in cuts, which threaten essential services relied on by Victorian families. There is a great deal of concern out there in the community, and indeed in Preston and Reservoir, about the prospect of a Liberal–One Nation government and just what that would mean for services that families and locals rely on. We heard the Premier earlier address this chamber on exactly what it might mean and his concerns, and I certainly echo his comments. While the Premier was speaking, we had the member for Berwick in here, and the member for Berwick sort of pushed back through his interjections on this \$40 billion in cuts number. If I heard him correctly when he was interjecting, he said that the \$40 billion number was made up. It is very interesting that opposition members appear to be prepared to say that the \$40 billion number is made up, but not prepared –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: In fact the member for Evelyn, who is not in her place, interjects to suggest exactly that thing. Yet I notice that the member for Evelyn, and indeed all of the opposition speakers, are not prepared to stand up in this chamber on this motion and explain what their cuts will actually look like. I put it to you –

Jade Benham interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: You will have your chance, member for Mildura, after I finish my contribution if you would like to stand up and detail exactly what those cuts will look like. I put it to you, Speaker, that the reason they do not want to stand up and detail that is, first and foremost, because very few of them understand their own policy. The Leader of the Opposition has come out and said that they are going to shift Victoria to a fiscal cash surplus by 2032 at the same time as reducing tax

revenue. I listened very carefully to their contributions; I do not think anyone within the ranks of the Liberal Party understands what a fiscal cash surplus is.

I give great credit to whichever Liberal staffer came up with this policy. I reckon they came up with it because they did not want to say, 'We're going to reduce debt.' So one of their staffers said, 'Let's make our target a fiscal cash surplus', which was an interesting choice. Good on that staffer, because they have managed to convince opposition MPs to take up this policy, seemingly without having explained to them what a fiscal cash surplus actually is. We miss the days when the Liberals had people who had actually done some accounting. To give him his due, Neil Angus, a member for Forest Hill – who you would remember, Speaker – was a good accountant. I remember when I worked in the Treasurer's office he was on top of it. But since Neil left, they have really had no-one who can do any accounting. Essentially this policy that has been put forward by the Liberal leader is that they are going to move the government into having what would be called positive free cashflow in a corporate sense, and I do not think they understand just how dramatic that is as a change.

We have certainly had years recently where investment in assets by our state government, investment in really important public transport projects in particular, has been running at \$20 billion or so a year. The Liberal Party say they are going to dramatically reduce that. I cannot imagine a world where you reduce that to anything less than \$5 billion to \$10 billion really. Any government has to build new schools, upgrade hospitals and do a whole lot of asset expenditure which any decent government, you would hope, would do, so they are going to have to leave at least \$5 billion or \$10 billion on the asset side. Of course our books are balanced at the moment, so they are going to have to cut \$5 billion to \$10 billion from their expenditure. Furthermore they have promised to cut taxes, so that is, I do not know, another \$2 billion, another \$5 billion – they are not very clear about what that is. But in rough terms they are talking about cutting expenditure by \$10 billion a year. If you add that up across the four years of the forwards, you get a \$40 billion cut. That is just my guess at what their cuts might look like, but there is absolutely no way to do what they have said that they are going to do without making very significant cuts that have got a multibillion-dollar number on them. If they are contesting the \$40 billion number, which I think is a conservative and generous estimate – you can well and truly imagine a world in which it is \$45 billion or \$50 billion across the forwards – then it is incumbent upon them to explain how they are going to do that. I can only hope that the member for Mildura, as she says, does stand up after me and give the house some explanation of what that critical policy for the future of our state looks like. She may have to ring up whichever staffer it was who came up with it – credit to them, as I say – and get just a quick explanation of what a fiscal cash surplus is.

Having I feel comprehensively dealt with the motion in front of us, in the short period of time I have left I might just take this opportunity knowing that it might be my last contribution for this session. Indeed we do not know what will happen in November. It may be my last contribution full stop. We all stand up in this place knowing that the way our system works is that one individual is elected to sit in these seats and stand in these places, but we all know that behind us we have great teams who do a huge amount of work. I am very grateful for my electorate office contributing and helping me be here today to make this speech and be here every day to do the work that we need to do. I do want to quickly thank Louise Kenney-Shen, who has been with us right from the start and is a fantastic part of the Darebin community. A lot of the work we are doing around community housing and public housing and the work we do to support some of our local Darebin community members who have more complex needs, additional needs – people who face barriers to participation in our economy or in our society for various reasons – Louise has led. She has been absolutely fantastic on it. I am very grateful for that leadership. A fun fact about Louise is that she speaks fluent Mandarin. I know many Mandarin-speaking constituents in Preston and Reservoir have been grateful for being able to bring issues to her, for those who prefer to speak in Mandarin.

Then we have Ellie Tossol-Smith, who has done a remarkable amount of work to get us organised. You know that some people think of politics, if they are not so involved, as some glamorous business where we are out arguing various points, but many of us know that getting things done in this world

is often, as an MP's office, just a job of remembering to follow up time and time again with ministers and organisations that have promised you that they are going to get back to you with some information or with a policy decision and you still have not heard from and then you have to call up and you have to ring every couple of days and email. Ellie has just done a fantastic job. People think the enemy in this job is powerful vested interests or something, and sometimes it is that. But so often the enemy is just bureaucratic inertia, poor coordination and limited attention span of decision-making. People here know that having someone in our office who has relentlessly, politely said time and time again 'Hey, you haven't got back to us. Can you please get back to us?' has done an enormous amount for Preston and Reservoir. I am grateful for Ellie's contribution.

I have to touch on Emma Cunningham, who has left our office, but she did a great job of getting us organised. An amazing story – Emma took the job in our office from Dublin, where she interviewed. She had actually never been to Melbourne. It speaks to what an organised person she is that she organised her job here before landing in Melbourne for the first time. Then, remarkably, I have never met anyone who does their homework like Emma does her homework. She got here, and within a week we would be sitting in the office talking about some random Darebin character, talking about Tara Burnett, Alex Bhathal, Kim Le Cerf or someone. I would say this person's name, and Emma would be like, 'She's moved to DEECA now.' I would say, 'Not only how do you know who Kim Le Cerf is; how do you know what DEECA is? You've been in Melbourne for a week,' and Emma would be like, 'I was reading something somewhere about it.' I do not know if she sleeps. She just must read all night about things. But we were very grateful. I, she and Nathan Kerwood-McCall, who was in her office at the time, had a lot of fun on all things Darebin. As we all know, you have got to work with your local council. That was the previous Darebin council, and working with them was a real challenge. But thank you to Emma. Thank you to Nathan Kerwood-McCall as well, actually. He was an absolute public policy professional who was with us at that time.

Thank you to Will Mezner, who has joined our office at the moment and is getting some survey responses out that I have been meaning to get out for a couple of years. Finbar Bray is in the team at the moment. Maya Charles Sedergrreen is doing all our grants work at the moment, which you know, Speaker, is very important stuff, just to help coordinate that for the community. Then there is Laurens Dowling Lane, our great Northern College of the Arts and Technology creative arts QGIS specialist, and Spencer Hurley, who was in our office and worked really closely with our veterans and RSL community. And then there is Reggie Michelson and the amazing Aashini Rastogi, who I think will go on to great things, who came into our office to do work experience and then was so good that she came onto the payroll, still completing year 12, I think. Then there is Alex Mansell; Blake Ward; Callum Rees; Arya Kushwaha; Lisa Greenough; Mayank Sajwan; Thomas Taylor of Reservoir Leisure Centre lifeguard fame, amongst his many achievements; Parth Jadav; Tom Leslie; and everyone else who has volunteered or helped out in the office over that period.

I suppose we are at that time of the cycle where you have got to think, 'Why would people re-elect me, Nathan Lambert, to a role representing Preston and Reservoir?' Honestly, I think sometimes if only I could convey to people what it is that these amazing people, mainly young people, have come into our office and done, if I could show them what they were doing, that alone would be reason for re-electing this great team – just to see Ellie and Louise and Will and Maya and everyone who has helped out and to allow them to continue doing what they have been doing for our community.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:51): I was listening to the member for Preston, and I will ask the indulgence of this chamber to thank my incredible team and staff too. I do echo what he was saying in terms of the incredible power of work that our electorate staff do and give and the effort they put in and the heart they put in as well. Amongst my team I have to give a huge shout-out to Lorna, Kara, Pete, Scott and Seb, who was working with us before and will hopefully come back to us again, and to the beautiful volunteers, Rudy, Lynne and Pat, who just give so much of themselves to help our community. They do go above and beyond, and they deal with stories, as we all know, that are sometimes very difficult and hard to hear, stories that impact us all and that we take away with us

when we hear real tales of tragedy. My staff have absolutely been exemplars of wonderful human beings who do a lot to try and make this place even better. As the member for Preston said, it is not just about the local MP, it is the team of people they have with them, the unsung heroes who turn up every day, sometimes after coping abuse or sometimes after listening to a story that is so heartbreaking and so heart wrenching because we know that we simply do not have the power necessarily to make things better for that person in a tangible way. But they listen and they care, and I know that that matters for many, many people. I will start off by saying that in the first instance.

I will say, though, on this motion, that I am very concerned about what Victoria would look like if the opposition carried forth the plans that they are putting out there. I have to say I could listen to the member for Preston for another hour explaining the lack of understanding that seems to be evident on the opposition benches of what their proposed cuts and what their plan for Victoria look like and the impact they are going to have. These are conversations I am now having with people in public who are saying, 'Oh, but they're going to get rid of the debt,' and I say, 'No, they're talking about significant cuts to our economy.'

I will talk from the perspective of a business owner, because I employed, at any given time, 40 people across my two businesses when I had two at once, and when I had my one business the whole way through, there were 30 staff, 15 full-time equivalent and a whole bunch of people who would come through. We would have university students who would come through, and maybe they were just working for a year with us and they spread their wings and they flew into the career of their future afterwards. We had a number of people come through, and we had also full-time staff who had only ever worked for us and the previous owner. There is nothing more terrifying when you are in business than the thought that the pie out there, the amount of money that circulates in an economy, is going to shrink, and the figure of \$40 billion is actually horrific.

If I were a small business owner right now, I would not be thinking that the Liberals are my best bet for a good future in my small business. I would be thinking the complete opposite. I would be terrified that my customers, my clientele and the people who spend their money for my service or my goods will not have money to spend. Forty billion dollars worth of cuts and a proposed 31,000-odd jobs out there ripped out will have a flow-on effect which will be like a tsunami, and it will crash the economy. That is what I am really worried about. I would not be sleeping very well at night now if my business was still mine. I would be very, very concerned about what they have in their plans to come, and that is just from a business perspective. I want to make that really clear to small business owners out there thinking that maybe the Liberals are their best bet. They are not, because when they completely shrink that economy down, people out there will not have the money to spend in your business, and that should keep you up at night. It is not a good choice for us. It might sound really great for their friends in the Institute of Public Affairs, because that is where they come from, but this is not good for the average Victorian person out there at all.

Putting business aside, now let us look at the services that we are talking about. We are offering free dental for people. It has been the big gap. Ever since Medicare was created in Australia, the gap has always been, 'Why not teeth?' That was a question my husband asked me when he moved here, because of course he is from the UK where the National Health Service does cover teeth. In fact I actually had to go and have a root canal under the NHS system in Manchester. He was a particularly frightening dentist, I have to say, but that was more about him rather than the NHS. Eventually I ended up having to get that poor sad tooth extracted. He did not think he needed to use too much anaesthetic, which was a little bit concerning. But all that aside, when my husband came here and realised we had Medicare like the NHS and then had to pay privately for dental, he could not understand why that was. Neither could I. I could not explain it to him other than it was just a gap that had always been there. I always hoped that gap would be filled by the feds. They have not done it, but we are going to do it. That is a fantastic thing for Victorians.

I tell you what, already we have so many people wanting to come and live in this state. We have people flooding the city of Melbourne but also other parts of this beautiful state that we call home. They are

going to be storming over to us, I reckon. They will all be experiencing FOMO in New South Wales, Queensland, Tassie, WA, South Australia, Northern Territory and ACT. They will have a severe fear of missing out when we get our free dental here. I really hope that other states take up this mantle, and I hope that the federal government actually looks at this and goes, 'Yes, it's about time that we did this too.' I hope that we once again lead the charge on this one, because we have done it many, many other times in so many other areas.

Let us talk about urgent care clinics and how wonderful they have been. We call them priority primary care centres. They have changed their name, but the same thing applies. We are making sure people can get access to good bulk-billed health care. When someone says to me, 'What does this free dental clinic look like?' I say, 'You know an urgent care clinic – think that but for teeth.' They go, 'Oh,' and it all makes sense because it is tangible and it is real. We went into the last election talking about those bulk-billed urgent care clinics. We went in, we said we were going to do it and then we did it, and it has gone even bigger than we originally anticipated. That is what will happen with free dental.

When I talk about those cuts – I know I spoke about the impact on business, and as I said, I want to make that really clear to businesspeople – the next cuts and the real impacts out there too that we have to worry about are the services we are going to see completely evaporate. When I said there will be a tsunami coming for small businesses, there will also be a tsunami that takes out frontline services. They can say as much as they want. I had this conversation with a nurse, just on the weekend, and we spoke about the fact that the Liberals have said they will not touch frontline services – (a) I do not know how that is even possible and (b) I said to her, 'Even if in some magic wonderland nurses do not get cut, police do not get cut and teachers do not get cut, all the support people behind them, who allow them to do their work and focus on their work only, without having to worry about the extra admin burden out there, which the support teams do so well to take the pressure off, if they are gone, who is left to do it? For the opposition to say they are not going to cut frontline services is disingenuous, because they may not cut that person out of their role, but all of a sudden that person is going to be left juggling so many other competing interests. How are they possibly going to deliver 100 per cent of frontline services when all of a sudden their role is now taking on an admin burden?

My worry for my electorate and the people across Monbulk is: what does it look like? Is free kinder going to go? What happens to the four-year-old child in Tecoma who cannot get into kinder because their parents cannot afford it? Are they going to get their best start and best life? No, they simply will not. Free kinder has been such an incredibly successful story. It is incredibly successful because these beautiful young people are getting their first introduction to education and they are so ready for prep when they go there, so much more ready than the children who never got that opportunity to do four-year-old kinder, let alone three- and four-year-old kinder. A huge shout-out to the educators and the teachers, the staff across kindergartens, because they make a difference every day to our littlest learners.

What about all the other supports out there that we have provided that are funded? Also, can I say, on the way we have dealt with this, we make sure that people who need a hand up the most get it. Every investment we make is an investment into Victoria's future and the future of our people. On all the things that we hold dear – education, health care, the things that we all need – our Labor government has spent and dedicated its time and its energy into ensuring that people have a level playing field. That is all at risk this November. If anyone thinks that a One Nation–Liberal coalition looks like the better alternative, they have got another think coming. I hope that people really stop and think about where their vote is going to go, because it is dangerous. Forty billion dollars worth of cuts will hurt people. It will hurt the economy. It will hurt small business owners. It will hurt the parents of kids at kinder. It will hurt the parents of children at school who rely on a free breakfast to keep their stomachs full so they can learn. It will hurt so many. I commend this motion to the house.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (15:01): I rise to give my contribution on the motion regarding Labor's landmark announcement of free dental for every Victorian. Whilst those on this side of the house care about dental care for Victorians, those on the other side are dedicated to cutting anything

and everything. I agree with the member for Monbulk. It was a great contribution, and it would be absolutely fantastic if free dental not just happened in Victoria but went to every state and became a federal initiative. It is great to see Victorian Labor leading the way, as it often does in many different areas. I love the idea of free dental. I think, if my memory serves me correctly, I may have had free dental when I was a kid. The reason we used to get free dental, if indeed we did – I would have to ask my mum – is that we would jump on the bus from Coolbellup, go into town, into Fremantle, and go to the dental school. The reason we did that – I think it was free – is because they were students and the students needed kids and adults and people with issues with their teeth so that they could train. The only reason we actually did that and put up with it, because it was a bit of a nightmare, is that Mum would buy us a block of Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolate each after we left the dentist and once our mouths had returned to normal. It is a very Edwardian sort of memory for me too, because the dental clinic was opposite the Fremantle jail. I really do not know if any of the people doing the dental work and training were ex-prisoners or whatnot, so I have always had a bit of a fear of dentists.

It is really great that my daughter and grandchildren went to the dentist the other day. My wife went up to look after the kids whilst my daughter had her teeth done. Then little Max, who is two years old, got up in the dental chair and had his check-up and our little Grace, who is 4½, had her teeth checked. They are in safe hands, and they are going to start to understand that dentists are not frightening. I think a lot of people that do not go to the dentist do have a fear which is unreasonable. I would urge anyone that has not been to the dentist for a while to actually go.

Certainly this bill gives the opportunity to people that do not have the ability or the money or the opportunity to get to the dentist as much as they should. I think one of the things that this policy will do is it will take the fear factor out. It will get people to go to the dentist because it will not cost them money. Once they are there the dentist obviously can help them and give them advice. These are people that would not normally go. I think it is so very, very important that people go to the dentist. I met a bloke the other day when I was doorknocking, and he was in a great deal of pain. He told me he had gingivitis. He said his gums bleed constantly and, as I said, he was in pain all the time. I said, 'Have you been to the dentist?' He went, 'Nah.' I said, 'Why not?' And he said, 'Oh, I'll be all right.' I think it is a cost factor and a fear factor. Certainly free dental is going to change that for a lot of people, and I think that is a very, very good thing.

What have we announced is that a re-elected Carroll Labor government will open 10 free public clinics. Seven will be in Melbourne and three will be in regional Victoria. They will be focused on where the gaps in services are. You will get a free check-up and treatment like fillings, root canals and extractions. The most urgent cases go first, so if you are in pain, you have got swelling or you have had an accident, you will be seen first, like that gentleman I saw on the doorknocks. I am sure that as he was a pretty severe case he would be seen first. Once these clinics are up and running they will see more than 100,000 Victorians every year. It is a \$230 million investment over three years, and it is a first, as we have said, for any state in Australia. It will be the first government to put this into place.

Why does it matter? Apart from what I have talked about a little bit earlier, it is because Medicare does not cover dental. I will say, quietly though, that it absolutely should, but that is another matter and many people have spoken about that already. It does cover a lot, but not dental. The numbers tell the story. According to an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on oral health and dental care in Australia, of the \$13.2 billion Australians spent on dental services in 2023–24, 61 per cent was paid by patients straight out of their own pocket. One in four people who needed to see a dental professional delayed it or did not go at all, and 16 per cent said cost was a reason. If you look at the gap, in our least disadvantaged areas 65 per cent of people saw a dental professional last year. In our most disadvantaged areas, it was 42 per cent. It should not matter how much you have in your bank account as to whether you get dental care or not; taking care of your teeth is and should be part of your own healthcare plan. The Grattan Institute says more than 2 million Australians avoid dental care because of the costs. When care gets put off, the problem does not go away; it gets bigger. In 2024–25 there were close to 89,200 hospitalisations for dental conditions that could have been prevented with earlier

treatment. That is people in pain. It is hospital beds being used when a check-up might have done the job a few years earlier. I did not really realise that people would be going to hospital because of dental ill health.

This plan has been warmly welcomed, and I want to share what people who work in this space have said. The Victorian Council of Social Service said:

This commitment is a game changer for low-income Victorians who have been going without.

They also ask that the clinics reach low-income Victorians first, and the plan is focused on where the gaps in services are. The Victorian Healthcare Association welcomed the commitment and called it 'a good outcome for the health and wellbeing of Victorian communities'. They said it gives us 'a foundation for prevention and early intervention', and I think prevention is a great word in this debate. Peter Breadon from the Grattan Institute has argued for years for dental to be part of our health system. On the workforce, he said:

Workforce shortages are not an excuse to deny people care, they're a reason to invest in training.

I could not agree more. Dr Simon Judkins, an emergency physician working in a regional hospital, said he can no longer see a logical explanation for dental health being left out of Medicare. He has seen how an untreated dental problem can turn into something serious, like sepsis. That is someone who sees the end result of those people who are waiting. Tan Nguyen from the Public Health Association of Australia said:

It's the first time a government has stated that essential oral healthcare is a fundamental right for everyone. A ... principle like that will be profound ...

The Royal Australian College of Physicians said it reflects a 'growing recognition that dental care is both a health issue and a cost-of-living issue'. The National Rural Health Alliance said:

... walk-in check-ups and treatments ... would be incredibly valuable for rural people who deserve the same access to ... people in the city.

A dental expert from Charles Sturt University called it 'a great start'. That is a fantastic set of voices in support of this. There will no doubt be others that do not support it, but we should not be in the habit of just saying no to things because they are hard to do. The hard things to do are often the right things to do, and this is part of it.

A plan like this only works if you have got the people to deliver it. That is why there is \$13 million to grow and keep a strong workforce across the 10 clinics. It includes relocation support to attract 20 clinicians to three regional clinics and two years of support for 30 dental assistant trainees and 20 dental graduates, plus scholarships and mentoring. It is about building the team, not just cutting the ribbon. We are not starting from scratch. Smile Squad has already visited more than 1000 government schools and given more than 175,000 students dental check-ups, saving families around \$400 per child. Parents do not have to take time off work, and kids get the care they need at school. This plan takes that same idea and says, 'Let's do it for everyone.'

As the Minister for Health Ingrid Stitt put it, getting dental care should not be determined by your bank account or where you live. That is the very easy to understand reason that is at the heart of this announcement. If you have got a toothache, you should be able to walk in and get it looked at. If your kid needs a filling, you should not have to choose between that and the grocery bill. This plan makes that possible. Whilst I would love Medicare to include dental, we are not going to be waiting around for something to happen in the future; we are going to get on and do the job. Victoria will take the lead, as we often do as the Victorian government. I commend this motion to the house.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:11): Acting Speaker O'Keeffe, I know it is poor protocol to reflect on the Chair, but I wish you all the best for your next chapter. I am very pleased to be standing here because this is a real point of difference. This is about a Labor policy that will be a game changer for the most vulnerable Victorians. I think that is what we have got to remember. Who is Labor's

dental care plan going to help the most? It is the most vulnerable people in our community. That is why many of us are here, particularly on this side of the chamber. We know that a lot of people can look after themselves and can get the dental care that they need, but for a lot of people that is not the case. That is why when the Premier announced on 22 August that this was going to happen, I was absolutely elated that a re-elected Carroll Labor government will deliver free dental care for all Victorians. I know that a lot of people are sceptical about this and say that it cannot be done – but it can be done and it will be done if we are re-elected. That is the important caveat that we put on this – that it will only be done under a Labor government, because those opposite will not do this for our most vulnerable Victorians. They will not even speak on this important motion.

We are here talking about our values, and it was really interesting to hear the member for Cranbourne speak earlier about her life before she worked in this place and about talking to people and trying to get them a job but they were so ashamed of their teeth that they were covering their mouth in job interviews because their teeth were in such poor shape. We know that that is very, very class based because in Australia, and also internationally, people on lower incomes generally have poorer oral health than wealthier people. The research consistently shows that people who are disadvantaged are more likely to have untreated tooth decay. They are more likely to experience gum disease. They have less teeth because they have lost their teeth or have had them extracted because it is cheaper. They delay or avoid dental treatment because of the cost, and they present to hospitals with preventable dental conditions. One of the main reasons, we know, sadly, is that dental care is not covered by Medicare for most adults, meaning many people must pay out of pocket. As a result, for people with lower incomes and people struggling with the cost of living, with the costs of their rent and with the costs of keeping their families supported, the dentist gets deprioritised. It gets deprioritised for six months and then 12 months and then 18 months, and suddenly we have got kids who have never even seen a dentist – but that is okay because we have got Smile Squad, and I will come back to that later.

It is extraordinary, and some people will know this from their own electorates and from speaking to people, but women in Australia and also in countries like the UK used to have their teeth removed before they got married. They would get a set of dentures because their families did not want them to go into a marriage with the burden of having to worry about dental care. Women would have their teeth removed before their wedding. It is just extraordinary. My friend's mother has talked to me about the trauma of having her teeth removed before her wedding, one of the happiest times in your life. She had her teeth removed because it was going to be cheaper and safer and more effective. She has had dentures since before her wedding. That is what this is about. It is about making sure that we hold on to the teeth that we have got. The best teeth are the teeth that we have, not ones that we have to replace with dentures, because dentures are painful, expensive and difficult to maintain. We need to manage our own choppers all our lives and make sure that we look after them. But we know that without access to free universal dental health care, which is what a re-elected Carroll Labor government will deliver, that is just not going to happen.

We know that poor oral health can be turned around. It is not actually something that cannot be fixed. If you look at the requirements and the suggestions from the Australian Dental Association, we can improve dental health. How do we actually improve dental health? The best thing to do obviously is to brush your teeth every day with good toothpaste. We know that if you brush your teeth twice a day for 2 minutes with fluoride toothpaste you will have better teeth, you will have less cavities, you will have less tooth decay, you will have less gum disease and you will have less loss of teeth. We also know that water fluoridation is considered one of the most effective ways to prevent tooth decay. Can I tell you, growing up in Ballarat, our water was not fluoridated. Mum and Dad used to make us have fluoride tablets every night because we did not have fluoridated water, and I am so glad. It was only in the last 20 years that we actually got fluoridated water in Ballarat.

We know that regular brushing and drinking fluoridated water make a huge difference to prevent tooth decay, that cleaning between your teeth daily with floss and interdental brushes can make a huge difference and that limiting sugary drinks is so important. But the other thing that the Australian Dental

Association says is so important for maintaining good dental health is having regular dental check-ups and being able to have access to dentists. That is what this government is already delivering for kids at our government schools and low-cost schools across Victoria. We are doing what we can for our little people, but there are a whole lot of people who have not had the opportunity to get dental health care and live in pain every single day. That is why I am so pleased that we have a plan to make sure that the number of people who are unnecessarily going to hospital due to dental conditions and delayed care can be turned around. This is not a fait accompli. This is being able to get things done and to do things better. We also know that superannuation is about your retirement. We should not be raiding our precious super, which is thanks to Paul Keating and our federal Labor government and which our unions fought so hard for. Our super should not be raided to get dental care, but sadly, 30,000 Victorians a year are accessing the super that they need for their retirement because they do not have access to dental care.

What are we going to do? What is our plan? It will be 9 am until 9 pm five days a week, because we know people work shiftwork and people go to school. We know people have a range of things. But there is more. Not only will it be 12 hours a day, five days a week; we are also going to open up on Saturdays and Sundays from 9 am to 5 pm, on weekends. That is how we are going to see 100,000 Victorians a year – by offering a service that is open, that is available and that is not just in Melbourne. Communities like mine will not have to jump on V/Line to go to the dental hospital; they will have it in regional Victoria. I know that a few people have got their elbows out, and I am going to put my elbows out as well because Ballarat and the Grampians region deserve a regional dental clinic that opens seven days a week. That is certainly something I will be advocating for. Can I just say ‘Thank you for your advocacy’ to that good Ballarat caller who, when the Premier was on ABC radio, rang in and said, ‘Hello, Premier, will Ballarat be getting one?’ I will continue to push for one as well, because it is just so important.

But with our Smile Squad going around to local schools like mine – like Forest Street Primary, Delacombe Primary, Wendouree Primary or Alphington Primary – we know that if we can get kids sorted with regular check-ups, get those fillings done and get the X-rays done then we will set these kids up for success. We will set these kids up to have good dental health for the rest of their lives. We will set them up to be the generation where there was no dental poverty in Victoria, and we will lead the nation in preventing tooth decay and preventing gum disease and ensuring that our kids, our elderly people and other people who have not put themselves first but have put their kids first and have teeth in a terrible state will be looked after. I could not be prouder than to be a member of a Labor government that understands that dental poverty is a real issue that it is going to address, because everybody deserves to have good teeth.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:21): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon and make a contribution in favour of this incredibly important motion and this incredibly important election commitment by the Carroll Labor government. There is a pretty serious contrast between us and those opposite. Those sitting on the government benches – indeed this government under Premier Ben Carroll – will be using government to reduce an unavoidable household cost for all Victorians. We have got form and we have got history in this area that we are talking about right now.

Prior to the 2022 election, I believe during COVID, there was a clear gap in Australia’s primary health care, which was the clear responsibility of the federal government at the time. But the former Liberal government of nine years decided that they were going to trash Medicare, take money out of it and make it more expensive and less accessible to see a general practitioner. That is the responsibility principally of federal government primary health care, so this Labor government at the time decided that was not good enough for Victorians and that being able to see a GP when you need to for urgent care that is not necessarily care that you would need to go to an emergency department for but was urgent care was principally a right for all Victorians to be able to do. That is the fundamental basis of Medicare, but under the failures of that former federal government that was not happening. So we took it upon ourselves to open, I believe, 25 urgent care clinics at the time, to make sure that Victorians, for

urgent care but non life-threatening instances or illnesses, could go to an urgent care clinic free of charge, using their Medicare card, and be able to see a GP, nurse or somebody to help them with whatever ailment they may have had at the time.

That was so incredibly successful that once the Albanese Labor government took power in 2022 they took over responsibility for urgent care clinics and have grown that system all around Australia. This commitment to universal free dental for all Victorians is based on that urgent care clinic model. As I said, the Carroll Labor government is using their time in government to reduce an unavoidable household cost for all Victorians, which is exactly what dental is. Unfortunately, unlike primary health care, dental care and dental hygiene are all too often ignored by too many Victorians.

I was actually incredibly surprised – I should not have been – that once we made the announcement those opposite wanted to trash it, acting like a trip to the dentist is a luxury for Victorians, not a necessity, like it is only something you get to do if you have the means to do so, if you have thousands of dollars in your bank account to be able to go to the dentist a couple of times a year for check-ups, and God help you if you need serious dental work, like root canals, crowns or fillings. As a government we do not see a trip to the dentist as a luxury; we see as a necessity for Victorians. We have already got form in this space with Smile Squad, making sure that young people who go to school can access dental care really easily where they are going to school. The Smile Squad van comes along, and they have their assessments. I have got assessments of my own children at home. But we decided as a government that that was not good enough, that all Victorians, regardless of how much money they have in their bank account, regardless of whether they are in school or not, regardless of whether they may be able to access some of the really limited programs that are accessible through federal support through Medicare, should have access to dental care when they need it, because Victorians should not have to choose between fixing their teeth and paying their electricity bill. They should not have to choose between fixing their teeth and paying their electricity bill, because they are both absolutely essential.

There have been many fantastic contributions before mine and, I will note, none from the opposition. They have chucked the cue in the rack for the term. We will see those of them lucky enough to be returned in December when this place resumes under a Carroll Labor government – a fourth-term Labor government.

Dental hygiene or dental care is health care. All of the research and all of the stats and everything we know says that. If you do not have the means to take yourself to the dentist and you end up with a bad infection, an ulcer or a cyst or something terrible, then ultimately where you end up is in an emergency department. You do not end up at the dentist, you end up in an emergency department or on antibiotics in a hospital bed because you have got such a bad infection from the lack of dental health care you have been able to access. What that then does is put a significant strain on our public hospital system. It puts a significant strain on our emergency departments, and it comes at a significant cost to the federal budget and to the Medicare scheme, which is so incredibly important we need to protect it in every single way that we can. Whereas if that person had just been able to access pretty basic dental care for free before it got to that point where they had that terrible infection, that ulcer or that cyst in their mouth where they had to present to emergency, we would have ultimately saved a significant amount of money. If we were to collate all of that, how many times that happens across this country over a year, we would save ourselves tens of millions of dollars just by making sure that people have the dental care that they need when they need it.

Contrast this with those opposite, who want to trash this policy. I do not even know the grounds for why or how they want to trash it. The infrastructure to set this up already exists. There are places all around Victoria, like the urgent care clinics that we set up, that already have the infrastructure there to deliver this service. It will come at a cost; there is no doubt about that – of course it will. But it is worth every single cent that it will cost, because ultimately what it will do is pay for itself by meaning, as I said, that people will not have to present to emergency departments all around Victoria with secondary infections and in abject pain because they were not able to access the care that they needed. In contrast

to this, we have a Liberal–One Nation coalition rolling into an election with the promise of making \$40 billion worth of cuts and 7500 jobs going. Not only will they not deliver free dental for all Victorians, we know, because it is in their bones, that they will cut frontline services. They will cut health care, they will cut nurses from hospitals, they will cut Smile Squad from our schools and they will cut our public health system. So not only will you not be able to access free dental, but when you cannot do that and you end up with the type of infection that I spoke of, it will be harder for you to go and see a doctor at an emergency department here in Victoria because they will rip funding out of our public hospital system. It is in their DNA. This policy, free dental for every Victorian when they need it, is Labor to its bones. This is one of the greatest and clearest examples of what Labor governments do: using government to reduce inevitable household costs on every Victorian. Contrast that with the Liberal–One Nation cut squad going into the November election.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:32): I also rise to speak on this government motion:

That this house:

- (a) commends the Carroll Labor government for committing to free dental care for all Victorians;
- (b) recognises this investment will ease cost-of-living pressures and improve access to essential health care; and
- (c) condemns Liberals' and One Nation's \$40 billion in cuts, which threaten essential services relied upon by Victorian families.

I want to start by making the very obvious point that all of us, no matter where we live, how much we earn or what we do, rely on government services in some form or other. Often we take these services for granted. We do not actually think about where they come from or how they came to be. We just accept that they are our right, as they are, and that they are things to support us and to make our lives and our families' lives a little bit easier. I do not think I even thought about this prior to becoming elected. I never really thought about why they were there and what decisions were made to have those services provided, but it is actually elected governments that decide on the government services to be provided to the public. Conversely, it is elected governments that also decide what services we do not receive and what services should be taken away from us. I know that these are difficult times. I get around the electorate, like we all do, and people are finding it difficult. There is a lot of uncertainty in the world. There are financial pressures. I speak to residents, and they are not happy. They are disappointed. They want to see more, and what they actually want to see more of are more supports from government and more things that help them in their daily lives, not less. This is where it really is incredibly frustrating when we hear about a Liberal–One Nation coalition wanting to be elected to cut those services and cut billions of dollars out of government spending. That cannot make people's lives any easier; it can only make people's lives more difficult.

Getting on to this motion, it mainly talks about the election commitment by Labor for free dental clinics. Of course, as previous speakers have already said, dental care is a part of health care. I hear so many people as I get around the electorate saying, 'Why is it that dental care is not part of our healthcare system, and why doesn't Medicare provide it?' I think this move from the Victorian Labor government is a huge step towards having dental health care as part of our universal health system, and it is universal in that everybody has a right to dental care and that dental care should be free. When we talk about the re-election of a Carroll Labor government, we are talking about, as a central policy shift, this commitment that dental care would be something that everybody could access – that there would be universal dental care for those in Victoria. As in many cases for many things, we would hope into the future that in other states and also federally these initiatives are taken up so that we do get to a point where everybody – all Australians – have a right to universal health care covering all aspects of a person's health and wellbeing.

While we go through and talk about things like the commitments that we are making, such as the free dental health clinics, in contrast, the Liberal–National–One Nation opposition constantly talk about cutting government spending as if it is a good thing. They talk about a \$40 billion cut to the government budget. In saying that, they seem to be trying to deceive Victorians by somehow

suggesting that this does not mean a cut to essential services that are provided by government, that are relied upon by Victorians and that all Victorians expect, rightfully so, to be provided. We have to ensure that we really do make sure that the opposition parties are taken to task when they talk about the things that they will cut and how it is that they will scratch back or claw back \$40 billion from the Victorian budget.

Talking about government services and what governments provide, a good government does intervene in the economy and the society in order to assist people and, in old economic terms, take the rough edges off capitalism and private enterprise. While that sort of economic system continues, it is done through government in a way that allows the harshest points that are most harmful to people to be taken away by government decisions – for example, through regulation. We have got consumer affairs legislation so you cannot get ripped off when you purchase something from a retail store or some other goods and services provider. When it comes to economic downturns, we look at ensuring that employment is a main focus of the government so as many people as possible have jobs and, again, as many people as possible have good-paying jobs. We look at projects like the level crossing removals, for example. They were not just architectural or engineering wonders or anything like that, they were actually real things that supported the economy. They provided jobs. They provided skills through apprenticeship programs. They supported equality for women by providing high-paid jobs for women in the workforce as well. They also provided convenience for commuters so that there is a little bit less time in getting from A to B, whether you wanted to get to work or whether you wanted to get home or take the kids to school – whatever it might be. It also made it quicker for trucks and logistics to get through those previously congested areas, again contributing to the productivity and growth of the economy in those ways. This is making things easier for individuals, but also on a bigger level we are making economic choices to ensure the economy is growing and investing in the future of the economy and of Victoria.

Then we look at things such as housing. If we left that just to the market – as it seems that the Liberal–One Nation–National coalition would expect us to do – there would even be less housing on the market for our young people and next generations to purchase as well as properties for rent. We have got to continue as a government to provide services and spend in areas that then create further wealth and grow our economy and also ensure that essential services, like a roof over your head, are things that can be provided to Victorians. We still need more housing. We still need to make changes to ensure that there is increased building in the housing market so that there is enough housing for those that need it, whether it is to purchase or to rent. But again, it is government intervention, trying to do things that pull levers that then ensure that there is growth in the industry, growth in housing, so that those houses are available for those who need them. Of course if we just leave it to the market and do not intervene, then where are we? We would be going backwards in housing, with greater problems, difficulties and hardships for Victorians. They are just two examples of where government services are so important.

Government services ensure that there are certain aspects of essential services that are universal rights that every person in Victoria or Australia is entitled to and can have. Any cuts to services through cuts to the budget just mean that we are going to have less of those services. I think it was the Australia Institute, a well-recognised independent research organisation, that clearly stated through their research and study of an analysis what a Liberal coalition and One Nation government were proposing in terms of cuts – that it would have to be cuts to nurses, to doctors, to police, in spite of them arguing that they are going to increase the police workforce. We have to look at the independent analysis, the real facts, the real research to see what party is going to provide what offering to Victorians into the future. It is not right to be offering things that will not be delivered. I know Labor is committed to honesty in our commitments.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:42): Acting Speaker O’Keeffe, it is lovely to see you in the chair. Congratulations again on your valedictory and your contribution in this Parliament. It has been a privilege to serve alongside you and also on the parliamentary Economy and Infrastructure

Committee, on which you served as deputy chair very diligently on the various very interesting inquiries, I might add, which we both joined largely on a bipartisan basis.

This of course is a very important matter on public health policy, wellbeing and community wellbeing. But with a little bit of indulgence, I just want to take the opportunity in the house to thank a number of people in my community for having helped me be the member for Pascoe Vale over the last four years and for my community's support at the last election, which I obviously seek again this coming November to continue that diligent work, advocating and fighting on behalf of our community. I want to just acknowledge my electorate office staff too for their very, very hard work.

Jade Benham: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Anthony CIANFLONE: While the opposition may not be interested in this motion or want to speak on this motion or have any interest in supporting the health and wellbeing and dental hygiene of the Victorian community, we certainly do on this side of the house. I know dental hygiene and the health and wellbeing of my community are very important to me and also to my electorate office staff who fight every single day to serve my community. I want to acknowledge and say thank you to them for their hard work, for helping me be the member for Pascoe Vale and for helping with the thousands of inquiries we have received over the last four years to serve my community.

Mimi Tamburrino OAM JP has been a stalwart for continuous years. We are talking several decades – over four decades. I think she is the longest continuous electorate officer on this side of the house, going back to Jack Walton when he was the upper house member here. She worked for Bob Hawke, the Prime Minister and the federal member for Wills at the time; Kelvin Thompson; Peter Khalil; and then yours truly as well. She has served so many constituents every single day on my behalf. Julian De Marco, my outstanding parliamentary adviser, does a great job on the social media. Justin Tamburrino in my electorate office too does a great job every couple of days, particularly putting together frames commemorating the *Hansard* contributions in this chamber. Olivia Jones has got a very bright future, Mark Gazić is an outstanding community safety adviser and long-time friend of mine for many years, too. Also to some of my previous staff who served me over the last four years, including Lucy Birch in particular and also long-time volunteer Paul Gavin, who comes in every single day or two to letterbox and drop and do all sorts of things across my community. I want to acknowledge, as well, my family – like all of our families, they carry a huge, huge burden for me being here, particularly my wife Anna and my kids Raffaella and Cleopatra – and the Pascoe Vale Labor branch. We have a branch meeting tonight, and I will be looking forward to hopefully reporting to them about this debate here today.

I just want to pick up from yesterday on Dr Tim Read, who we commemorated yesterday. He was very committed to health. I had the privilege of giving a condolence contribution in his memory, and I quoted quite a few from across our community who wanted to go on the record about his diligent work across our suburbs. One quote in particular I left out – and it was remiss of me to leave it out yesterday – but I just want to put it on the record now. It is from the Brunswick Residents Network, who contacted me. Nancy Atkin, on behalf of the Brunswick Residents Network, said:

It's a great loss for our community. Tim was an early supporter of the Brunswick Residents Network and other community groups. His advocacy on local issues – from cycling safety to accessible public transport and community engagement – continued when he entered Parliament. He was always approachable on community issues.

We know that the late Dr Tim Read, the member for Brunswick, would be a very strong supporter of improved dental health in this state. That brings me to the motion, of course, which is:

That this house:

- (a) commends the Carroll Labor government for committing to free dental care for all Victorians;

- (b) recognises this investment will ease cost-of-living pressures and improve access to essential health care; and
- (c) condemns Liberals' and One Nation's \$40 billion in cuts, which threaten essential services relied upon by Victorian families.

We know that over the last four years it has been only this side of the house – not just this last four years but since 2014, since we got elected – that has been absolutely committed to taking real action and providing real investment, real initiatives and support to improve and provide more health and wellbeing services right across the state. Whether it is the new hospital and health services in Footscray; the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital; upgrades at the Northern Hospital; the Austin Hospital; the Parkville precinct of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Royal Women's Hospital and the Royal Children's Hospital; the new hospital at Frankston; or the new hospital being built at Melton, it is only Labor governments that have been delivering the new health facilities that our community needs – community hospitals; more doctors, nurses and allied health professionals; Nurse-on-Call; the virtual emergency department; the initiative to encourage young people by making it free to study nursing; and the Medicare urgent care clinics. Can you ever imagine a Liberal–National–One Nation coalition opening Medicare urgent care clinics? It just would not happen any time soon. It never would have happened. We are proud to have one in Coburg at 444 Sydney Road, which is serving our community every single day.

The community pharmacy program is providing people with easier, cheaper and more affordable access to care without the need for a GP or doctor's prescription for certain conditions. But it is on the broader health policy front that we have continued to take action: the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and progressing all that important work around the mental health of Victorians and the Royal Commission into Family Violence to prevent, deter and take strong action on family violence and men's and young boys' behaviour change too.

Of course there is also the Australian-first public health-led model establishing the violence reduction unit, which is modelled on the same VRU that has been set up in the UK, in Glasgow and London in particular, which has had an outstanding effect in helping change and turn the lives around of many young people in particular who are at risk and at the margins by tackling those root causes and drivers of crime from a health lens and a health perspective – because violent crime is entirely preventable. To a large extent, it is about looking at the determinants and those drivers, which are around housing, employment, education attainment, skills, health, wellbeing, mental health, substance abuse, trauma and family violence. All these are indicators that determine whether or not someone goes on to pursue a life of crime. That is what the violence reduction unit here in Victoria is doing under the great stewardship of the relevant ministers – the Attorney-General, the Minister for Police and the Minister for Youth Justice – but also the CEO Andrea Davidson and her team, who are doing amazing work. As Parliamentary Secretary for Community Safety, I have been supporting that, particularly through the many regional forums we have been hosting and community round tables across many electorates in our community, including in Sebastopol.

Building on all that work, that is exactly why the Premier has made this commitment to establish 10 free dental clinics should we form government again with the support of the Victorian people this November. It is well and truly time, as we know, and we heard from previous speakers, including the member for Hastings, who made a fantastic contribution, that Medicare should be expanded to cover dental too. That is long overdue. As the member for Tarneit pointed out earlier, just like we stepped in during COVID to set up urgent care clinics because there was a massive gap there under the watch of the Scott Morrison Liberal government – we stepped in because of their lack of investment in the GP network with state-led urgent care clinics, which thankfully have been absorbed as Medicare urgent care clinics under the Albanese Labor government – we are doing the same here with dental.

These 10 clinics will be provided in strategic locations right across the state. I am strongly advocating, of course, for one in the northern suburbs, as are the member for Broadmeadows, the member for Greenvale, the members for Preston and Northcote and all of my colleagues across the north. We

would love to host at least one of these dental clinics in our community, because we know that dental care and access to dental care is also a crucial socio-economic determinant to a family's life chances. It is also why we have already been doing work in this space through the Smile Squad, which is visiting many local schools across the state, including, on several occasions, schools in my community, including my former primary school, Coburg West, which it visited a couple of years ago now. I had the chance to visit and pop by when it stopped by the school. The parents love it, the students love it, and the teachers and education staff love it, because we are providing that dental care right at the coalface, where families need it most. On that note, that is why I commend this motion and support our ongoing action on health.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (15:52): I also want to talk about all of the things that have been spoken about before. Oral health and dental health are critical to health in general. As the member for Pascoe Vale was talking about, it has impacts on all-over health, including for your heart. When I worked in aged care policy there was a lot of malnutrition because a lot of older people have poor oral health, and that is why it is a priority for this government. I cannot tell you how proud I was when I heard that we are doing free dental clinics across the state. We have got public dental clinics, but there have not been enough of them to cater for the need. Eligibility is pretty tough, and we know that a whole lot of working families are now doing it pretty tough. I have always been lucky enough; I can afford to take my kids to the dentist every six months or so. I have always been lucky enough to have good oral dental care. But I know my parents made a lot of sacrifices to make sure that happened. I needed orthodontic work as well. I did not wear my plate often enough, which is why I probably need to go back. But it is very expensive.

We know the difference it makes to confidence also. My father-in-law's brother was a prisoner of war, and he had some difficulties. They had nine kids and could not afford the dental care that was needed. My father-in-law paid for treatment for one of his nieces, and it made a massive difference to her life and her health but also to her confidence. We know, for people who are self-conscious about their teeth, how that can really impact their confidence. You see it sometimes: people will not smile for photos, and you think, 'Oh, I know it's because they are self-conscious about their teeth.' It breaks my heart, really. So I just think this is such a good Labor policy, and I really am proud because it will give us 10 free dental clinics across the state. There will be no eligibility; you will get the care you need in everything. It is not just urgent care, which is what our public dental system gives currently, where you have really got to be in pain to get eligibility. This will give people dentures. It will give people the ability to chew again. It will make sure that they do not get malnourished because they have not got good oral health.

I really want to shout out to the community health sector, who have done a mountain of work in this area for a long, long time. I know that they will be so very happy with this announcement, because they work so hard to make sure the poorest people in our community have some semblance of dignity and are pain free with the current public dental health system. But 10 clinics across the state treating, I think, 100,000 people a year will make a massive difference to people, and that is kids, adults and older people. It is not just emergency pain relief, it is the dental care you need. To me, Medicare is one of Labor's defining policies and something we are all so very proud of on this side of the house. I know the Liberals, unfortunately, threaten that every few years. Including dental in public health will make a massive difference to all of the people that look to Labor for quality of life, for equity, for health care and for the dignity of being able to chew their food, smile in a photo and live a pain-free life. I do not know if I got around to thanking the community dental health services. DPV Health in particular do a great job in my electorate. I know they have expanded their beds out in Epping, and I am really proud to have been able to have helped to get that funding so they could do that. I am hoping we will get one of these 10 free dental clinics in Broadmeadows, because I know it is also an area that is in need of dental care.

I also want to talk about the Smile Squad and what a massive difference that has made to kids and families in my electorate. It is so hard to get the time to take the kids and to try to book an appointment

during school holidays. They are always booked out. Trying to get a before-school or an after-school one is hard. I have also got the privilege of having relatively flexible work. For a lot of families that is not the case, and if you cannot get into a dentist during those times, it is really hard. Having the dental van at school makes a massive difference to even just having the regularity of check-ups, and the free dental care is another thing that you do not have to worry about, because the school is doing it for you and it is getting done during school hours. I remember when I was a kid there was a dental bus that used to come. They would put this big thing in your mouth, and I got quite a few fillings there. It is good public policy. It is good health policy. I am so pleased that our government prioritises spending money on exactly that sort of thing, because it is essential to what we do as Labor governments. We make sure people have equal access to health and equal access to dignity and all of the things that I am so proud are part of being a Labor government.

We can contrast that with what might happen if the Liberal–One Nation party gets in. I am really worried on a whole lot of levels. In the area of economics I think that \$40 billion in cuts is going to mean less teachers, less child protection workers, less firefighters and less police – all of the things that we rely on every day to make sure we have an operating society. I just do not know how they can justify all of those cuts. Public transport will go, free TAFE will go and free kinder will go. I know thousands and thousands of people have enjoyed going to the free TAFE in Broadmeadows. The new health and community care centre of excellence has meant that we have been able to train up workers in all of those care industries where we need so many more workers into the future. It suits the people of the north. They are a very caring community, and they give back. Being able to get the training they need at a free TAFE in Broadmeadows makes an incredible difference. Also, if you come and have a look at it there – and I encourage everyone to come and have a look – it is a beautiful place to learn, and everyone feels so proud to walk in there. They feel like they are valued and that they matter, and that is exactly what they are to us. Every person matters. Every person deserves the very best in education, the very best in health care and the access to that and the very best in all of the things that make life worth living and good to live in Victoria.

The other thing I want to talk about is the other cost-of-living relief measure that the government has been providing. The half-price public transport for the rest of the year has been massive, but the free public transport for kids is just amazing. I reckon we have seen 200 kids come through the building today, and that just means that we can have excursion –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the grievance debate.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Government performance

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:01): Thank you for the opportunity to grieve for the people of Victoria, my last opportunity in this 60th Parliament. And sadly, there is much to grieve about in Victoria today: 12 long, wasteful years of the current Andrews, Allan, and now what is his – oh, Ben, Premier Allan, government. We have had an opportunity to make Victoria a place where people want to live, where people want to invest, where people can grow their businesses, look after their families, have their children well educated and have the best health care and fantastic transport services. And what do we find after 12 years? After 12 years we find a government that after three premiers has no idea what it did with \$15 billion of extra spending on overgrown, overblown projects.

Here in Victoria, for those of us in regional Victoria, we have missed opportunities. We have our highways, our byways, our country roads falling to pieces, crumbling. Our roads are in chronic disrepair. And yet for those of us from the west, particularly, we make the journey to Melbourne – and

some of us might do that this week with the grand final – and we get to the now-open West Gate Tunnel. It was supposed to open back in 2022, but part of the \$15 billion was the excruciatingly long amount of time it took for the government to get anywhere with that project. We get there now, and the joke going around about the West Gate Tunnel is that people are wanting to book it for their 21st birthday because you know no-one else will be in there. It will be an open venue, it is well-lit and you do not have to worry about anyone else being there. It is a private venue. It is like some sort of subterranean nightclub for most people these days. It is not used by the people getting into the city because this government did not consult well. Do you know what it did? The West Gate Tunnel typifies the lack of good governance and accountability of this government – it was billions of dollars overbudget, it was years overdue, and no-one knew why they built it. No-one knew where it was going to. It dumps you at a spaghetti web of intersections on the north side of the city and still does not get you to where you want to go. And it is not just me saying that, it is the tunnel itself. The Minister for Roads and Road Safety is sitting here. The minister for roads can have a road convention down in that tunnel he is now in charge of. He will not have to worry about anyone getting in the way, you could have whiteboards all through it with pictures of his pothole fixing that he is doing. And my goodness, he will need a tunnel that is kilometres long because there are that many potholes he could show people in his exhibition.

But quite frankly this lost 12 years is a real disappointment. We have missed out something chronic in country Victoria. We have got the potholes, we have got our roads and then of course there are people in regional Victoria that want to use public transport. Let us take the Warrnambool line, a crucial piece of infrastructure built back in the 1870s and 1880s. Since that time we ran trains regularly and on time every day of the week, to and from the metropolis all the way through to Warrnambool. And on that train every day we provided food, we provided seats, and we provided toilets, even. Most people did not have them in their houses in 1870, but you got it on the train.

Fast-forward to today, and we have 10,000 less seats a week. Imagine that, fast-forwarding to 10,000 less seats a week on the Warrnambool train. Not only that, but there is also no food. You have got to pack an esky. If you are coming from Warrnambool or, heaven forbid, from Portland in the morning, pack an esky, take your own food and bring your own water. If you are bringing the dog along, bring the kibble. There is nothing you can get on the train. Worst of all, if you are a school group from Polwarth or, heaven forbid, from the U3A, a wonderful group of people in Western Victoria – the U3A are going to a concert at midday at the wonderful Arts Centre here in the city – God forbid if you want to get on the train and all have a seat. No, having a seat in this day and age is a long-forgotten tradition now in regional Victoria. You can expect to stand all the way to Melbourne and all the way back, and that is if you do not have to dodge any number of misbehaviours or other things that may happen on the trains now, because the government has refused to support those working on V/Line to make sure people are sitting where they are supposed to sit and behaving as one would expect them to behave on such a service. We have missed those opportunities. We have seen money wasted in Melbourne, and we have had a very, very poor return indeed.

Also over the last 12 years we have had the situation that this government has, in its wisdom, listened to the community to a certain extent. It heard the community say that in the electorate of Polwarth we have this wonderful state asset called the Great Ocean Road. The Great Ocean Road is an icon not only for the people of Polwarth but for the state and the nation as a whole. It is a wonderful place, and the Great Ocean Road itself – the physical road – is the world's longest war memorial. You would think that managing that would be quite simple, but sadly over the last 12 years the highlights of the Great Ocean Road – the Loch Ard Gorge, the Cape Otway lighthouse, the functioning harbour down at Apollo Bay, Point Grey at Lorne, all these iconic places along the Great Ocean Road – have been left to decay and crumble.

Back in 2018 the Liberal federal government at the time generously gave \$200 million to the state of Victoria to get some projects up and running along the Great Ocean Road. Well, fast forward to today and we have got the government flat out trying to get these projects finished before the election. It is

going to be interesting to see how open they are before the election. We might wander in and still see the scaffolding everywhere. They are down there desperately trying to get them open, even though they have had the money through 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026. For nine years they have had the money – nine years – and they have not been able to get these projects done. The cost of that delay is that the people in Kennett River have been short-changed. They are no longer getting sealed car parking and sealed roads; they are getting gravel. The people at Skenes Creek are no longer getting their walking track, because we cannot afford that now. That has been cut from the agenda. The poor guys down at the Apollo Bay harbour are getting a reduced project. They are still waiting to get their fish and chip shop open. It closed last year. It will be closed again this summer. Two lost years because this government is incapable of finishing a project.

Not to mention the tourists – we love the tourists along the Great Ocean Road. We love the tourists coming through Polwarth. We have spent in excess of \$150 million on a very elaborate toilet block down at the Twelve Apostles. You have got to wonder how you spend \$150 million on a toilet block when you have not even bought the land yet. That money does not include the purchase of the land, because the poor farmer down there, we took the land off him. We took it off him two years ago now, I think. He still has not been paid. Instead he is in court fighting to get paid by the government. They have not paid a cracker, but they have spent \$150 million on a very elaborate toilet block and a big dam with no overflow and a car park – a great car park that is probably going to have all sorts of lighting on it too that will really help with the atmosphere down there. We will see what happens, but we do not know yet.

One of the great joys that people have down there is the opportunity to go on a helicopter flight. The government's decision to site everything where they have without consulting the community has meant that we have put the helicopter joy rides at risk at the Twelve Apostles. So it will be a great experience for people. They will get down there. There will be no Loch Ard Gorge to see, no arch to see, no coastal walk to go on and no helicopters to go on. All these things, after 12 years, have been taken from us. We have lost seats on trains. We have lost opportunities for tourist activities on our iconic coastline, and of course all that money that has been spent, the \$150 million, was not money spent on the roads. Quite simply, the missed opportunity and the reason we grieve in Victoria – and we certainly grieve hard in the seat of Polwarth – is that we had opportunities to get this right. We have spent the money, but we have spent it badly. We have spent it without wisdom. We have spent it without consultation. This government has been on a frolic and a folly of its own to the detriment particularly of the people in Winchelsea.

Another opportunity arising is for good education, and I am passionate about education. I was raised and educated in my electorate. I know the opportunities there. Good education can deliver great outcomes to the kids and the young people in my electorate. Disappointingly, can you believe that since COVID the already low attendance figures at the schools in my electorate have gotten even worse? Under this government we drive around with our Education State numberplates, and yet this government's focus on making sure that kids have the support and the reasons to turn up every day to school – they have just turned a blind eye to them. I have got schools in my electorate, my secondary schools, with 36 per cent attendance, 38 per cent attendance or in the low 40s. In fact I have only got one secondary school in my entire electorate with an attendance rate over 60 per cent. That is not something we as a state should be proud of. Twelve years of an Education State should have delivered way better outcomes than that to the students and the young people of an electorate like Polwarth.

I have been proud so far to make an announcement that we are actually going to start doing something about that in the electorate of Polwarth. We are going to look to give support to the Winchelsea school, for example. The Winchelsea school was rated one of the poorest maintained schools in the whole state, and it is in a growing community, with no plan, no horizon for its redemption. It is a great school. It has got a strong community. It has got a great teaching staff. And yet this government has expected the teachers and the kids to operate with minimal fencing. It must be the only school in the state that is on a dual-lane double highway with no 40-k zone out the front of it. It is unable to have its spouting

repaired. It is riddled with asbestos. It has got possums in the classrooms. And then we go, 'Wow, the kids in the Polwarth electorate are only turning up to school 30, 40 per cent of the time.' That is because this government has turned its eye away from those kids and those young families in regional Victoria, and I grieve strongly about that.

One of the other great grievances that we have in the electorate of Polwarth is the way this government has turned its back on gas. As someone who has lived and worked his entire life in regional Victoria and in Polwarth, many of my communities – Colac, Camperdown, Cobden, Winchelsea – all have strived for a long time to have gas connected to their towns. They got it, and what did that mean? In the end, it means we are now the biggest producers of dairy product in the country. We produce milk for the supermarkets. Western Star Butter only this past month celebrated its 100th anniversary of producing and manufacturing in the electorate of Polwarth, because gas is available in Cobden. We have got the manufacturing of AKD, Associated Kiln Driers, the largest timber producer in the country. Thirty-odd per cent of the construction timber in the whole of Australia comes from the resources of that company, which needs the gas-fired kilns that it uses to produce the product. That is not only important for my community but absolutely essential for the nation as a whole. It cannot be done without gas. We have the gas line, we have the gas processing facilities and we have the infrastructure. We just have not had a government, for 12 years, to approve and authorise the expansion of that gas field. In fact what that has done has set back confidence and the ability of those big producers to continue to invest, because this government has refused.

Lily D'Ambrosio interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: The former minister sitting up there making a little bit of a noise – she is tweeting away up there – was responsible over these 12 years for denying my community and the industries in my community the ability to invest properly, because of her self-inflicted restriction on gas. She did not ever have any of the gas companies knock on her door and say, 'There's no gas.' She had them knocking on her door saying, 'Please give us permission to explore and develop those important gas fields that exist in the Otway Basin.' But, no, I grieve because of the 12 years of this government. That lost opportunity has set investment and set confidence back. In fact because of that we are down to only 20 per cent of the capacity. There is huge capacity down there, which would bring the cheapest, most cost-effective gas to market in the state. Instead we have bleaters on the other side here who have no idea where their gas comes from. They have no idea. They somehow think you can use a hair dryer to process gas and milk and other things. No, you need real energy, you need real resources. You need to have an understanding of how these things work, and sadly, that has been denied for my community.

Lauren Kathage: On a point of order, Speaker, I take offence at the blatantly sexist comment from the member for Polwarth.

The SPEAKER: Are you seeking a withdrawal? Member for Polwarth, I seek a withdrawal for the member for Yan Yean.

Richard RIORDAN: I withdraw the comment.

Lauren Kathage interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Yan Yean, enough.

Richard RIORDAN: I blow-dry my hair. *(Time expired)*

State election

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:16): I grieve the fact that the Liberals have no solutions but a conga line of cuts, let me tell you. You cannot make \$40 billion worth of cuts without cutting hospitals and schools. And we all know that cutting too hard and fast wrecks frontline services, reduces jobs and actually shrinks the economy. Independent economists have confirmed their plan is simply not

credible and does not add up. It is actually ruthless. Part of the plan is cutting one in seven public sector jobs, and that includes health workers, disability workers and child protection officers – and we all know it will not stop there. The report is clear: the Liberals will need to cut more than 30,000 jobs, so that would be a whopper and that would absolutely smack Victorians in the face.

What does that actually look like? It would mean longer hospital wait times, fewer nurses and fewer hospital beds. I will note that our Victorian Labor government has improved nurse-to-patient ratios and increased the number of nurses and midwives by 17,000, just to give a bit of perspective, a bit of compare and contrast. It will mean communities will be less safe and it will mean local infrastructure cuts. We have already seen some of the dazzling policies being floated around by One Nation for what we would call the Americanisation of our hospital system, abolishing the Department of Health. We know that would have absolutely devastating consequences. They are certainly not fans of paid parental leave, and they are not keen on penalty rates either, so really they are the enemy of the worker. In order to get to government, the Liberals would have to partner up with One Nation. That is why I am spelling out what this proposition would mean, what the cuts would mean and what the policy frame would be.

To zone in on health, because it is obviously really important, the Liberals have form; we are not making this stuff up. When they were last in government they cut more than \$1 billion from health and went to war with the nurses and paramedics. They failed to deliver hundreds of promised hospital beds, despite making it a key election promise. In four years they managed to open just two alcohol and other drug beds across the entire state. They defunded 25 community mental health providers and shut down the only 24-hour mental health advice hotline. They voted against the mental health levy, leaving Victorians on their own when they needed support the most. So we can just get a flavour of what sacking 31,700 public servants would look like.

On education, when they were last in they cut more than \$1 billion from TAFE, shut 22 campuses, sacked more than 3000 staff and almost destroyed vocational education in Victoria. They cut more than \$1 billion from schools, slashing the education maintenance allowance and cutting speech pathologists, psychologists and social workers. They even cut Fresh Fruit Fridays. Where is the heart? But imagine what they will cut with \$40 billion. So we can see that their plan is not credible.

So what have we done? Let us put that on the table. Thanks to Labor's investments, Victoria's students and schools are leading the nation. We made a promise to open 100 schools. It is actually more than that: we have delivered 121 schools, more than anywhere else in the country. The government and the AEU have reached an agreement that means Victorian teachers are the best paid in the country, with the best conditions. According to the most recent NAPLAN data, Victorian students are leading the nation for a second year in a row. We all know that is not by accident; that is about investing in our schools and investing in our wonderful teachers, who do the hard work to bring out the best in Victorian students. Victoria is ranked in the top two in 16 of 20 measures, cementing our status as the Education State.

What about energy? This is also a matter close to my heart. The opposition said the SEC is gone if they win. What does this mean for Victorians? This means higher power prices for families and bigger profits for overseas corporations. They sold off the SEC under Jeff Kennett in the 1990s. Labor has brought it back, and the Liberals will – make no mistake – abolish it again. The Liberals announced last week they would be 'pausing' – cutting – Victoria's renewable energy transition if they were to be elected. Cutting the energy transition means one thing: higher bills for Victorian families. Their reckless political decision would send bills skyrocketing by over \$500 a year, destroy the reliability of the grid and deprive regional Victoria of almost – get this – \$10 billion in investment and thousands of jobs. Why would you, even if you were a climate denier like those opposite, turn your back on that kind of investment in regional Victoria? I do not know. I think it is ideological. I cannot understand it. It does not make economic sense. We of course back renewable energy all the way.

Just while we are on the topic of energy, One Nation have announced they will bring nuclear energy to Gippsland. I wonder if the Liberals can categorically rule that out, because they would have to team up with them if they were to form government. We know that the social licence on nuclear energy is pretty weak, particularly when you think that there really are no safe repositories for high-level nuclear waste in the world. Actually, I was on the inquiry that looked into nuclear energy and uranium deposits. Halfway through that inquiry NuScale – they had thought, ‘This is the opportunity; we’re going to launch here’ – were set back because the SMRs were not ready. They just did not have the commercial viability. SMRs purport to be quicker, but as we know – as there have been so many devastating accidents with nuclear energy – over time it takes longer and longer and longer to build up the protective mechanisms in concrete, steel et cetera to try to protect communities. We have learned through bitter experience, and there are communities that have enduring impacts to this day.

But of course under Labor that is not the way we do it. We are transitioning through renewables. I have to say that broadly, when you think about the Victorian community, they really are very supportive of renewable energy. We know that by their fantastic uptake of the Victorian energy upgrades scheme something like 2.4 million Victorians have been able to upgrade their homes, and thousands and thousands of businesses as well. You do not just have to take it from us; take it from Victorian consumers and Victorian businesses, because they know this is a way to keep their power bills down. At the same time, they are also doing their bit to reduce emissions into the future – because yes, we do need a planet that is actually livable, and a good way of doing that is transitioning the energy that we use.

I note that the member for Polwarth was talking about gas. There were a lot of opinions in that, but facts I think were sadly missing. The fact is that there are just not endless supplies of gas in Victoria. It is just not a factual statement. It is not about us blocking anything in that regard. The market knows. I do not know why the Liberal Party does not talk to the actual operators themselves, because if they did, they would know that they are actually spinning a lot over there. The only thing I can think of is: is it a little back door to fracking? Is it a back door or a front door? Surely they have talked to somebody in the gas industry. They would know the truth. Therefore this is all about warming people up for the idea of fracking. We have embedded a ban on fracking in the constitution. Why have we done that? Because we are actually thinking about farmers, we are thinking about agriculture and we are thinking about water. Once you are fracking and you poison the groundwater, that is not good for farmers. It is not a viable solution. We have seen when it has gone terribly, terribly wrong. Trying to reverse it is not good all round; it is actually not an easy thing. It is extraordinarily difficult because it can be so devastating to the environment. That is why we took these measures. It was the right thing to do. That is why I just think there is a veiled allusion to fracking when they talk about gas and that we must invest more in that domain. We know that that is not good for Victorians more broadly but particularly not good for farmers and farming land. That is why I cannot understand why those opposite are tantalised by that idea. Obviously I do not live in a regional area – I live in the city – but I have empathy for farmers, and I think about what that would mean in terms of devastating their beautiful agricultural land. I would not want to have that on my conscience.

There are many other aspects that could experience severe cuts were the Liberal–One Nation coalition to form. Let us look again at the issue of emergency services. When they were in they cut \$130 million from Victoria Police and slashed \$66 million from our fire services.

Martha Haylett interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, that is the record. There is a lot of bravado over there: ‘We’re going to do this and we’re going to do that.’ I actually just do not believe it, because it is in their nature when push comes to shove to just cut, cut, cut. They cannot get their hands out of the pocket when they really need to at that vital moment. It is like, ‘Nah, we’re leaving it in there and we’re going to cut the services that people need most.’ When you think about it, by contrast our government has invested close to \$5 billion in resourcing our police. It has added over 3500. We have also promised to recruit another 1500, and part of that, the how, involves having a second police academy in the west. It means that

you have broader accessibility in terms of people not having to schlep over to Glen Waverley. You have got different parts of Victoria. That means we are also getting a broader network of those recruits who might seek a pathway into the police force. I know this is certainly going down very well in Wyndham and in that area because it costs time and money et cetera to have to travel across the city. Having that kind of accessible recruitment pathway seems to be a really good and pragmatic idea. You can set whatever figure you like for recruitment, but if you do not have capacity to actually train up the police, it is not going to happen.

That is why I do not really buy the proposition of those opposite: 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, we'll put up X number of police,' but they are baulking at the idea of a second police academy. The two elements do not match up. We know you cannot only put the goal – that is, the target – of an extra 1500 police; you also need to have the mechanism to be able to train those police. That is exactly what Labor has done, because we always plan well when it comes to being able to train people for relevant pathways. That is also why we have invested in TAFE and we have free TAFE in this state, just as an example, because we know how important it is to invest in vocational learning pathways so that Victorians have choices and are able to tap into their true interests and passions and find pathways that are meaningful to them. We have form in this, in a good way, because we know the value of education and we know the value of backing it in.

If I can come back to the start of my grievance, I lament the future for Victoria were it to have the Liberal Party's proposal of \$40 billion worth of cuts. It would be savage and it would have devastating consequences. We know, unfortunately, that they have form when it comes to really investing in big cuts across the board. Whether it is police, whether it is education or whether it is health, they have form. Victorians have lived through that, and they really do not deserve to be subjected to that again. Therefore, the Carroll Labor government is the way forward.

Government performance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:31): I rise to grieve for the people of regional and rural Victoria, who have been absolutely let down by this government – not just the Carroll Labor government, not just the Allan Labor government, but also the Andrews Labor government. Indeed I could go back to the Brumby and Bracks governments as well, because we have been sadly neglected by this Labor government for a very, very long time. I know that we have got the Minister for Roads and Road Safety here at the table. That in itself would be enough – to say that roads are the area where we have been neglected the worst would be fairly easy to do, but most particularly we have been neglected in terms of the infrastructure spend and the services that we deserve in regional Victoria. The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) has found for the last five years that we are getting in regional Victoria less than 13 per cent. In the last couple of years, 12 per cent. Indeed in the current budget, 2026–27, the estimate of the infrastructure spend in regional Victoria by the Parliamentary Budget Office is just 11.9 per cent.

Why is that important? It is important because we are 25 per cent of the state, but we are getting just 12 per cent of the infrastructure investment under this state government. That is in every aspect of our lives. It is the lack of investment in roads. It is the lack of investment in improving our roads. It is the lack of investment in rail. One of the reasons that I actually first asked the PBO to do this work four or five years ago was that I noticed that everything the government was doing in regional areas was largely funded by the federal government. When it comes to rail, the government likes to spout about the regional rail revival projects in Ballarat, Bendigo, Gippsland, Warrnambool and Shepparton. Eighty per cent of it has been funded by the federal government, but when there is a project in the city Labor is happy to put its hand in its pocket and actually fund those for its constituents, but not in the regions.

We have seen time and time again that this government has failed to invest in our hospitals and in our schools. We hear so much about this being the Education State. Well, not in most of rural and regional Victoria, where our schools are falling apart. Schools like Sale College have been campaigning for

nearly 10 years now for consolidation onto one site. They are across two campuses and both of them are actually falling apart. We have got videos of teachers on rainy days having to go and find bins – not buckets but bins – to catch the water that is coming in because the roof is so poor and the maintenance is so poor. That is an example of one. We have got fire stations that are not getting done, like Foster fire station and Korumburra. It has taken 10 years to get Yarram underway and now it is finally getting built. We have got a commitment to Mirboo North. Again, that was actually funded. It was committed to by the CFA several years ago, but that money got taken away by the government and it is only now that they are committing in this year's budget to do Mirboo North. That is certainly something that the Nationals and Liberals will match. That is a commitment that we will give.

We are missing out so often because the 12 per cent that we are getting is across the board, when we are 25 per cent of the population in regional Victoria. That is why the Nationals and Liberals have committed to our fair share guarantee. If we are elected this year on 28 November, we will guarantee a minimum of 25 per cent of the state's infrastructure investment will go to rural and regional Victoria in our first term. That is an important thing because it actually sets an expectation for the entire government that we will deliver for rural and regional Victoria. The Leader of the Opposition and I have both said publicly that that is not just how we want to do infrastructure investment, but we actually want to go a step further. We actually want to make that the way we run the government, that regional Victoria actually gets its fair share, not just of infrastructure spending but of the services and the things that we need, because we are certainly not getting them under this Labor government. We know that to do that we have to have a strong economic plan, and we are hearing the government at sixes and sevens on this issue. They do not actually know what to say, and it is best evidenced by the notices of motion that are on the government business program. One of them refers to the Liberals committing to cut \$40 billion, and another one refers to the Liberals committing to cut \$22 billion. They cannot actually even get their own negative story straight.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, you tell me, member for Lara, because none of it is true. Member for Werribee, you should be careful on this, old mate. This government cannot lie straight in bed. They do not know whether they are Arthur or Martha, even on their issues when they are attacking the opposition. We have got a 10-year plan that we are being very clear on. We have committed to a hiring freeze in the Victorian public service. I heard the member for Albert Park talk about it, and I have heard everyone on that side talking about the Australia Institute. I mean, for people that apparently do not like the Greens very much, they are very fond of quoting the Australia Institute, which is predominantly run by former Greens staffers. You do know that, don't you? It is funded and run by former Greens staffers. They run this Australia Institute rubbish that there are going to be 31,000 jobs cut. The Parliamentary Budget Office, the independent Parliamentary Budget Office, which the Labor Party established, is the one that has said, after we asked them if there is a hiring freeze, what would it save? The Parliamentary Budget Office came back and said it would be \$22 billion over 10 years.

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: With no redundancies, no-one will lose their job. The opposition has committed to an essential services guarantee that we will not be cutting jobs, unlike those opposite – thousands. We remember the former Premier being asked the question, 'Is it hundreds of jobs?' 'No, it is thousands.' Oh, okay. But that is different. When there are cuts by the Labor Party, they are not really cuts, they are just efficiencies and they are reviews and everything. But apparently there is this rubbish that we get thrown about the cuts that are going to happen here. We are actually going to run a disciplined process. Absolutely, we are. We know that we can save that \$22 billion over 10 years. The Parliamentary Budget Office said it. So forget the Australia Institute rubbish that it has come up with. We have got that plan. We have got a plan to make those savings. Scrapping treaty will save \$1 billion over 10 years. We have committed to getting rid of Breakthrough Victoria, which is \$1.2 billion. There are savings to be made in things that we do not think should be priorities and savings that will help us get the budget back under control and also do the things that we want to do.

We actually want to send a signal to business that we want to grow. We want to grow in regional Victoria in particular as well, and we are going to start to reverse Labor's changes on land tax. Land tax is where we had a threshold of \$300,000. Tim Pallas, the former Treasurer, dropped that to \$50,000 and brought 300,000 people into the land tax system. We will progressively raise that up. We will raise the threshold and reduce the rate for payroll tax. Now, both of these are very modest, and I am being completely up-front and honest in saying that these are not massive tax cuts, but they are sending a signal to the private sector, to investors around the world and around the country that Victoria is going to be open for business under a Liberals and Nationals government, and regional Victoria in particular will be open for business. We want people to come and invest, to create jobs and to get Victoria back on track, because we know at the moment all we hear constantly is the term 'ABV'. We hear it from investors in the property sector, in the manufacturing sector and in others – ABV, anywhere but Victoria – and we are not going to have that under a coalition government.

That 10-year plan is critical to get the budget back under control and to return us to a cash surplus by 2032 so we can actually start paying down the debt and save that \$11 billion that we are currently spending – or we will be spending – on interest payments. \$11 billion is more than the police budget, the ambulance budget and the kindergarten budget put together, with \$1 billion left over. Those opposite never understand and never accept the opportunity cost that comes with that debt. We will deliver safer communities, in particular in regional Victoria, with 3000 new police. That will allow us to reopen the 40-odd stations that have been closed or had reduced hours under this government. We had the Premier only a couple of weeks ago saying that he is about reopening police stations and not about closing them, and then he closed another four. Another four inner-city Melbourne stations got closed. Three thousand more police – 1500 of which are to fill the vacancies that currently exist. I heard the member for Albert Park talk about their commitment to recruit 1500 police. That is just filling the vacancies that they have left, which have been there for so long and have left our police undermanned and have left our streets without an active police patrol.

We will bring in new bail and sentencing laws. We will stop the revolving door that we have had here. I heard previous speakers talk about how they back their police. The best way you can back police is to let them do their job and to back them when they do their job. One of the things that police tell us every day is that they are sick of arresting crooks, them getting out on bail and then arresting them again the next day, and we see that particularly with youth offenders. It has got to stop. That is why we will bring in 'break bail, face jail'. That is why we committed a long time ago to Jack's law, something that the Premier has jumped on board with in the last week or so. The member for Morwell spoke about the importance of that this morning. Once again we actually moved a private member's bill on Jack's law and the Labor government voted against it. So are they really committed? We had members stand up and say they support it, but they voted against the bill. It is ridiculous.

I started with roads, and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is at the table now. I do not hold the minister responsible for the state of the roads entirely, because he has only been there for 5 minutes. He is, though, the third roads minister in four months that we have seen under this government. We know that the current Premier, when he was roads minister, cut the roads maintenance budget by \$200 million. Do not ask me. Do not believe me. That is in the Auditor-General's report from two weeks ago. That is where we saw the rot set in, when those cuts were made under the now Premier back in 2021–22. We have now seen our roads fall into disrepair. The Nationals and Liberals will deliver a \$5 billion plan over four years to eliminate a million potholes and get us back to doing the preventative maintenance that needs to be done – grading the roadsides, cleaning out the table drains and doing the reseals. We are down to less than 2 per cent of the network every year being resealed, when it should be 7 to 10 per cent every year. It is simply not happening under this Labor government. We will make sure that we hold contractors to account. We will review the contract arrangements and make sure that we are actually getting value for money and the best possible efficiency we can with our roads.

We will lower costs with no new taxes or charges. We will abolish stamp duty for first home buyers up to \$1 million, versus the current arrangement at \$600,000. I mentioned how we will progressively raise the land tax threshold. And very importantly, we will scrap Labor's emergency services tax. This is an egregious tax that is all about filling Labour's budget bottom line, not about supporting our frontline emergency services. Workers will go back onto the fire services property levy, and we will ensure that our CFA, SES and Fire Rescue Victoria are funded properly.

We will deliver reliable regional health care, and we have already made some significant funding announcements for some of our hospitals, on capital, whether it is the Mildura base hospital thanks to the member for Mildura or whether it is the member for Lowan delivering a commitment for the Hamilton hospital. We have had Bass Coast health commitments and we have had Albury–Wodonga commitments, and there will be more to come to make sure that our regional hospitals are looked after, up to scratch and meeting modern conditions. I went to Hamilton with the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Lowan, and I could not believe just how bad and how cramped and tiny the Hamilton emergency department was. We will fix that.

We will deliver stronger planning protections for our farmland. This is a government that – and I have followed the member for Albert Park multiple times on renewable energy projects – does not understand the impact on regional Victoria. It has never had the respect for regional Victoria when it comes to renewable energy or transmission lines. We will give people their power back to appeal at VCAT, we will repeal the new compulsory acquisition powers the government brought in, we will repeal the fines that the government brought in, we will scrap VNI West, we will do a review of the Victorian transmission plan, including Western Renewables – and I will make the point that whilst the member for Albert Park was talking about how wonderful these projects were, she neglected to mention how her own Premier is now committed to reviewing Western Renewables Link. We will introduce legislation that gives agricultural land stronger protections, that treats it like we treat the environment, like we treat cultural heritage, and make sure that we actually address the concerns of our farmland, which is absolutely critical. We will deliver affordable, reliable energy, whether it is gas, whether it is our energy security guarantee, whether it is solar panels on roofs and the like. We will reverse Labor's ban on gas and we will deliver honest and accountable government. But most of all, we will make sure that regional Victoria gets its fair share. It has not been getting it under Labor, it will under the Nationals and Liberals.

One Nation Victoria

Katie HALL (Footscray) (16:46): I am pleased to make a contribution to today's grievance debate and would like to start by setting out how long it is I can hold a grievance: it is a long time. I am going to go back to 1998. In 1998 young Katie was a high school student. I was in year 10. Often we are asked by school students, 'What made you get into politics?' In 1998 I was one of the school students who helped organise a school strike against Pauline Hanson. And I know, Speaker, you would not condone this sort of behaviour, but I actually got caught wagging school because I was on TV, and I know my father, my beautiful late father, was actually secretly quite proud of his daughter that day. That was one of the reasons I became politically interested as a young person, because I was shocked to see the demonisation of our migrant community from Asia that Pauline Hanson was targeting in her rhetoric at that time. The other issue that made me quite political at that time was the Liberal Party's cuts to education. Of course Footscray High was one of the schools that they closed down. I came from a family of teachers and nurses, and what I saw was family members losing their jobs, teachers going into a teaching pool, and schools being closed down and sold off to developers, as we had in Footscray.

I still hold the same grudges that I held in 1998 when I attended that school strike against Pauline Hanson, and it is quite scary that the more things change, the more they stay the same. We are now entering the election period. This is indeed the last sitting week of the 60th Parliament, and One Nation have emerged as a force yet again in Australian politics. I am not shocked; I am disappointed to see

that the Liberal Party will not rule out forming government with One Nation, and I am genuinely scared and concerned for what that could mean for my community of Footscray.

We heard just before the member for Gippsland South say with some pride that treaty will be one of the things that they scrap – that they would be happy to save money by scrapping treaty after the decades of work it has taken us to get to this point, to be leaders in this nation in reconciling with our First Peoples and providing autonomy for our First Peoples through treaty. I am shocked and appalled that the Leader of the Opposition could be a supporter of the Voice to Parliament referendum but then come in here and say that under her government she would scrap treaty. I do not think the people of Kew would be very supportive of that either.

We know that the opposition has announced that they will cut \$40 billion from the state budget, indeed that there will be a mini-budget before Christmas. I think about the many thousands of public servants who might be worried heading into Christmas about whether they will have a job. What will this mean for our nurses and for our teachers? The Liberal Party have already announced that they will close six schools without consultation so that they can create three select entry schools, abandoning the children and young people who would otherwise be going to a high-quality local state school. I am proud that I have been part of a government that has upgraded every school in Melbourne's inner west in the Footscray electorate. We have invested more than \$130 million across the schools in Footscray, and of course we reopened Footscray High, the very school that the Liberal Party under the Kennett government closed, leaving the young people – at that time the school was in Yarraville on Wembley Avenue – those students, without a local high school.

It is scary to think that One Nation will be shaping the politics and policy of a Liberal–One Nation government, that they will do anything and say anything to get into power, including a deal with One Nation. This election is a real choice: Labor's plan to fight for working people, as we always do, or the Liberal–One Nation plan to cut services and to hurt working people. We know that there are ruthless cuts coming. The Liberal Party cannot do this alone. The Liberals and One Nation can only form government in Victoria together, and under a Hanson–Wilson government we know that One Nation will not stop the cuts. They will vote for every single one of them. In the Victorian Parliament the One Nation member in the other place has already voted with the Liberals for a spending cap requiring those deep cuts to public services that we saw during the Kennett era and are now resurfacing again.

One of the other things that made me a political young person was women's rights and women's healthcare rights. Something I wanted to reflect on, which I think is a very real risk of a Liberal–One Nation government, is women's rights that we have fought so hard for on this side of the chamber being clawed back. They need to come clean with Victorian women about what they will say goodbye to. Will they agree to a deal with One Nation to stop women having access to safe and legal abortion? Will they get rid of paid parental leave, something that stops thousands of women from being trapped in poverty? And do they agree with Pauline Hanson's disgusting assertion that family violence is something that women make up? How will they make it even harder for women to report this?

It is shocking to think that in this day and age, after all of the work that we have done, we could be taking such backward steps. Voluntary assisted dying and all of the extraordinary social reforms that have meant so much to Victorians: it will be very easy for the Liberal Party and One Nation to tear those down. But what I wonder even more is where the moral line is, where the ethical line is, in terms of the corrosive impact that this will have on our democracy. I think it is important when we have the opportunity to be in this place that we reflect on the kind of society that we want as Victorians and the importance of having kind leadership and civility in politics. I know that when I open my Facebook page as a member of Parliament, I see horrendous commentary from One Nation supporters flooding my social media channel. It is disgusting. I think that that is a concern that we really should be speaking about: what will happen to public discourse in Victoria if One Nation get a foothold in this place.

I would like to conclude my contribution to this grievance debate, perhaps my last of the 60th Parliament, by focusing on civility in politics. Whatever side of politics you are on in this place, I have thought in the 60th Parliament we have all come here with an aspiration to do good things. Representing Footscray and our community in this place has been the honour of a lifetime for me. There have been extraordinary days of joy. There have been hard days too, because people often come to their member of Parliament when they are experiencing the most difficult of circumstances. Some of the best moments we have among my team are where we resolve a problem, perhaps for a single constituent seeking help. To that end, to counter some of the negativity in public discourse, we set up the 'nice wall' in my office, and we have filled it with cards, letters and words of gratitude for my staff who do so much and work so hard to make lives better and make our community stronger. Sometimes, too often, when someone wants to direct a casual cruelty in my direction, it lands on my staff.

Every single member of my team lives locally. They are passionate inner westies who care deeply, and I could not do this without them. Sel Sanli has been by my side every day for eight years. I will be grateful for his friendship and stewardship of team Footscray forever. Linden Nelson joined my team after COVID, and her articulate and tireless advocacy and her flawless attention to detail have undoubtedly changed local lives. Patty Cashman's previous work as a disability worker shines through in his quiet and kind approach to his work. Patty, your future is very bright. Zerine is new to my team. She is kind and cheerful and she is a champion for small business. She is an accomplished communicator. My parliamentary secretary advisers Luke and Cat are both local, and they have thrown themselves into my mission to reform the way music education is delivered in government schools. It has become their mission too, and I am confident the body of work we have produced together will ensure that children, whatever their background, have the life-enriching opportunity to learn an instrument or learn how to read music from singing. Every day I am mindful that I come to this place representing the shared values of the Footscray branch of the Labor Party. I get to stand on their shoulders, and I hope that our successes – the school upgrades, the new hospital, the truck bans – have made them proud.

When it comes to civility in politics, sometimes your family feels the harshest criticisms the most. To my partner Joseph Ischia, I am not sure where you came from but thank God you are here. All of us in this place choose this life, but the people we love are conscripts. I thank him for picking me up and providing me with perspective on those tough days. To my children who also did not choose this life, one day I hope you realise that I pursued this path to make life better, fairer and more equitable for future generations. I love you more than anything.

In my first speech in this place I said I would give this job everything I had, and to quote again the wise mantra of *Friday Night Lights*, 'Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose'. So as we head into what will be undoubtedly an unedifying and brutal election, I hope that everyone can reflect before they write a nasty comment on social media, before they pick up the phone and ring my electorate office to abuse one of my hardworking local staff members, that we are all here to do something good for our communities, that we can be kinder and that we should encourage civility in politics. That does not mean we cannot call out the things we disagree with, but we should always do it with respect.

Climate change

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (17:01): Thanks to the member for Footscray. That was a fine contribution. I enjoyed listening to that, and I enjoyed hearing about your past, fighting One Nation as a student. Best wishes to you.

Today I want to grieve for an issue that was close to the heart of my late colleague Dr Tim Read, and that is the nature that has been lost in the last 12 years of this government and for our kids who will not get to grow up in the stable climate that we all had. Victoria is facing an escalating climate crisis. The global average annual CO₂ concentration reached around 420 parts per million in 2023, which is over 20 parts per million more than when the government came to power in 2014. Melbourne has just had its hottest winter on record, and now we are heading into the worst El Niño event in recorded

history. We are also seeing more killer heatwaves, longer bushfires, rising tides and deadly flash flooding. The failure of a glacier in the Himalayas just killed over 1400 people in Nepal and Tibet, with thousands still missing. Our oceans recently hit a record high average temperature of 21.1 degrees, and in August I am sure many people were terrified, as I was, to read the UN's report *Limiting Overshoot*, which conceded that earth is hurtling past the 1.5 degree climate tipping point, which was agreed to in the Paris Agreement. It is now a question of how far we go above that limit. Temperatures are expected to increase by a catastrophic 2.6 degrees by the end of the century unless governments start taking drastic action to end coal and gas.

I am a scientist, and I am very aware that Victoria cannot solve this problem alone and that, by its very nature, climate change is a global problem. I get that this is not easy, that we have many people reliant on gas in their homes in Victoria, that people are used to driving cars that use fossil fuels, that it is hard to change things overnight. Given these sobering statistics – the very future of our children and our grandchildren, our ability to grow food in this state and the \$167 billion worth of homes that will be lost by 2100 due to rising sea levels, according to the Climate Council's latest report – surely, given all of this, as a wealthy state in a wealthy country which has so much at risk from climate change, we should be doing everything that we can and using every lever that we have to reduce this risk. At the very least, surely we should stop pouring fuel on the fire and making the problem worse. But unfortunately here in Victoria under this Labor government we are doing both. We are refusing to reduce our own emissions enough and we are pouring fuel on the fire by supporting new gas-drilling projects.

In February this year the Labor government tabled a response to the Greens parliamentary inquiry into climate resilience in Victoria, a fine piece of work that talked about what we need to do in the built environment to protect us from locked in climate change. Yet Labor outright rejected key recommendations that would actually have led to significant change, such as the recommendation for a resilient homes scheme similar to those that already exist in other states. They also refused to create a permanent climate adaptation fund. I have had people who have previously worked for a very long time within the department come to me and tell me that they feel like this government just does not take climate adaptation seriously and that the climate adaptation plans are a joke because they do not have any actions attached and certainly do not have any funded actions attached. In fact this year Victoria will only spend \$19 million on climate action. Meanwhile this same Labor government plans to fast-track AI data centres, and they continue to approve new oil and gas projects in Victoria, including a second drilling project near the Twelve Apostles. In the last year or so Labor have approved over a dozen new oil and gas projects in Victoria's oceans and recently announced that they will backtrack on supporting renewable energy infrastructure by yet again reviewing transmission infrastructure across the west of the state, which is absolutely essential if we are to meet our renewable energy targets and get off coal.

It is Victorians who pay. We stare down higher energy and insurance bills in a heating world that has officially missed that 1.5-degree threshold, yet neither of the major parties is doing enough to touch the sides of the climate crisis. They have failed to heed the warnings, and it is us, ordinary Victorians, who end up paying the price. We pay through our skyrocketing insurance bills, we pay through our higher energy bills and we pay through the climate disasters and extreme weather we experience and all the loss that comes with that. There is still time to change course, though. The UN's report said that we can still stabilise the climate if we act very urgently and make significant changes. But if we do not, we are cooked. This government likes to talk about the fact that we have renewable energy targets, but in fact those renewable energy targets were set virtually at the level that the government knew we could meet with the existing investment that was in the pipeline. They were not an ambitious target that we were trying to extend ourselves to meet. Now even those meagre targets are likely to be missed because of the expansion of AI data centres, which are popping up right across the state as the Labor government has courted big tech to come here and build them, with very little protections and controls about the energy and water that they use.

I also want to grieve today for the nature and biodiversity we are losing due to this government's inaction. I have never seen such neglect and disdain for our environment as I have seen in the last few years of this Labor government. We had a few years where we had some hope and some action, but the last few years have gone in the exact wrong direction. People I speak to no longer have any faith that this Labor government will do anything to protect the environment at all or that they care about it, to be honest. Victoria has already lost around 80 species since colonisation, with almost 2000 now facing extinction. Victoria's latest state of the environment report rated 26 of 42 biodiversity indicators as poor, with 20 deteriorating since 2020. They are pretty damning stats. Labor has cut hundreds of environment workers at Parks Victoria, the Victorian Fisheries Authority, the biodiversity division at the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and many other agencies. In 2024 Parks Victoria's core funding was cut by around \$6 million and its capital by around \$40 million. This year Labor cut it again. Labor starved Parks Victoria of funding so badly it could not even pay its park rangers the same as other public sector counterparts. The government's flagship biodiversity strategy, called *Biodiversity 2037*, essentially is unfunded. Programs like Landcare remain critically underfunded. If they do not receive funding in the next year, they will have to sack Landcare facilitators and the program will go under. Imagine losing Landcare – a Joan Kirner legacy – because Labor defunded it. That is where we are at.

Instead of reforming our laws to protect native animals, Labor has bent over backwards for hunters, shooters, developers and mining and logging companies. They have backflipped on banning duck hunting, despite the recommendation of the government's own parliamentary inquiry. They ruled out any new national parks, including the decades-long plan for the great forest national park to protect the areas of our native forests that were previously logged, and instead opened up tens of thousands of hectares of national parks for recreational deer hunting. They have failed to protect the critically endangered grasslands in Melbourne's west, land the government was meant to have purchased by 2020, but did not, and they have left loopholes that allow native forest logging by stealth.

When it comes to wildlife, we are also seeing some very worrying concerns. Last year the Victorian government issued 4806 authorities to control wildlife, authorising the killing of over 230,000 protected native animals. That is 58 per cent more permits than the average from 2009 to 2024 and 66 per cent more animals than the 16-year average – and it is getting worse fast. Permits were up 35 per cent in 2024 alone, and the number of animals was up 30 per cent. These permits are issued to landholders on request, and once they are issued the outcomes are not tracked. The government signs off on the killing of hundreds of thousands of protected animals and has no idea how many are actually killed. And regulatory changes now allow these permits to be converted to commercial harvesting in national parks and on other public land. Kangaroos often bear the brunt of this system. The eastern grey kangaroo alone accounted for over 70 per cent of every animal authorised to be killed last year. Together, the three kangaroo species made up 79 per cent of the total. These are animals that are an icon of our country, yet the government is authorising their killing at levels well above historical norms, with no tracking and no idea of the real toll.

Koalas also bear the brunt of this government's poor decisions. For years the government has claimed koalas are overabundant in Victoria, claims that have led to the mass killing of koalas, including shooting them from helicopters. But two weeks ago the government finally released a report it sat on for more than 12 months. The review, led by the Arthur Rylah Institute with scientists from major universities, estimated there were around 225,000 koalas in Victoria, less than half of previous estimates of 460,000, and they found them in chronically poor health. Of 68 koalas assessed, 29 were in such poor health they had to be euthanised. A quarter of Victoria's remaining koalas – over 50,000 animals – live in commercial blue gum plantations. As native forests have been depleted, koalas have come to rely on these plantations for food and shelter. But when they are harvested, they are displaced, they face injury and death and there is nothing really in place to protect them. Restoring habitat and rebuilding koala corridors across Victoria should be one of our most urgent conservation priorities. Instead the government has offered a meagre \$2.6 million. That is pocket change. When in

New South Wales koalas were listed as endangered, the New South Wales government committed \$190 million over five years.

A healthy environment is not just a nice-to-have. Clean air, fresh water, functioning ecosystems – these are the foundations of our health, our food, our economy and our culture. For First Nations people, country is not a backdrop to life, it is life. But Labor is treating nature and wildlife as something to be pillaged and destroyed for short-term profit. Funding for environment protection in Victoria is at a historic low. Species are declining, habitat is shrinking, invasive species are spreading. Meanwhile, the department managing our environment too often acts in the interests of industry, not nature. We need a fundamental shift, not a tinkering at the edges but a genuine reordering of how our government values and invests in nature, and that is exactly what the Greens are here to deliver.

While we are talking about animals, I have another example of this Labor government abandoning animals in my own electorate. The Lost Dogs' Home, a beloved institution in North Melbourne, has served our community well for over a decade. It is currently facing an uncertain future due to the government's Arden development. Six years ago the government said they would acquire the Lost Dogs' Home site on Gracie Street and make room for residential and commercial development, open space and flood mitigation as part of the Arden precinct. But it is now six years later and the Lost Dogs' Home have not been advised of a new site or a timeline for relocation – they are still waiting. In the meantime the site in North Melbourne is bursting at its seams. Every month that passes requires staff to invest significant resources in maintaining ageing infrastructure that is not viable for the long-term needs of the Lost Dogs' Home, and time is running out. So today the Greens and I are calling on the government to act to save the Lost Dogs' Home and ensure it has a guaranteed future in a facility that is fit for animals and the community that it serves.

Although it is a bit of an aside, while we are here I would also like to talk about urban open space, something that we all need for our health and wellbeing. In particular there is an issue that has come up in my local area of Carlton and Carlton North. The City of Yarra has decided to ban picnics across the iconic green median strips along Canning, Rathdowne and Drummond streets. On Monday the City of Yarra declared that the median strips would be treated as part of the road rather than as the municipal reserve; therefore picnicking and having a drink with friends is not permitted – what wowsers! There is something uniquely Melbourne about grabbing some food and a bottle of wine and sitting outside on the median strip with your mates on a warm evening. Carlton's median strips are our neighbourhood's shared backyards. It is distinctly Melbourne to use our public space like this, and we should celebrate the way we respectfully share our communal open space as part of Melbourne's unique culture, not send in the fun police to stop people having a rosé in the sun. It should not be a crime to sit on the grass and enjoy a drink with friends. So I am joining the community's call to free the strip, and my message for Yarra Council and its killjoy mayor Stephen Jolly is this: banning picnics on median strips on Canning and Drummond streets is a ridiculous and unnecessary overreach and it needs to be reversed. The Greens stand with the community in saying, 'We want our strip back.' No-one is here to defend bad behaviour or people leaving rubbish and creating a disturbance, but banning picnics is a massive overreach. The council needs to find a way to reverse the ban and ensure our community can once again respectfully enjoy that great Melbourne pastime, a picnic in the sun in the middle of a median strip.

In conclusion, I grieve for the nature we have lost due to this Labor government's inaction. I grieve for our children and grandchildren, who will not get the chance to grow up in a safe climate because political leaders across the world did not have the guts to take on the fossil fuel lobby and the status quo and do more to protect our kids' future. I have lost faith the government will ever take climate change seriously, and that is exactly why the Greens exist to replace them.

Werribee electorate

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:16): Zooming out from inner Melbourne to the outer suburbs, I would like to grieve for the potential impact of a Liberal–One Nation coalition on growth suburbs like

mine. But first, to reflect on something more positive, since being elected to this place I have been laser focused on listening to people in my community – whether that is out and about knocking on doors, at community events or talking to families, especially families of those that I have taught in my community – then working in government on solutions to the problems that they raise with me and then ultimately delivering for my community. We have seen this in many different cases recently, with things like the route 194 bus, an orbital route between Wyndham Vale and Werribee station made possible through advocacy by those estates through that area and the work that I did in government to make sure that it met the community's expectations. It now runs that rapid service through communities like King's Leigh and Riverwalk. And there have been other things, like getting Ison Road open months ahead of schedule to provide an alternative to Ballan Road in central Werribee for traffic through Manor Lakes and Wyndham Vale, something that is particularly important, as I will come to in a moment, when it comes to the record of those opposite on planning in our growth areas like Wyndham.

We have also seen many other achievements, like more schools in our electorate – more schools being opened – and upgrades to schools. One of the proudest upgrades that I have managed to champion in my time as the member of Parliament for Werribee is not necessarily one of the biggest in terms of dollars – we have \$45 million in this budget towards a new high school in Wyndham Vale – but the few hundred thousand dollars towards Riverwalk Primary School on a project to help create closed spaces in what is currently an open learning area to help with the move to explicit instruction by that school. As a former teacher who has had to teach in many an open-plan area but also in a proper classroom in an enclosed environment, I know just how important that few hundred thousand dollars is to that school community, and going out there and visiting the principal Barry last week and seeing how it will work was a great moment.

I know when it comes to the Liberal record in my community it is quite stark, particularly when it comes to schools. A few months ago I was humoured to see the Shadow Minister for Education show up to Werribee Secondary College with a gaggle of other Liberals in tow and talk about infrastructure at Werribee Secondary College. He would have walked around things like the auditorium there and the new classrooms that were built by Labor governments after a shocking fire burnt down a fair chunk of that school about a decade ago. But what is most abhorrent is that those opposite, back when they were in government, refused to fund the final stages of that important rebuild for Werribee Secondary College. At the time, state Liberal MP for the upper house Andrew Elsbury – who, I will say, was so impressed with the Liberal Party that he is now a candidate for the West Party – said:

Every opportunity I get I raise the issues at Werribee Secondary College ...

...

Just because things don't get mentioned in an election campaign doesn't mean they don't happen.

But still they did not come to the party with any funding to complete the build at Werribee Secondary College. To go there and to talk about our school infrastructure is quite ironic, given that at one point the electorate of Werribee actually had most of the new schools that were opened. I think it was around 50 per cent of the new schools that were opened in the state of Victoria one year were in the electorate of Werribee, which is a credit to the school building program that the Labor government have championed in our outer suburbs.

But our community do not have the short memory that those opposite would like them to have. Previous Liberal governments, particularly federal Liberal governments, have invested \$0 in the infrastructure and the services that my growing community needs. In fact at one point about four months after the Catherine McAuley centre, which is our acute mental health centre at the Werribee hospital, was opened, it was at risk of closing because the federal government refused to provide the funding to keep that service running. This is the contempt that those opposite and their mates in Canberra, when in government, have for my community.

While I am still talking about historical matters, I do want to go to some of the issues around planning for growth. Back in the dying hours of their government, the then Minister for Planning – who I do know is sitting at the table, so I am going to go a little bit easy on him – approved many a precinct structure plan across the City of Wyndham. Unfortunately, there was no investment in the infrastructure needed to be able to cater for those tens of thousands more homes. Since then the Labor government has delivered the schools, the community centres, the roads and the bus services that these communities needed. But there has obviously been a gap because that planning was not done when it was opened up – fast-tracked, some would say – to developers in my community.

We now see curious situations where, because of the planning system that was set up by those opposite with these precinct plans, we have entire gaps in the road network, which means that we cannot run buses through places like the Savana estate down Pear Street. There is literally 300 metres of Pear Street that does not exist because the rules were changed and developers could take their jolly good time to finish those roads that were necessary as part of those precinct plans. We also see situations like the gap in Ison Road, where route 194, which I mentioned earlier, cannot actually run down that road because there is no intersection at Ison and Greens, again because the rules were not in place when those precinct structure plans were approved and started to make sure that developers did that work.

We have made it pretty clear on this side that we believe that growth should be sustainable in our outer suburbs, which is why in the electorate of Werribee there will be no new precinct structure plans under this government until 2029–30, and what we are developing will mostly be industrial and commercial properties on the western side of Werribee. This stands in stark contrast to the plan of those opposite, which is to fast-track houses in my community. Yet there is very little mention of the necessary infrastructure needed to cater for such growth. I think it is almost vandalism when it comes to our outer growth areas with that plan.

There has been a lot of talk on this side about this so-called plan – the glossy brochure that the member for Kew waves around so often – and some of the financial assumptions behind it. Yes, there has been a lot of discussion of the Australia Institute report into what that would mean for our community. Our community in the outer western suburbs relies heavily on good public services and having a good public service through public entities that operate different things like our water corporations, our Country Fire Authority and the Victorian Institute of Teaching – I am just naming a few that I will mention in a moment – and not just the Department of Education and the core public services through that. We rely on them heavily, so when we heard that there will be a so-called pause on our back-of-house or back office jobs, I was curious about what that would look like. The Australia Institute report tears this apart. It will mean that there will be job losses, and it will mean that there will be a \$40 billion hole in the budget of a potential and dangerous Liberal–One Nation government.

This is particularly worrying because some of those so-called back-of-house functions or back office functions are very loose and ill-defined in their glossy brochures. The people who we are talking about in these back office roles, these administrative assistants, support the people on the front line. It is not like they are just sitting there twiddling their thumbs and putting together slide decks, they are supporting people on the front line. Some of those administrative support people I can think of that I have engaged with quite heavily through my role as a volunteer firefighter and as a teacher are people like our brigade administration support officers, our wonderful BASOs working out of district 14 headquarters in Melton. They help the secretaries of the brigade and the captains and officers to be able to run those brigades. They are back office, and there is no real clarity from those opposite whether or not they would be at risk from this so-called plan that they have got. People who sit at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing at the Footscray housing office, the people who coordinate the maintenance, the people who we contact from our electorate offices when someone in public housing needs assistance, they would technically be back-of-house or back office staff.

I think too across my electorate flood mitigation is particularly important. Those experts, when it comes to flood mapping in our catchment management authorities and Melbourne Water, are back

office and are under threat from the plan that the Liberal–One Nation coalition have. The people who process your Victorian Institute of Teaching registration – I just did mine about 20 minutes ago, because it is September, and a reminder to all teachers out there, make sure you get it done before 30 September, otherwise you have to pay extra – are back office and are also at risk. It even goes to people like the lady from the hospital who called my partner last week to confirm our outpatient appointment at Werribee Mercy – that person is back office. This is what is at risk with the nasty, small-minded conservatism of those opposite with their mates in orange T-shirts.

I think it is particularly important to reflect on what ‘back office’ means, and I have got a bit of a list here from all the different public entities – like Cenitex, literally the IT service for the entire public service of Victoria; the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel; the Commission for Children and Young People, who often go in and make sure that our services are acting appropriately with young people; all our health agencies, our public health boards and the staff under them; not to mention our biggest employer in Victoria, which is the Department of Education. All of those positions would be at risk because, and the Australia Institute goes to this in much detail, you cannot have a hiring freeze and cannot achieve the savings which the member for Kew wants to try and achieve in this so-called plan without actually affecting these sorts of roles.

I think it is also particularly important to place on record this idea around not being able to afford things because we are in debt. The reality that is outlined by the Australia Institute and in multiple different publications from Treasury as well is that we finance to build projects that increase productivity in our state. We are asset rich now in Victoria because of 12 years of this government, continuing with the Carroll Labor government, because we build infrastructure. If those opposite with their One Nation mates get a chance to run the state, they will not be able to afford the infrastructure to cater for that so-called fast-tracking of growth in the outer suburbs, because the reality is they have said they want to have a cash surplus. That means that they will not necessarily be able to pay the, say, \$83 million for the Ballan Road and Bolton Road intersection upgrade that the Labor government has committed to, which I would say the Liberal Party are particularly silent on. They could not afford to pay for things like their hybrid trains from Spain – ‘trains from Spain’ is a great line – further delaying electrification for the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines through an interesting jaunt into foreign-built trains and also putting people out of work at our factories in Ballarat.

I think what I want to end on today is not necessarily the grim reality of the legacy of the Liberals when it comes to my community or the plans that they have through their glossy brochure but a little bit more hope, and what I want to achieve as a re-elected member of Parliament for Werribee comes down to hope. As someone who grew up in my community and left to go to university and start my first job, I know just how important it is to have a community to come home to. I want many young people in our community to have the jobs, the training and the services they need to start their own families, like I have, and to continue that beautiful thing in our town. So many kids leave home, and they always come back to Werribee. It is like the Hotel California of the western suburbs.

We cannot let parties in blue and orange T-shirts divide our community for their own personal political gain or the interests of billionaires. I do not even want to go down that path with One Nation, because it is just really interesting. They claim to be of the people, yet they really are of Gina Rinehart. We are better in our community together. I look at those community events and the diversity of experiences represented, but we all want the same things. We want good public services. We want to have those jobs in those public services to help each other. We want to make sure that we can work together and have good schools and good health care – all things that are at risk with the Liberals and One Nation, and we have seen it before in our community, but things that I know that if we are Werribee together with a Labor government, we will continue to achieve.

Premier

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (17:31): Grievance – where do you start with this Labor government? This is my first one. We will start with the Premier. The Premier wants Victorians to believe he is part

of a new government. He tells us he is not Daniel Andrews and he is not Jacinta Allan. He might have a different name on the office door, but he cannot rewrite the government's record that he helped lead. Premier Carroll was not sitting on the sidelines. He was a senior minister. He was the Minister for Roads and Road Safety among many other portfolios. He was the Deputy Premier and he was a former premier's partner in crime. He sat at the cabinet table while the scandals mounted, while the debt mounted and while our roads deteriorated and billions of dollars were poured into projects that blew their budgets. He was the second most powerful person in this Labor government, and now he wants Victorians to believe that he arrived to clean up somebody else's mess. He was instrumental in creating that very mess. Changing the name on the Premier's door does not refund the \$589 million wasted on the Commonwealth Games. It does not fix all the potholes, it does not help rebuild Rosebud Hospital in my electorate and it certainly does not erase the decisions the Premier supported while sitting around the cabinet table.

This is the fundamental problem for this Premier. He wants the authority of an outsider coming in to clean things up when he was the ultimate insider, and there is nowhere that record is clearer than integrity. Today the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria began its work, and I suspect there were a few people nervous on the other side turning up this morning. For months this Premier told us Victoria did not need this royal commission. Labor resisted it, Labor blocked it and Labor dismissed it, and they attacked the idea. Then they changed leader and suddenly, almost overnight, the royal commission they said they did not need became the Premier's first major announcement.

What changed? The allegations did not suddenly appear in August. The concerns about corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct on major construction projects were already there. The opposition had been calling for a royal commission and Labor had said no. Then suddenly Labor said yes. The truth is simple: Victoria needed this royal commission all along; Labor just did not want one. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming. Fifteen billion dollars matters. In fact every dollar matters, because while billions disappeared into cost blowouts, waste and projects plagued by corruption, communities like mine were constantly told there is no money. There is no money to rebuild the Rosebud Hospital. There is no money to finish the Flinders Pier. There is no money to properly maintain our roads and fix the potholes. Every dollar wasted is a dollar that cannot be spent in communities like mine, and when we are talking about a hospital, this is not just a line item in the budget. It can be a life-or-death choice.

Then there is IBAC. In March the opposition brought forward the follow-the-money bill into this Parliament. It would have strengthened IBAC's ability to follow public money through contracting chains. The bill passed the Legislative Council and came into this chamber, and what did Labor do? They killed it at the first reading, and the now Premier Ben Carroll voted it down. Less than three months later Labor announced that IBAC would get follow-the-money powers. Now the Premier tells us these reforms are so important that they needed to be fast-tracked. Give us a break. In March he voted to kill them. Now he wants credit for delivering them. It is just another backflip from Backflip Ben. If these powers are so important now, why were they not important back in March?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I understand the member has told us that this is his first contribution to a grievance, but there is no excuse for not using correct titles for members in this place.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member has twice used incorrect titles. I encourage the member to use correct titles and continue.

Anthony MARSH: Sorry, Deputy Speaker – the Premier who backflips. Why did Labor vote them down, and why should Victorians believe that this government suddenly discovered a passion for integrity after almost 12 years in office?

Then we get to the special prosecutor. Labor announced it with great fanfare – Victoria's first special prosecutor. It sounds pretty impressive, but there is just one slight problem: it is a special prosecutor with no powers to prosecute. This government's own announcement says additional powers will come next year, so we are establishing a special prosecutor before giving the special prosecutor power to prosecute. Only this Labor government could come up with such a plan. At the moment the only thing particularly special about the special prosecutor is its inability to do what it says on the packet.

Sitting beside all of this is the public interest immunity. This Labor government was told to fix it years ago. Recommendation 91 from the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants recommended changing the law so public interest immunity could not be used to refuse to provide information, answer questions or produce documents to a royal commission. The Labor government agreed. They said they would do it, but we all know they did not. Four years later we have another royal commission, and the cover-up power is still there. Why? Because they want to be able to use it. They were told to remove the cover-up power, they agreed to remove the cover-up power and four years later they have deliberately left it sitting there.

We already know former Premier Daniel Andrews has form in this space. In 2023 when the Commonwealth Senate committee was examining the Commonwealth Games debacle, he preemptively claimed public interest and intergovernmental immunity to avoid any scrutiny. I suspect he will be very interested in that provision when the royal commission starts asking questions, and there might be a few other former ministers and current ministers interested in claiming that too. If this Premier is serious about transparency, he should have gotten rid of it. Do not leave an escape hatch for the very people this royal commission may need to question.

Then there is the cost of all this mismanagement. As we said, the Commonwealth Games remains one of the most extraordinary examples: more than \$589 million not to hold the Commonwealth Games but to cancel them – more than half a billion dollars, and Victoria got nothing. The Auditor-General found the original budget was unrealistically low, the business case was inadequate and agencies did not always provide frank, full and timely advice. This was more than \$589 million for an event that never happened. Imagine what that money could do in our health system. Imagine what it could do for our roads. Imagine what even a fraction of it could do for my local hospital. Then there is the SRL, the Suburban Rail Loop – billions upon billions of dollars. The Auditor-General found that, based on the available evidence, the SRL East was unlikely to be delivered within the government's announced budget and timetable. The government published estimates of \$34.5 billion, and the Auditor-General found that even that could be well over a billion dollars short.

While those billions disappear into Melbourne megaprojects, the Mornington Peninsula is told to hurry up and wait. Rosebud Hospital can wait. Flinders Pier can wait. Our roads can wait. Our coastline can wait. Our community can wait. My community has waited long enough, as has that of the member for Mornington on the Mornington Peninsula. The roads should be particularly uncomfortable territory for this Premier, but now apparently roads are someone else's problem. Ben Carroll was the Minister for Roads and Road Safety from 2020 to 2022. He recently reminded everybody that he is not the roads minister. No, he is just the Premier. Talk about a cop-out. The Auditor-General's report this month should embarrass every member of this Labor government. In 2021 around 39 per cent of Victorian state roads were in poor or very poor condition. That was already a pretty poor record, but by 2024 it was around 48 per cent, almost half of our roads, in poor or very poor condition. The gap between defects recorded and defects repaired more than doubled between January 2025 and June 2026, and the department itself told the government the funding was insufficient to maintain or improve the network.

That was not an opposition talking point; that was the Victorian Auditor-General. They knew, and frankly people in Nepean did not need an Auditor-General to tell them any of that. They drive these roads every day. They hit the potholes, they damage their tyres and wheels and they put themselves at great risk. They report the same potholes time and time again. They watch the temporary patches fail. Motorists are sick of being told that this is not normal. They are sick of reporting potholes and watching

nothing happen, and they are sick of paying the price of a government that stopped properly maintaining our roads. Apparently not everyone agrees. During a road maintenance debate in the other place in July a Labor member told the Parliament the residents on one road were 'quite happy to have it full of potholes' and 'actually like it full of potholes'. We have all seen it. What utter nonsense. Nobody in Nepean has asked me for more potholes. Nobody has said that they want their road to fall apart as a traffic-calming measure. They want roads before they –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member on his feet appears to be reading a speech.

Matthew Guy: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I have been in the chamber and I have noted that Labor members have contributed to this grievance debate no differently to the member for Nepean. If the member for Macedon would like to set a precedent for her own members, I would be keen to see you rule on it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the member reading a speech or referring to notes?

Anthony MARSH: Referring to notes, like many other members opposite. The basic test also applies to community safety. People do not judge community safety by the number of press conferences this Premier holds. They judge it by what happens outside their front door and in their communities – whether their homes are broken into, their car is stolen or the kids are safe and whether local traders can close their shops at night without being threatened. Earlier this week a resident in my electorate informed me that three armed intruders broke into their house with machetes. Just last night a large group of young people caused chaos outside my electorate office in a Subway. The shop was trashed and the fight spilled out onto the street. That is not acceptable. Then, incredibly, this morning again we saw Labor vote down Jack's law as introduced by the opposition – twice in just 12 months. Just last week the Premier announced that Labor now supported Jack's law after resisting it and after dismissing it and after voting it down. But suddenly – just another backflip – the Premier now says that Jack's law is so important that they will introduce it, but only after the election. They are in government today. They have the numbers today. They had the power to do good today, but they did not. They voted it down, and they are making Victorians wait until an election to give them basic safety. Why should Victorians have to wait? Why should our police have to wait? Labor could have helped get dangerous weapons off our streets today. Apparently enough changed for Labor to put Jack's law on the election flyer, just not enough for them to vote for it in Parliament.

While Victorians are dealing with all of this, what are they getting from this tired Labor government? Another promise, and this one is extraordinary. I sat here listening earlier today to Labor member after Labor member telling Victorians about their wonderful new promise of free dental care. Not free dental care for some Victorians and not free dental care when someone is in great need and lucky enough to get an appointment – free dental care for all Victorians. That is their claim. The Premier said himself that every Victorian resident will be able to go to a free public dental clinic for a check-up every year – every Victorian every year. There are more than 7 million Victorians. How many people does Labor say these new clinics will treat every year? A little over 100,000. That is 1.4 per cent of the population. Let us do some maths, shall we? If they have the capacity for roughly 1.4 per cent of Victoria's population every year, it will take roughly 70 years to get through the population once – not every year, once. So on average a Victorian will be waiting 35 years to get one of their free Labor dental check-ups. Maybe Labor is just hoping they have no teeth by the time they get there. It is mathematically impossible, but Labor again is more than happy to lie to the Victorian public.

I do not believe this is an accident. We are weeks out from an election, and after more than a decade in government Labor doles out promise after promise. This is just another promise built on a lie. The Premier tells 7 million Victorians they can get a free dental check-up every year, but then buried in the detail is the evidence to show that can never be the case. They hope that nobody does the maths before polling day. Perhaps we should not be surprised, but let us be honest, they know this promise is a scam. It is just another desperate attempt to cling on to power. This is the same Labor government whose

own forecasts have Victoria heading towards \$200 billion in net debt. Labor cannot count, or perhaps they can, but what they are really counting on is that Victorians do not notice and they do not do the numbers.

This is what happens when a tired government reaches the eleventh hour. Policy gives way to politics and delivery gives way to slogans. The numbers do not lie, and Victorians should not be lied to either. There is a common thread throughout all of this: mismanagement, backflips, desperation, cover-ups and a royal commission that was resisted but is now underway, but we all know this is the Carroll cover-up commission. Follow-the-money legislation was voted down, but now Labor wants credit for follow-the-money powers. They announced a special prosecutor who cannot prosecute. They were told to remove public interest immunity from royal commissions. Four years later, the cover-up power is still there. They spent more than \$589 million on the Commonwealth Games that never happened, and half of Victoria's state road network is in poor or very poor condition. Now they are promising 7 million Victorians can get a free dental check-up every year, knowing that is a blatant lie.

The Premier wants Victorians to believe none of this belongs to him. But he was there. He was a minister, he was Deputy Premier, he was at the cabinet table and he owns this shocking record. The consequences of that record are not abstract for my community. They are the Rosebud Hospital still waiting for the full redevelopment that it desperately needs. They are the potholes littered all across the Peninsula, wreaking havoc on our roads and on our residents. They are the taxpayers watching hundreds of millions of dollars disappear while basic infrastructure is left wanting. They are local businesses dealing with crime and antisocial behaviour, and they are families being promised things that simply do not stack up. The Premier says he is different and will do things differently. Changing the Premier does not change the record. The Premier was there. He was a minister, Deputy Premier and at the cabinet table, and he owns this shocking record. The only hope is now to boot out this shocking Labor government and give Victorians a fresh start.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage members to be careful with the words 'lie' or 'lying'.

Opposition and One Nation policy

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:46): I rise today to grieve for Victorians and for their future under a One Nation–Liberal coalition. I grieve for residents in the Lara electorate who cannot afford a One Nation–Liberal coalition. They cannot afford \$40 billion of Liberal and One Nation cuts: \$40 billion of cuts to health care, to education, to public transport and to the services that the residents of the Lara electorate rely on. I would like to know, and I think Victorians would like to know, what will the One Nation–Liberal coalition cut first? Which hospital will they close? Which train station will they close? How many TAFE campuses will be locked up? Because with \$40 billion in cuts, you can say goodbye to free TAFE. They have got form on that, because the last time the Liberals were in government they closed TAFE campuses. They closed TAFE and they locked students out.

We already know that they have a plan to close schools. The One Nation–Liberal coalition announced that this week. They have announced that they will close six government schools. I am actually quite shocked by this. I have never heard of an opposition taking a policy to close down government schools into an election campaign, but that is what you get with a One Nation–Liberal coalition. This is disgraceful. Imagine being a parent of a child in grade 6 who is excited to start year 7 at a great government school, only to have the One Nation–Liberal coalition come in and close it and convert it to a select entry school that your child cannot go to. Converting six existing schools to select entry means massive disruptions to six already thriving communities of students and parents. If a student is already in a government school where they are settled, where they have friends and a routine, play sport, where they know the bus route, and they do not pass a select entry test at year 9, then they are out. Parents will have to find them somewhere else to go, away from their communities, separated from their friends, further from home with longer commutes.

You cannot trust the One Nation–Liberal coalition on education. All they offer is false hope. Their plan for \$40 billion of cuts will devastate schools, and I think it is a lot more than six schools that are

coming that will end up being closed under a One Nation–Liberal coalition. Do you know what the worst thing is about their plan to close the six schools? The One Nation–Liberal coalition will not even come clean on which schools they are closing. They will not tell us which six communities they are going to devastate by ripping out a state secondary school that every student can attend. Schools are the hearts and souls of our communities. My mum was a primary school teacher at an incredible government school, and she taught me so much about what schools can offer young Victorians beyond learning. Schools are safe havens. They are places where children feel like they can belong.

Schools are a place where our youngest Victorians can be nurtured to grow and thrive, and I am so proud of this government's investment in our state schools. We have delivered record funding. We have opened over 100 new schools and upgraded thousands of schools. In the Lara electorate that means upgrades to schools like Northern Bay College's Goldsworthy campus, where we have delivered a \$20 million project that has delivered an entirely new school entrance, a performing arts centre, an administrative building and incredible classrooms and learning spaces for the students there; upgrades to schools like Northern Bay's Hendy campus, a school that was burnt down with a terrible fire about 18 months ago and a school that this Labor government is rebuilding; upgrades to schools like Nelson Park School, a beautiful school community and a specialist school in the Lara electorate that supports children from prep to year 12, and I am so proud that we have upgraded both campuses; upgrades at schools like Western Heights College, which runs an incredible specialist sports program, and up until recently, the students there did not have a gym – but that is right, this Labor government came in and built them a gym; and upgrades to Lara Secondary College, where we are upgrading the toilets, and to Lara Lake Primary School, where we have installed traffic lights out the front to make it safer for students as they are coming to and from school. All of that is at risk under a One Nation–Liberal coalition, because if the One Nation–Liberal coalition is cutting \$40 billion, there will not be any money to upgrade any more schools anywhere in Victoria.

Only Labor is investing in education, and the results speak for themselves, with Victoria achieving the best NAPLAN results in the nation two years in a row and a record pay deal for teachers. But all of that is at risk under a Liberal–One Nation coalition. So I grieve for every Victorian who relies on our great government schools for a great education, because the future is grim with a One Nation–Liberal coalition. I grieve for those six communities where the One Nation–Liberal coalition has a secret plan to close six schools, and I call on those opposite to own up to what they plan to do and tell Victorians which schools they plan to close if they are elected in November.

In her contribution, the member for Footscray noted that she can hold a grudge and reflected on the actions of past Liberal governments where they closed down and sold off our schools. Well, I can also hold a grudge. As I said earlier, my mum was a public school teacher, and she lived through those Kennett years. I was in primary school then, but I remember them too. They stick with you. I could not understand why anyone, let alone the leader of our state, could think that closing schools and selling them off was a good idea. At that young age I already knew just how important our state schools are, and I heard from my mum about the uncertainty of Liberal cuts, with schools being closed and sold off around Victoria, with teachers being sacked. I have a long memory, and I will always hold a grudge against the Liberal Party for what they did to Victoria's education system in the 1990s. And while it is shocking that they now have a plan to cut \$40 billion from Victoria's schools and hospitals, we should not be surprised, because this is who they are. They have cuts in their DNA.

I grieve for Victorians and for the people of the Lara electorate who rely on our public health system, because with \$40 billion of cuts planned, no hospital, no health service and no community in any part of Victoria is safe. In Geelong we remember what happened the last time the Liberals were in government. The Labor Party committed to building a second public hospital. So did the Liberal Party, but when they were elected, that was one of the first promises they broke. Instead of a public hospital, guess what they built. They built a private hospital that is not accessible for everyone in our community. And it gets worse, because public services at Barwon Health were shifted to the new private hospital, leaving Geelong residents with poorer health care. I grieve for Victorians because that

will happen again under a One Nation–Liberal coalition. With One Nation as the coalition partner, it gets even worse, because One Nation want to Americanise our health system. That would be devastating for Victorians. One Nation's health policy includes withdrawing Australia from the World Health Organization and scrapping the regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

Victorians cannot afford an American-style health system. Residents in the Lara electorate cannot afford that, because they rely on great local health services, like the services at Barwon Health North, a massive health facility in Norlane built by this state Labor government. It provides dental care, dialysis programs, medical imaging, allied health care and an urgent care clinic. Hundreds of local residents are visiting Barwon Health North every single week for their appointments. It is always full. I recently visited with the Premier when we dropped in to see their dental clinic. It was a morning, and in the mornings they operate as an emergency clinic. You can show up without an appointment and be seen to, and let me tell you this: that waiting room was packed because Victorians rely on public healthcare services. Labor is building the new women's and children's hospital in Geelong. This is a \$500 million investment, the largest investment in regional health in Australia. It will deliver a new children's inpatient unit, a new neonatal and parent care unit and expand the special care nursery capacity, expanded maternity inpatient beds and birthing suites, a dedicated operating theatre and specialist outpatient clinic rooms. It is an incredible facility, and this is vital for residents in Geelong, particularly as our region grows. All of that is at risk under a One Nation–Liberal coalition, and I grieve for Victorians should that day come.

I am so proud to represent one of the most multiculturally diverse electorates in Victoria. For decades Geelong's north has welcomed migrants and refugees with open arms – people from Croatia, Macedonia, Vietnam, Greece and Ukraine. More recently we have welcomed families from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan to name a few. We have flourishing Karen and Karenni communities. For many, the journey to Australia has not been easy, particularly for those who arrived as refugees, leaving everything behind in search of a better life. But they have been welcomed in Geelong, and we have embraced their culture, their faith and their traditions. On this side of the house, we are committed to the belief that our strength in Victoria lies in our diversity and that the contributions from people of all backgrounds have made our state better. Under our Labor government it does not matter where you were born, where your family came from or how you practise your religion, you are valued here and you are part of the wonderful multicultural community that makes our state so great. The divisive rhetoric that is all too frequent in political discourse in 2026 concerns me. I am sick of deleting racist comments from my social media. I am sick of listening to my friends talk about how the policies of One Nation make them feel. I am sick of people thinking that in 2026 it is okay to divide our community and tell people to go back to where they came from. I will always stand up against racism in our community, and I grieve for my community and a future where this behaviour is not called out.

One thing is clear: the Liberals have no solutions, just cuts for Victorians. They have announced that they are going to be cutting \$40 billion from the state budget, and behind that are jobs – jobs for hardworking Victorian families. Now we have heard from independent economists that have confirmed that their plan is not credible and does not add up. Part of their plan includes cutting one in seven public sector jobs. That includes health workers, disability workers and child protection officers, and we all know they will not stop there. It will be teachers and nurses next, and we know that because they have done it before. This report is clear: the Liberals will need to cut 30,000 jobs. That is 30,000 jobs that Victorians cannot afford to have cut. This is a real One Nation–Liberal plan that will hurt working people and will hurt working families. Their \$40 billion of cuts will devastate the services that people in Victoria rely on. It will mean longer hospital wait times, fewer nurses, fewer hospital beds and no new hospitals, like the one we are building right now in Geelong. It will mean cuts to schools and cuts to teachers and no new schools like the over 100 we have built across Victoria. Victorians cannot afford the real risk of a Liberal–One Nation government, and this election is a choice

between Labor's plan to fight for working people or the One Nation–Liberal plan to cut \$40 billion worth of services, to cut 30,000 jobs and to hurt working Victorians.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The time has come for me to interrupt business in accordance with the resolution of the house today for the members for Sydenham and Murray Plains to make their valedictory statements. I remind visitors in the galleries that no photography or filming is allowed.

Members

Member for Sydenham

Valedictory statement

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (18:01): Could I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land that we are all gathered on, paying my respects to the Wurundjeri and Bunurong of the Kulin nation and acknowledging all traditional owners across Victoria. To some of our special guests who are here joining us in the gallery today, who have been absolute pillars of strength to me, in particular during my time as Minister for Treaty and First Peoples – Antoinette Braybrook, Paul Briggs and Ngarra Murray – and others that might be joining us outside, thank you.

Can I also acknowledge His Holiness Sri Radha Manohar Das Swamiji – thank you for being here – and Uros Rasic, Labor Party president and Labor candidate for Sydenham. I have leaders from across Sydenham here tonight, particularly out in Queen's Hall, from across our schools, our sports clubs and even our Taylors Lakes Lions Club. I have leaders from the Australian Nepalese community, the Australian Indian community, Australian Irani community, Australian Serbian community, Australian Macedonian community, Australian African community and many, many friends from the Australian Muslim community from a range of different countries, all here joining us tonight. Can I also acknowledge my colleagues from Brimbank and Melton city councils, who I have had the pleasure of working with over the last 16 years, and former members of this place that are here.

Love has kept me going for the last 16 years – the love from my family; the kindness and the love from my friends and colleagues in this place; the love and mutual respect for my staff, my local ALP members and my AWU family; and the love for my electorate and its unique landscapes and unique people.

My late husband Stephen Patrick Hutchins, who I was with for 16 glorious years, has now passed on, and I have been without him for the last nine years. But that is only physically, not spiritually. He has never left my heart or my head in all those years. His voice of political experience and reason would always whisper in my ear in the last few years when I had to face tough times or doubted myself or even when I was on the edge of blowing a gasket, as he would say. He was there to keep me on track. The strength and depth of love he demonstrated and taught me made me a better person and definitely a better politician.

I want to thank some of his friends who have always supported Xavier and me – to Michael Lee, Leo McLeay, John and Tony Sheldon, Terry Tzaneros, Wayne Forno and Mark and Fran Bishop, thank you – and of course my sister-in-law Linda, who recently passed away and who I know is in the big bar in the sky having a red with Steve, and my brother-in-law Doona.

I want to say thanks to my amazing stepchildren, who I love with all my heart. They could have chosen to walk away from their evil stepmother after their dad died, but in fact we have built even stronger bonds and relationships. I look forward to having the opportunity to spend more time with them in the Blue Mountains after leaving this place: Lauren, our fierce unionist – the Health Services Union is lucky to have you as an assistant secretary; Julia, our bright feminist, sassy teacher; Michael – intelligent, witty, loving, kind and a total smart-arse; Georgia – gorgeous Georgia – the boss lady and teacher; and Madeleine – M-A-D-E-L-E-I-N-E, because she has to have her name spelt right – is our

angel and our NICU nurse. All of my stepchildren are now parents. Nine years ago when Steve passed away there were six grandchildren: Jacob, William, Edie, Rorie, Nate and Audrey. Since then another six children have joined our family: Marceline, Frederick, Theodore, Rueben, Eleanor and Hamish. I love them all very much.

To my beautiful son Xavier, you are my source of pride and joy. Your political wit and intuition are out of this world. Your ability to sign anyone up to the Labor Party is phenomenal. You are smart, charismatic and smooth, and you are able to con me out of yet another \$20 every day of the week. I think you have been made for union leadership or perhaps even politics. But whatever you do, darl, just finish your bloody degree! You were only five years old when I got preselected, and you have had to endure both a mum and a dad in politics your entire life. When Dad was going to Canberra and that suitcase would be in the hallway, you would cry because you knew he was going. When I sat late nights in here – because we used to sit till 10:30 or 11 – I would get home and pull up in the driveway of our Keilor home and you would be there with your little face looking out the window because you could not go to sleep until Mum got home.

I know that losing your dad at such a critical time in a young boy's life – when you were 13 – has a profound impact on so many people, but you rose above the trauma, and you make him and me proud every day. Thank you for being by my side at rallies, during campaign launches and during the longest days at pre-poll. On four different occasions you were by my side on polling day and of course on late nights you have been with me in Parliament, particularly when we did the voluntary assisted dying bill and you came in and stayed the night. In recent years you have listened to my debriefs about a hectic day in Parliament or just let me have a bitch about someone while we walk the dogs. You have always been by my side, and I will always be by yours.

To my mum Dianne and stepdad Mark: I could not have done it without you. Thank you for being on this crazy journey with me and supporting me. Mum, you were so young when you had me. You were only 18, and our lives were tough. We never had any money, and we moved house 19 times in 20 years. But your strength, determination and unconditional love have helped me reach the really fantastic career heights that I have reached. I recently heard my friend Antoinette speak about her relationship with her mum and a spiritual sign that she has in the dragonfly, and I thought to myself, what is that spiritual sign that Mum and I have? I cannot help but think it is an Aperol spritz, Mum.

To my brothers Glenn, aka Mummy's little meatball, and Brent, aka car wash social media extraordinaire: whilst I still think the Roos are a much better club than the Swans, I still think that Taylors Lakes is better than Sunbury and I think Mum's spag bol is better than both of yours, I do concede that without the encouragement, support and pride of both of you and both of you always standing up for me – thank you – I would not be here today.

To my nephew Gus: you are a legend. That is all I need to say. To my niece Tara: I am really proud of you. To my friend Sudarsan: thank you for your support and for introducing me to meditation to keep me sane, keeping me focused on my end goals always. And to Uros, who has been dubbed many a time as my political son – he is now the son of Sydenham; everyone owns him – I want to say thanks for your years of support, and to Catherine as well.

I love this quote: 'I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realised that I was somebody.' That was said by Lily Tomlin, and it is something that I know all too well as an MP and a minister. Some of the proudest things that I have worked on in my time, alongside my staff, are things like getting 50 per cent women on government-paid boards; becoming the first state government to achieve 50 per cent women in the Parliament and more than 50 per cent women in our cabinet; establishing Respect Victoria; eliminating the use of NDAs; boosting women's rights and entitlements in the workplace; establishing working women's centres; and in the public sector supporting and implementing family violence leave and superannuation and long service leave entitlements being paid on parental leave. These are world-changing and life-changing legislative changes. We have also had gender equality legislation, gender budgeting legislation, a women's pain

inquiry and a massive investment in women's health and reproduction clinics. Our family violence investments have totalled over \$4 billion, and the rollout of the Orange Door and increasing the family violence workforce are some of the things that we should all be so proud of.

Unfortunately the deaths of women still continue at the hands of men. Last Friday a man was killed by a shark in WA; it was all over the news. Yet over the weekend in New South Wales three women were murdered by men, including a 90-year-old grandmother who was murdered by being stabbed to death by her grandson. None of that got major coverage, and none of that is a barbecue conversation. Fifty women have been killed in Australia so far in 2026, 43 by someone they knew, seven killed by strangers, 18 killed by ex-partners, nine killed by their sons – none by their daughters – and 12 of those murders here in Victoria. Look behind every single number and there is a real woman with a whole network around her who is grieving. To the survivors of family violence that are here joining us today: I see you and we all see you. I am proud to be part of a government with a tough-on-crime Premier who is willing to put the safety of women and children at the centre of this government's agenda and who is committed to doing the work to end family and sexual violence in this state. Tougher penalties for partner murder, rape and sexual offences are things that have long been called for in this state. This is complemented by our investment in police and reservists and of course the recently passed laws criminalising coercive control and banning character references in sentencing. Victim-survivors should not have to relive their trauma in court or have their perpetrators' reputations rubbed in their faces. Women and children absolutely deserve to be safe. The polls show, unfortunately, that the Liberals and One Nation are surging ahead of us at the moment, and I want people to be very, very aware we are contemplating a government that would cut \$40 billion. What does that mean for the services that support women and children? And what does it mean for the future of legal abortions in this state?

One of the other key things that I am really proud of is the respect for First Nations that this government has shown with our work on treaty, truth-telling and forming the First Peoples' Assembly with real power and real resources. Fighting racism is at the forefront of our work, but of course there is a lot more to do. Only a few weeks ago there was a far-right, neo-Nazi rally here on the steps of Parliament and a comedian who, by pretending to be Aboriginal, mocked an Acknowledgement of Country. She is a disgrace and just a racist with a microphone. I want to thank leaders like Travis Lovett who call this stuff out. Racism is alive in Victoria. Just ask many of the people that are here to support me tonight sitting in the gallery and in Queens Hall. Islamophobia is real. Antisemitism is real. Anti-black is real. Aboriginal and African Victorians face racism on a daily basis. Of course having a multicultural society is absolutely integral to Victoria's profile, and one does not take away from the other. It adds to a better society. We need to have respect for all religions, cultures and ethnic backgrounds.

I have a huge list of what we have achieved in Sydenham, and I just want to touch on the fact that as part of the 121 new schools across this state we have had three new schools built in Sydenham. We have had every single school during my 16 years upgraded. We have had six new kinders built. We have invested in teachers and made sure our teachers are the best paid in the country. We have new schools with Aboriginal names. We have Aboriginal history being taught in our curriculum, and we have inclusive funding for students with disabilities. And if re-elected, the Labor government has committed to a \$20 million upgrade of Copperfield College at Sydenham and Delahey. I want to do a quick shout-out to my favourite principals: Simon McGlade from Delahey; Gab Zorko from Springside public school; Andrew Atherton, Mary Chiodo, Michael Gruis and Nick Adamou from Copperfield; Robert Kotevski from Parkwood Green; Paris Spencer from Wiyal; and all the local residents and principals and teachers in my electorate, in particular Andrea Markham from Ardeer South Primary; Anne-Maree Kliman, the principal of Parkville College and always my number one principal; and Jane Mason from Melton Secondary College.

To all the volunteers in my community who make the sports clubs tick, thank you for all your work. To the Friends of Sydenham Park and Taylors Lakes Lions Club and to the ALP members that have come in tonight to support me, thank you. One of the proudest things that I have done in Sydenham is

to save 12 parks that were going to be sold off by council back in the first year that I was an MP. I am glad that those parks are still there, and many of those parks have been upgraded.

Lastly, can I thank my current and former staff, my excellent electorate office team, who have worked their butts off today. Aleks, Nicole, Jared, Anya and Gus, thank you. Thank you for the love and attention you have given constituents. Former EO staff Raquel, Natalie, Katharine, Uros, Elvira, Christopher and Lachlan, you have all been not just staff but friends to me. To my former ministerial staff: Robert and Madeliene, the two best chiefs of staff in the whole of the government. To Ismene, Rachel, Sarah, Lawrence, Rebekah, Parsa, Tilly, Marcarla, Hannah, Susan, Emma, Gab, Dylan, Rita and Mel: I was privileged to work with some of the sharpest minds and most talented writers that I will ever work with in my life, and we worked across 12 different portfolios – education, treaty and First Peoples, women, family violence prevention, local government, industrial relations, victim support, corrections, youth justice, government services, jobs and industry and crime prevention. And if anyone wants to know why I am retiring, that list says it all. But this was done during some of the hardest times, and those hard times were during COVID sustaining just really nonsensical, aggressive abuse online.

The other really difficult time in this place was saying goodbye to colleagues who passed – like we did yesterday – particularly Fiona and Jane. Losing them was really hard and picking up their portfolios was even harder. My beautiful friend Sarah Carter is someone that I was extremely close to – losing her at the age of 45 was devastating – and my beautiful friend Simone Steveson, who passed away as well.

To my union Labor sisters Nicola Roxon and Sarah Ralph, thank you for always holding me up – and Liberty Sanger. To my best friends from high school – Carolyn, Gabby, Rachel, Martine, Matt, Lara and Barbara – and to Megan, Sarah, Hanadi, Julia, Ray, Monica, Monty, Charlie, Phill and Madonna, thank you for all your support. To Luke Donnellan, my bestie in Parliament when he was here, get another sausage on the barbie, why don't ya? To Robin, Jaala and Cesar, thank you for being my friends. To Ronnie and Sarah from the AWU, thank you for being such a great support to me.

To all the many friends in this place that I have made, I am going to miss you so much. I am not going to read out a list because I will leave somebody off, but there are friends on both sides of the chamber, and I want to say thank you for your support to me. Thank you to the clerks, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the parliamentary attendants, parliamentary services, the ministerial drivers and the staff and leaders of all of our government departments that I have had the privilege to work with. We have some unbelievably talented people in our public service.

I want to finish on this: 10 things I have learned in 16 years of being a parliamentarian. Here we go: believe the unbelievable; words do matter; when in a battle for something that you believe in, do not blink; surround yourself with the best people and trust them; lead by example and take people with you; if you cannot articulate the path, particularly when formulating policy, then others cannot walk beside you; people will betray you; and revenge is a dish best served cold, which brings me to the book that I am writing after. This is my second-final point: if someone works with you and they leave, always wish them well and support them, because you never know where they are going to end up. And always, always stand up for justice and equality.

I would like to finish on this quote, which was actually a centrepiece and written by my friend Rita in *Our Equal State*, the second gender equality strategy:

We need to ensure the girls of today are empowered to be the women of tomorrow regardless of the colour of their skin, religious beliefs or cultural upbringing.

Members applauded.

Member for Murray Plains*Valedictory statement*

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (18:28): To start off, I promise today not to say any profanities about the member for Brighton, just to put that on the record –

James Newbury interjected.

Peter WALSH: unless he chooses to interject, and then I may break that rule.

We come to this place with the help of many people and we get re-elected to this place with the support of those same people, and this contribution today is about thanking many of those people. Being a local MP is a team sport, and I have been blessed with the great teams that I have had over the journey. I start by thanking Neil Pankhurst, Elaine Lees and Damian and Karen Kelly for their outstanding leadership of my electorate council and all the volunteers who have manned polling booths for the last six elections to help me.

I also thank my predecessor Barry Steggall both for the fact that he asked me to run for Parliament rather than pursue the president's role at the National Farmers' Federation and then for convincing the person who was going to run for preselection against me that it was a futile exercise and a waste of his time. There was no preselection, but there was a very fierce three-cornered competition against a Liberal candidate for the actual election, because that was precoalition and we had those three-cornered contests. To Barry and to Barry Bishop, a former member for North Western Province – they were colloquially known locally as B1 and B2, and do not even start to work out which one is B1 and which is B2 because it was a constant debate – I thank them for their friendship and their support.

My transition from the Victorian Farmers Federation to this place was also made a lot easier by the fact that Fay and Janet, who had worked for Barry, stayed on, which gave the electorate the continuity of corporate memory and let me hit the ground running, although I had to do a day in the office with them before the election so that they could interview me to see if I was suitable for them to work for. Fortunately I passed, and we worked great together. As an MP you are only as good as the staff in your office. I was blessed with Fay and Janet, then Ken, Sharon and Linda in my time as the member for Swan Hill, where our focus was always helping those who contacted us for assistance.

My first two terms in this place were dominated by the millennium drought and the issues that come with drought: poor crop yield, the need for fodder for livestock and the price and availability of water. These issues impacted not only farmers but also the economies of the towns. The saying that water is life is just so true and is emphasised in a time of drought. That drought spawned two major policy changes which still create division in country communities today. The first was the Commonwealth Water Act 2007 and the Murray–Darling Basin plan. Because water is constitutionally a state issue, the Commonwealth used their external treaty powers to draft the Commonwealth Water Act legislation, which means it is effectively environment legislation rather than water legislation. Consequently that means that the Murray–Darling Basin plan has a significant environment bias, to the detriment of the irrigation sector. The Commonwealth has purchased large quantities of water from irrigators for the environment under its powers under the Murray–Darling Basin plan, significantly reducing the available consumptive water pool, which means the next drought will be catastrophic for our nation's ability to produce food. Mark Twain's saying that whisky is for drinking and water is for fighting over may well become the reality in the next drought.

The second was the proposal by the Brumby Labor government to build a pipeline from northern Victoria to Melbourne. The infamous north–south pipeline project galvanised regional Victoria against the Brumby government. In my opinion there are similarities between that time and the VNI West renewable energy debate that has galvanised regional Victoria against the current government. But one of the satisfying things about being the water minister in the Baillieu government was winning the argument with Helen Silver, the head of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, as to what the future

operating rules of the north–south pipeline would be. Can I say they still apply today, so thank you to the current government for keeping those rules. May that pipeline rust into the annals of history without ever taking water from northern Victoria to Melbourne. There are many people to thank for that fight, including Jan Beer, Chris Harrison, Guy Duncan and Andrew Leahy, to name just a few. Andrew, from Murrabit, had the indignity of his young son seeing him on the nightly news being bundled into the back of a police divvy van at one of the Plug the Pipe demonstrations. They thought it was a hell of a laugh.

It is the challenges that our community face that we remember most, and one of those was the Kerang rail disaster of June 2007, where 11 people tragically lost their lives and 23 were injured. It occurred while question time was taking place in here. After question time Lynne Kosky, the Minister for Public Transport, came across to tell me what had happened, and putting politics aside, she offered me a ride to Kerang with her that afternoon. I thank her for what she did for the community through that harrowing time, when most people knew either the victims or those who helped with the injured and the recovery of the deceased.

The drought ended in 2010, as did the Brumby government. Dorothea Mackellar's poem *My Country*, describing Australia as a place of droughts and flooding rains, was proved true again, with floods in September and December of 2010 and a flood for the record books in January 2011. I must admit that being in government made it easier to help the response than being in opposition, like when I was standing on a burst levee near Kerang arguing with the North Central Catchment Management Authority about getting the levee fixed. In desperation I rang Ted Baillieu, explained to Ted what we wanted, passed the phone to the CMA guy and let Ted tell him what we were going to do. We got some action finally there. Tragically, you cannot do that from opposition. Although the Treasurer at the time Kim Wells, who unfortunately is not with us today, turned white every time we talked about the cost of the recovery after that flood because it topped \$2 billion. It was a huge amount of money.

Not only were seasonal conditions good through those years, but regional Victoria also benefited from our government's \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, which meant nearly every country community got its fair share of state funding, with record investments in CFA sheds, fire trucks, community buildings, sporting facilities upgraded and significant investment in health infrastructure, with my electorate getting a new hospital in Charlton because of the floods, Rochester hospital being rebuilt again because of the floods and new hospitals in Kerang, Echuca and Boort, where I was born. And after 50 years work on the new bridge in Echuca finally started. Regional Victoria needs that sort of investment again, and I hope the Leader of the Opposition becomes the Premier in November so that we can have that investment in regional Victoria.

It was a privilege to be a minister of the Crown, especially in the portfolios of ag and water – the areas I spent my life in before Parliament. I know that knowledge of the sector and the people would drive the department spare at times, because they would tell us something and within minutes we could reality check it and, more often than not, our intel was better than theirs. And do not ever believe the department saying to someone, 'It's sitting on the minister's desk. That's why you haven't had a response,' because I had numerous calls from people I knew saying, 'Can you please just sign that letter and send it back to us?' and I would say, 'Haven't seen it.' It is a ploy. I notice the nods from current ministers. It is an excuse from the department for what they have not done, not what the minister has not done.

Like my electorate office, I was blessed with the staff in my minister's office, who were genuinely committed to doing good things for Victoria, and they went above and beyond with the hours they put in to get things done. That was quite often despite the department resisting because it did not suit their agenda, like the kangaroo harvesting scheme, which had to be developed in my office because the department could only come up with reasons as to why it would not work. When it worked without a glitch, there was only silence, but the protein that was going to be left to rot on the ground was used for pet food consumption. Now we have those same carcasses being left on the ground to rot or feed wild dogs.

The team supported whatever we did, like accepting an invitation from Lyndall Sachs, the Australian ambassador, to lead a trade delegation into Iraq during the 2014 war because she felt that the French and the Germans were taking market share off us by dealing directly with Iraq rather than going through Kuwait, as was the accepted practice at the time. Even when they wanted to know our suit size to get the bulletproof vests fitted and our blood type so they had some blood on hand in case we needed it, both Luke and James Flintoff from the department came with me, and yes, we sold more dairy; yes, we sold more grain; and in addition we sold a lot of grain handling equipment because their equipment in Iraq was so antiquated. So to Luke O'Sullivan, who was the state director of the Nats leading up to the 2010 election, then my COS, thank you for being part of all that journey. I was as devastated as you when you lost your upper house seat in 2018, and I did genuinely feel that I had failed you when you lost, so I really empathise with that time. To Deb, who was in my minister's office, then COS as leader, thank you. To Simon, Steph, Tanya, Sarah, Monica, Kirsten, Yvette, Melanie and Tom, thank you for everything you all did. We were a formidable team that worked hard and enjoyed each other's company.

The 2014 election saw a major redistribution of electorate boundaries in northern Victoria, with the old seats of Swan Hill and Rodney abolished and a new seat of Murray Plains formed, which follows the Goulburn and the Murray rivers from Undera in the east, to Wood Wood north of Swan Hill, a smaller electorate than the old seat of Swan Hill but 250 k from end to end, with the office transferring from Swan Hill to Echuca, the larger population centre of the electorate. Thanks to Sharon for coming to Echuca to help with the relocation before Grandma duties required her to go back to Swan Hill. Two Nats, two Nat seats, two Nat MPs in the one electorate was always going to be a challenge, and I thank Paul Weller for making it easier by choosing to return to dairy farming and not creating a preselection.

One year rolls into the next, and as all members would attest, there is never a shortage of issues that come into the office – ministers to write to, issues to raise in members statements, constituency questions or adjournments. Throughout my time in Parliament the team always got a special thrill out of solving constituent problems that came about because of deficiencies in the bureaucracy – although for those that may have fallen foul of the law, the separation-of-powers defence was invoked many times, where we politicians make the laws and we cannot interfere when the judicial system is implementing them. If you are caught speeding, you are doing it by choice. We all have many interesting inquiries in our offices. One of my more challenging was from a mother whose son was living at home and had moved his girlfriend in, but Mum did not think she was suitable for him and rang the office to say she wanted her MP to speak to her son about finding a more suitable girlfriend – true story. It took a while to convince her that was not the role of an MP.

A member: How did it go, though?

Peter WALSH: I do not know the answer. Then there was the lady who rang after the Harcourt fires had destroyed the Mount Alexander transmitter and wanted me to go and reprogram her TV to the Shepparton transmitter. Again, those that know my IT skills would know that was not something I was qualified to do.

No contribution would be complete without mentioning COVID times, when our office was the busiest it had ever been. Not only did we have the constantly changing Victorian rules and lockdowns, but because we are a cross-border electorate we had to keep up with the New South Wales rules as well. Was it a hard border enforced by the police, or were we in various iterations of cross-border bubbles? Thanks to my staff we became the go-to place for plain English explanations of the ever-evolving rules. Because libraries and neighbourhood houses were closed, we assisted all those without computers and/or IT skills to get and print their permits to cross the border to travel to medical appointments. And just do not mention funerals, because not being able to attend them really upset people. We assisted with business support applications and particularly the follow-up, because the departments just would not return emails or phone calls and the businesses had bills to pay. We actually

sent chocolates to Martin Pakula's office at that time because his office did help us through those particular processes and they were great to work with, so thank you to Martin's office.

Hopefully the statute of limitations has expired when I say that some days I felt like a people smuggler, suggesting to grey nomads returning from Queensland what time a particular bridge crossing may not be manned. One lovely young lady rang me the next day to say they had gotten home safely, helped by her saying prayers for her and her husband to protect them from the police. Locking people like that out of their own homes was an absolute travesty. Thank you to Shan, Fleur, Andrew, Helen and Sarah for all you have done to help me do my job and for making the trip here today to share this moment with me.

I am proud of what the Nationals achieved in the 2022 election, where we now have more women than men in the party – no quotas, no rules on who should have what seat, just preselecting strong, articulate community champions who have done their community and the party proud over the last four years. My challenge to the group is the girls now have the numbers; let us take the next step and have our first female leader of the party. To my COS of that time Grady and then state director Matt Harris, we made a formidable team that helped change the face of the National Party parliamentary team in one election and set it up for the future. To Luke, Emma, Mark, Xavier, Georgia, Connor, Dominic, Madeleine, Adrian and Ben, thank you for what you did as part of the team when I was leader.

There is always unfinished business, and one of those is better flood mitigation for Rochester. They were badly flooded in 2011 and then smashed in October 2022 when nearly all the houses in town were flooded. There was an upper house inquiry that made recommendations after that flood, and there is an overdue flood strategy for the area stuck in the bureaucracy that should be finished. It is totally untenable that Rochester is now stressed again because Eppalock is full and a significant rain event will see them in trouble again. We do not want the Rochester hospital having to be rebuilt for the third time because better flood mitigation has not been put in place.

To all the parliamentary staff, the catering team and especially the IT team, who must shake their heads in wonder at the issues we get them to solve – what seems so simple for them is so hard for me sometimes – this place and what we do is something that is very special and you all ensure that everything functions so well, so thank you.

For those country MPs who have had ministerial drivers, we probably spend more time with our drivers than anyone except our immediate families, so to Paul, to Ray – or Grumpy, as he liked to be called – and to Andrew, or A2 as we have called him, thank you for your driving skills and professionalism as you kept me safe across more than 1.5 million kilometres of travel over 24 years. To Brett Hosking, the Nationals candidate for Murray Plains, I am sure you will represent the people of the electorate with distinction if given the privilege by the voters.

Lastly, to Liz, who is also here today in the gallery, as you can hear: thank you for your love and support. The true test will be me being home more often. Maybe that interstate truck driver's job might not be so bad after all!

God bless everyone who has been part of the last 24 years:

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields.
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Members applauded.

*Motions***Dental services****Debate resumed.**

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (18:48): I rise in support of the motion moved by the Deputy Premier. This motion asks the house to consider a clear choice for Victorian families. The Carroll Labor government is committed to free dental care for all Victorians. The Liberals are proposing \$40 billion in cuts, and One Nation will help them deliver those cuts. For a family in Glen Waverley, that choice is practical. It is about whether you can book a dental appointment when your child needs one. It is about whether you can get treatment when a tooth starts hurting without first working out which bill you can put off. It is about whether the hospital, school or other services your family relies on will be there when you need them.

Dental care is health care, yet for too many people the cost has made it feel optional. They wait through pain. They hope a problem will go away. Parents put their children's appointments first and postpone their own. Anyone who has done that knows the cost does not disappear. The pain gets worse, the treatment can become more complicated and the worry sits with you every day. That is why Labor's commitment matters. Free dental care for all Victorians will take pressure off household budgets and make it easier for people to seek care when they need it. It says that a person's income should not determine whether they can look after their teeth.

I represent a community with families at every stage of life – young children starting school, students and apprentices, parents balancing work and care, and older residents who want to stay healthy and independent. They do not need the same treatment, but they all deserve access to dental care. For a parent, this commitment means one less expense to dread. For a young worker, it means getting a problem checked before it keeps them off the job. For an older Victorian, it means being able to eat comfortably, speak confidently and get the care that they need. It means a great deal to the multicultural communities I am proud to represent in Glen Waverley. Many families have worked incredibly hard to build a life here. They choose our community because of its schools, its opportunity and the welcome they find among their neighbours. They contribute to Victoria every single day. They deserve a health system that is there for them too. That is what a Labor government does. It looks at the pressures families face and asks how it can make life better.

Now consider the alternative being put forward by the Liberals. They have promised \$40 billion in cuts. That is an enormous figure, and it can sound abstract until you ask what a cut of that scale means in a school, a hospital or a local service. The nurses who care for patients are people. The teachers who help a child learn are people, and so are the child protection workers, the allied health professionals and the people who keep essential services running. Their work cannot be brushed aside as a line in the budget. The opposition owes Victoria a straight answer: where would the \$40 billion come from? Which services would lose funding? Which projects would stop? Which workers would lose their jobs? Families have to make their budgets add up, and the Liberals should be prepared to do the same.

In Glen Waverley I hear from parents who want strong local schools. I hear from people who need timely health care. I hear from residents who want safe communities and better transport connections. Those needs do not vanish because the opposition announces a savings target. Labor has invested in our schools because education changes lives. At Vermont Primary School we have secured funding for the first stage of its master plan. At Camelot Rise Primary School more than 700 people have signed a petition calling for the upgrades their school community needs. I have been advocating for better facilities at Glen Waverley Secondary College, a school that means so much to our local families. I know the principals, teachers, staff and parents behind those schools. They are asking us to meet the needs of students today and to prepare for the students who will come after them. When the Liberals talk about cuts, I think of those school communities. When they promise a number as large as \$40 billion, they must explain what that number would mean for classrooms, for support staff and for the buildings in which our children learn. The same is true in health care. A family waiting for an

appointment does not want a slogan about efficiency. They want care. A patient in an emergency department needs the people and facilities to treat them. Free dental care expands access to the essential part of that care. Deep cuts would put pressure on services already relied upon by Victorian families.

We need to talk honestly about One Nation's place in this debate. One Nation likes to say it stands up for ordinary people, but standing up for working people means backing the services they depend on and respecting the people who provide them. It means standing with nurses, teachers, tradies and other workers when their jobs, pay and safety are at stake. The prospect of a Liberal government dependent on One Nation should concern Victorians. One Nation would have a say in what that government did. The Liberals should tell Victorians plainly which One Nation policies they would accept in return for support.

My community also knows the harm that division causes. Glen Waverley is strong because people from many cultures, languages and faiths have made it their home. Families have come here, worked hard, started businesses, cared for their neighbours and raised children who are proud to be Victorian. I will always stand with those families. I will not accept a politics that asks them to contribute to our state while treating them as outsiders. That is another part of the choice before us. Labor wants to bring people together and make essential care more accessible. The Liberal and One Nation approach offers division alongside cuts to the services that bring security to people's lives.

My own working life began outside this Parliament. I worked in construction. I built a telecommunications business from scratch. I understand that creating jobs takes hard work, risk and persistence, and I also understand what public service means to a worker and their family. When your child is sick, you need health care. When they start school, you need a good local school. When you are training for a trade or changing careers, you need opportunities to learn. When you get older, you need to know that that care will be there for you. These are the foundations that let people work, build businesses and plan for the future, and we should strengthen them. That is why I support this motion.

Free dental care is a direct commitment to Victorian families. It will help with the cost of living and remove a barrier to essential health care. It reflects a government that sees a person behind every budget decision. The opposition's proposed \$40 billion in cuts demands the same scrutiny. Victorians deserve to know what would be cut, who would be affected and what role One Nation would play in those decisions. The people of the Glen Waverley district work hard. They look after their families. They contribute to their community. They deserve a government that backs them when they need care and invests in the services their children will rely on. The Carroll Labor government is making that choice. I commend the commitment to free dental care for all Victorians, and I support the motion.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (18:55): It is my pleasure to speak on this motion about free dental care for all Victorians. This is something that is extremely important for all Victorians, and it is very important for our south-east region, especially my electorate of Narre Warren North. I talk about my community by way of my nervousness about what is happening with the far right and One Nation across Victoria, what people are seeing in them and what they will do to this state. What frightens me is what services they are going to take away from my community. I am very nervous about what a Jess Wilson–One Nation coalition will look like, and I am very nervous about what services, health services particularly, they will take away from my community. These are essential services that it needs every single day, like my urgent care clinic, which also has dental in it. I am very nervous about what is going to happen to these incredible services in my electorate.

I am really excited about the prospect of free dental because I know what that means for young children. I know what a difference our incredible Smile Squad has made to our community. To my community, particularly, the 19 schools that I have, the Smile Squad has made an extreme difference to each and every single one of them. It is that early intervention in teeth and dental care that makes such a difference to young people's lives. I had the unfortunate situation where my daughter needed braces, and they were extremely expensive. We had to go on a payment plan, and it cost us a lot of

money. I remember then taking my younger two boys to the dentist with fingers crossed and hoping that they did not also need that treatment, because of the expense.

Paul Edbrooke: Did they?

Belinda WILSON: They did not, fortunately. They have beautiful, perfect teeth like their mother, and they did not need early intervention.

Paul Edbrooke: And are they beautiful and perfect like their mother?

Belinda WILSON: Exactly. However, many young people do need intervention in their care, and it is very expensive. This will make such a difference to so many people's lives. People do not realise how expensive this service is until they have had extremely difficult oral care. I know a lot of members on this side have already spoken about root canals, extreme dental care and fillings. These are all expenses that people do not budget for, especially at the moment in Australia, so I think being able to offer this as a free service is something that is leading in this country. As we have said earlier, many people do not realise that it is not covered by Medicare. It is not, and that is something that the federal government need to have a good, hard look at. But this is something that we are leading the country in. We are going to offer free dental care, and I am really proud to be part of a government that looks after the health of all Victorians every single day of the week. I know that my friend across the road here who is giving me a smile understands how important free dental is for all Victorians.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Local learning and employment networks

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (19:00): (1849) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to secure ongoing core funding of \$10.85 million annually from 1 January 2027 through agreements of at least three years for Victoria's 31 local learning and employment networks, with transition arrangements confirmed before existing funding expires. Recently the member for Nepean and I spoke with Angela Byatt, the executive officer of the Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN, about serious concerns for its future and the young people it supports. Angela and her team connect our schools with industry, employers, training providers and community services. They have relationships with every school across Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula and more than 1000 active employers. For a young person in Mornington, Mount Eliza, Mount Martha, Moorooduc, Tuerong or Baxter, those connections can mean finding work experience, discovering a trade or getting the support needed to stay engaged in education.

Their work also tackles practical barriers. The department appointed our local LLEN to lead statewide coordination of funding that helps students travel to vocational education classes. A training opportunity means little if a student cannot get there. The government is restructuring School to Work into 17 delivery areas from next year. It says that this will expand access and improve support for disadvantaged students. However, the LLENs warn that the new arrangements leave their broader coordination role without core funding. It will also centralise currently localised services catering to different areas. Angela advises that our local LLEN did not tender because its work extends beyond the new program scope, and that applies to many other LLENs as well. Its value cannot be measured simply by counting individual placements. Someone must build employer relationships, identify gaps and bring schools, services and communities together. This is about connectivity, not simply numerical KPIs.

The statewide briefing warns that without core funding at least 25 of Victoria's 31 LLENs expect to close by the end of 2027. Others anticipate substantial staffing cuts or reduced capacity. That is a warning that the Labor government must take seriously. Once experienced staff leave and local

partnerships unravel, decades of knowledge and trust cannot simply be recreated when another contract begins. Schools, employers and families are already planning for 2027. They need certainty now. I ask the minister to work with the Treasurer and relevant portfolios to fund this essential coordination, retain local governance, require public reporting of outcomes and resolve this before the caretaker period begins. Our young people deserve reliable support as they take their first steps towards working life. Minister, please secure this funding before the current agreements expire on 31 December.

Glen Waverley electorate community sport

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:03): (1850) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to update the house on how the Victorian government is supporting local sporting clubs and investing in modern, inclusive facilities across the Glen Waverley district. Local sport is such an important part of our community. Our clubs give children and families a place to come together, stay active and build lasting connections. They also rely heavily on volunteers who give up their time every week to coach, organise, maintain facilities and keep their clubs running. I want to acknowledge and thank all those volunteers for everything that they do.

I am proud to be part of a Carroll government that backs community sport and the local clubs that bring our community together. That means making sure our clubs have the facilities they need to grow and creating more opportunities for women and girls to participate. In Vermont we have invested in upgrades at Vermont Reserve, supporting the Vermont Eagles football and netball club and the Vermont Cricket Club. This investment has delivered oval upgrades, new LED lighting and a new pavilion, including improved facilities to support female participation. At Brandon Park Reserve, we have supported a new pavilion and an upgraded car park for the Mazenod Football Club and the Mulgrave Wheelers Hill Cricket Club, including female-friendly change rooms, a referees room, a social space, public amenities and improved spectator viewing. This year's budget also invests \$100,000 to deliver an LED scoreboard upgrade at Brandon Park Reserve, making these local facilities even better. At Central Reserve we are supporting the resurfacing of the south oval for the Mazenod Panthers and the Mazenod Old Collegians Football Club, helping ensure the oval remains a quality playing surface for local players and families. These investments are about more than bricks and mortar. They are about giving local clubs the facilities they need to thrive, encouraging more women and girls and people with additional needs to get involved and creating welcoming spaces where families can spend time together and be part of their local community.

Of course we cannot talk about community sport without talking about basketball. It is hugely popular with children and young people in our community, and participation continues to grow. The Nunawading Basketball Centre in my electorate has served local families for decades. It is a facility where generations of children have discovered basketball, made friends and been part of a team. But the centre is now at capacity, and the demand for courts continues to grow. The area of the south-east of Melbourne has the highest density of basketball participation in the whole wide world. This highlights the importance of continuing to invest in sporting facilities that keep pace with our growing community and give more local children the opportunity to participate while providing better facilities for women and girls, families and the broader community. I look forward to the minister's response.

Morwell electorate community safety

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (19:06): (1851) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to explain why he will not allocate PSOs to Moe and Morwell in my electorate. For nearly four years I have been crying out for PSOs to be stationed at both Morwell and Moe, and every step of the way Labor has rejected these calls. The Morwell electorate has the highest rate of crime outside of metropolitan Melbourne, and the stats keep trending in the wrong direction. The Morwell train station and bus interchange is a hive of antisocial and criminal behaviour, and people travelling on our trains or who are going about their business on Commercial Road are simply not safe. Every second shopfront in Morwell is empty, and the remaining

businesses are considering shutting down because the threat to staff and customers is simply too great. The Moe train station is also a hotspot for all the wrong reasons. Students commuting to school, people travelling to and from Melbourne and others simply going about their daily lives are under constant threat from criminal and antisocial behaviour there as well. People no longer feel safe on our streets and at our transport hubs, and that is an indictment on this Labor government.

Just four stations in the whole of regional Victoria have a dedicated PSO presence, and one of them is in Traralgon. After my most recent call to the Minister for Police, he responded by suggesting PSO resources in Latrobe Valley did not need to be boosted because PSOs at Traralgon have the option of travelling to Moe and Morwell. What the minister fails to understand is that this is not possible. If the PSOs travel to Moe and Morwell, they have to be picked up and transported back to Traralgon by the police in time for that train that has just gone through Moe and Morwell, and that is one less police vehicle on our streets protecting our community. For far too long we have been dealt a dud hand in regional Victoria. We deserve to have the same protections as everyone else, and the statistics support the fact that we are in dire need of PSOs. Last year there was a massive 33 per cent increase in crime across Gippsland's public transport network. Minister, will you please explain to my constituents why you will not allocate PSOs to Morwell and Moe?

Point Cook electorate roads

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:08): (1852) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I invite the minister to attend the intersection of Point Cook Road and Central Avenue to enjoy the works that are going on there. The minister was recently at that site, and we saw some of those works, but I can tell the community that the lights at Point Cook Road and Central Avenue are now on. That means that intersection is safer and faster to get through for our whole community. It is something that we have been calling for for a long time, and I am glad that we are able to deliver that. For the next section, we are fixing the exit alongside the McDonald's. That will take a couple of months, and then we are going to resurface the whole road section, including the dip on the Point Cook Road bridge. Straight after that we will be onto Central Avenue, because we need to duplicate those last 800 metres – again, a job that needed to be done and will be done by this government. Should we be re-elected in November, we will also duplicate Point Cook Road from Central Avenue all the way through to Dunnings Road – another sticking point for our community. This is a job that we will achieve, because if we are willing to fix the intersection of Sneydes Road and Point Cook Road – a dangerous, horrible intersection, which is now safe because of traffic lights – and if we are willing to put traffic lights in to replace the Central Avenue and Point Cook Road 1½ roundabouts, which were dangerous and unsafe for pedestrians in particular and cyclists as well as drivers, then we are going to get this job done too.

Hawthorn electorate cycling infrastructure

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (19:09): (1853) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister provide a detailed update on the Box Hill to Hawthorn strategic cycling corridor, including its current scope and costing, the work undertaken since the 2021 feasibility study and what would be required to take the project through detailed design and completion. This is not a new issue. The concept has been advocated by the Boroondara Bicycle Users Group since 1995, with a detailed route proposal updated and assessed by the City of Boroondara in 2005. In November 2023 I asked the government when it would make a decision on funding the trail following the completion of a feasibility study in 2021. At that time there had been no progress on the design and no funding announced. I called on the government to commit to funding the trail.

In April this year I wrote to the Minister for Public and Active Transport again seeking support to progress the corridor, including funding for detailed design and consideration of a dedicated project team or steering committee. Since the feasibility study there has been further planning around the corridor and related infrastructure has progressed, as I am advised. But the question remains

unanswered: given this government has been in office for 12 years, why hasn't this project moved from being a recognised strategic corridor to a project with a defined scope, funded detailed design and an achievable pathway to completion?

The corridor is around 10 kilometres long, linking Box Hill, Mont Albert, Surrey Hills, Canterbury and Hawthorn. Its benefits are well documented. It would provide a safer, more direct connection between local communities, railway stations and more than 20 schools, including Swinburne University of Technology in my electorate. It would support more people to walk and cycle everyday journeys, help reduce congestion, improve access to public transport and deliver environmental and broader health benefits while filling an important gap in Melbourne's strategic cycling network. I have always been supportive of this project, along with the many people who have advocated for it over many years. I hope the minister's response can provide some clarity about actual work this government has undertaken to progress this important project forward and see it finally delivered.

St Joseph's Primary School, Springvale

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (19:12): (1854) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Mental Health in the other place, and the action I seek is for the needle syringe bin and dispensing unit opposite St Joseph's Primary School in Springvale in my electorate to be relocated to an alternate medical site and for the health response to be bolstered by an alcohol and other drug outreach support team. As a former psychologist who has worked in the AOD sector, I understand the value in harm minimisation policies such as the needle syringe program. However, there are concerns about the current location being the most appropriate one for the community and those who access it. For over 12 months I have been speaking with local business owners, community leaders and parents throughout Springvale who all support the needle syringe program but do not want the location opposite a primary school. I have also witnessed the increase in drug use in our community since the pandemic and recognise that we need additional funding to support these vulnerable people in our community. An AOD outreach team in Springvale would fill the gaps left by the needle syringe program being moved and would ensure that we are continuing appropriate harm minimisation policies to foster better health outcomes in Springvale. I want to thank everyone who has spent time speaking to me on this issue. Their feedback has been incredibly helpful. I would particularly like to thank members of the Springvale Asian Business Association, Richard Lim OAM and local councillors for their advocacy. I would also like to thank the minister for her engagement on this issue.

State election

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:13): (1855) My adjournment today is for the Premier, and my ask is for the government to accept that people are fed up with Labor and ready to vote Greens to replace them. We are two months away from a critical state election here in Victoria, and right now people are fed up. They are fed up with being told to choose between two major parties that have so fundamentally let Victorians down. Frankly, people are fed up with having to choose between bad and worse and, honestly, in 2026 who can blame them? Just look at how Labor is responding to the defining crises facing Victoria. In the middle of a housing crisis, Labor is demolishing and privatising public housing. In a climate crisis, Labor is fast-tracking AI data centres and opening up new oil and gas drilling in Victoria's oceans. In a cost-of-living crisis, Labor is delivering the lowest-funded public schools in the country and has spent years selling off our public services and assets, even trying to sell Melbourne Water and our road maintenance to private companies so they can make profit while we all pay more for worse services. That is Labor's vision: lowest-funded public schools, demolished public housing, cuts to the environment and privatising our public services for corporate profit.

And if all that was not bad enough, just look at what has already been committed to by the Liberals, Nationals and One Nation: more coal, gas and nuclear and an end to renewable energy, huge cuts to public workers, AI running our healthcare system, attacks on abortion rights and ripping up our historic treaty with First Nations communities. People are fed up with Labor, but they sure as heck do not want a Liberal–One Nation coalition government.

The good news is that this November Victorians do not have to choose between bad and worse. There is a genuine positive alternative for our state, and that is the Greens. Recent polling shows that we are in the box seat to win a whole host of seats and reshape politics to be bold, to be hopeful and to deliver the real change that Victorians need. The Greens are the only ones in Parliament fighting to put people and planet before corporate profit; to bring down your costs with free public transport, free dental care, rent controls and genuinely affordable and public housing; to make communities safer, with real investment in what works, like the mental health and addiction and homelessness services that have been so sorely neglected; and to replace Labor's coal and gas with cheaper, publicly owned renewables. The Greens will get money out of politics and ban corporate donations to politicians.

All of this better future is possible if we elect politicians who have the guts to take on the corporations and make them pay their fair share of tax. The Greens' plan delivers over \$5 billion in revenue every year by taxing the billionaire banks, the gambling giants, the coal and gas companies, property developers and the ultra, ultra wealthy. The Greens are the only ones fighting to tax these big corporations because we are the only party that does not take their donations, and we never will. We are fighting for two things: people and planet. We are not here to push Labor or any other government to be better, we are here to replace them. The two-party system is not working, the time to end it is now and this November the Greens are ready to replace it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Laverton, I am struggling to see how the action, as I heard it, pertains to government business.

Ellen SANDELL: Maybe it does not. Maybe it should be ruled out of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Would the member for Melbourne like to reiterate what the action is?

Ellen SANDELL: It is for the Premier to advocate using government resources for people to vote for the Greens.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not see how that relates to government business, sorry, member for Melbourne. I will rule that out of order if that is all you have got.

Multicultural and multifaith communities

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:17): (1856) My adjournment is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on our government's work to address vilification and discrimination against our multicultural communities. As the minister knows, we have so many incredible multicultural and multifaith communities, particularly in Melbourne's west, and I have to say it has just been such a pleasure to visit so many of them over the past couple of weeks: Quang Minh temple in Braybrook, the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association and the Vietnamese Museum Australia. Al-Taqwa College – I was there last week; our Filipino community groups; the East African Women's Foundation; our Greek Orthodox churches in Sunshine West; our Maltese, Greek and Latino seniors groups across the electorate; the Baitul Makmur Laverton mosque; the Australia Light Foundation; SMVS Hindu temple in Tarneit; the BAPS; and our Hoppers Crossing Gurdwara – there are too many to name.

When I speak to these communities, what they are greatly concerned by is the rise of racism that is now plaguing Victoria. They are worried about vilification and vile hatred that is increasingly directed at them, and they are saddened to see that there always seem to be some people in the community who are keen to punch down on them, especially when we members of Parliament engage with them. Indeed I have seen these comments accusing us of cosplaying by wearing a head covering while visiting a mosque or a temple, for instance. Let me be clear: it is not cosplaying when you dress appropriately to enter a cultural space that you have been invited to as a guest. You should not dress inappropriately when entering a church, and you should not dress inappropriately when you enter a mosque or a temple. Yet these communities always cop the worst whenever we meet them. It is

insidious, it is destructive, and I will call it out as racism for what it is. It is evil. But this kind of rhetoric is exactly what One Nation and their anti-migrant rhetoric have emboldened.

Let us be clear. Labor stands up for a community where everyone is accepted, no matter their skin colour, their religion or even their postcode. One Nation has demonised migrants, insulted our multicultural communities and nurtured and incited this kind of racism. When you play a game of 'Spot the white person' like their state president did, you embolden and you incite this kind of hatred that we are seeing both online and in person. It is pretty sad, and it is pathetic that the Liberal Party want to do preference deals with One Nation at the expense of the multicultural communities that they claim to care about. I am proud to stand here, and I am proud to say to One Nation and their army of racist online bots that if they want to come after multicultural communities in Melbourne's west, well, they have to come through me, because only Labor will stand with our multicultural and multifaith communities against this tide of hate.

State election

Anthony MARSH (Nepean) (19:20): (1857) My adjournment matter is for the Special Minister of State. The action I seek is that the minister, in the lead-up to the election, use every available measure to protect Victorians from dangerous electoral disinformation, including material masquerading as independent local news. On the Mornington Peninsula there is a particularly ugly example. Jamie 'Jay' Scicluna is the publisher of the *Somerville Times*, *Peninsula Local* and *STPL News* and likes to pretend he is a journalist. But residents and businesses deserve to know the person behind the STPL dirt sheet, so too should every political candidate who chooses to engage and advertise with him and benefit from his propaganda. Scicluna is a twice-failed council candidate, once endorsed by Labor, and a former ACTU thug who described himself as a proud ALP hack. During the 2016 Wyndham council elections, Scicluna posted serious allegations about his Greens opponent. It was grubby politics of the worst kind.

Earlier this year he was before the Magistrates' Court over more than \$16,000 in unpaid parking and toll fines. But this is far from the most shocking part of Scicluna's sordid record. In 2024 the Frankston Magistrates' Court found that Scicluna had stalked and harassed a Somerville woman. The magistrate described his conduct as demeaning, derogatory and also intimidating. The court heard Scicluna was 'out for blood' and 'won't stop until he destroys her'. A two-year personal safety intervention order and a firearm prohibition order followed. Then there was another woman, his former accountant. After she chased him up for unpaid invoices, Scicluna sought an intervention order against her, only to withdraw it before a contested hearing. The court later found the application was frivolous and ordered him to pay \$5000 towards the legal costs. The man who has appointed himself judge and jury of others on the peninsula then failed to front court over his own costs order. The magistrate signed a warrant for his arrest.

Then there is the troubling online conduct. Using the *STPL News* moderator account, Scicluna asked for help getting revenge on two businesses in a Reddit group called UnethicalLifeProTips. He described circumstances matching those of these two women, said he wanted to completely discredit them and asked strangers for any way to unethically destroy their businesses. This is a deranged political abuser using the veneer of journalism to pursue grudges, settle scores and push a political agenda. He relentlessly attacks those he regards as enemies while using his platform fuelled by AI content and fake followers to prop up his political mates. There is nothing courageous or independent about it, and it is not journalism. Even the Mornington Peninsula shire has had enough. In January it took the extraordinary step of formally ceasing engagement with Scicluna and his grubby organisation, citing expectations of ethical conduct, fair and accurate reporting and respectful behaviour.

Scrutiny is welcomed, but political vendettas and disinformation must not sail under the flag of so-called independent community news. Victorians deserve to know who is behind the headlines. Electoral disinformation does not always arrive from a foreign state or an anonymous bot farm.

Sometimes it has a website, a Facebook page and a sad, lonely, bitter agitator calling himself a journalist. On the Mornington Peninsula that man is Jamie ‘Jay’ Scicluna.

Multicultural and multifaith communities

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (19:23): (1858) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is an update on what the government is doing to support Victoria’s multicultural communities to ensure that all Victorians, regardless of their cultural, ethnic or religious background, feel safe, respected and supported. Victorians in our multicultural communities are concerned about critical issues such as health care and safety but also criticism around racism and discrimination. These concerns are particularly important at a time when people are looking to government for reassurance that their communities will be protected from racism and discrimination while also having fair access to essential services and support. I therefore seek an update from the Premier on the government’s current actions and priorities to support multicultural communities.

Responses

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Victim Support, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Community Sport) (19:25): I would like to thank the member for Glen Waverley for his question about how the government is supporting community sport in his electorate. I acknowledge the work and commitment of volunteers within community sports groups, those who provide opportunities for Victorians to get involved in sport and access the many benefits of participation, particularly women and girls. I am proud that this year’s budget is providing more than \$24 million to support the development of high-quality accessible community sports infrastructure across the state, including through the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund. This brings the Labor government’s investment in community sport and active recreation to more than \$2.4 billion since 2014. As the member for Glen Waverley has highlighted, this investment includes \$750,000 towards the delivery of facilities upgrades at Vermont Reserve, including improved lighting and change room upgrades; \$300,000 towards the delivery of service upgrades at Central Reserve’s south oval; \$500,000 towards the delivery of a new pavilion to replace the current facility at Brandon Park Reserve; and \$200,000 towards the installation of new 500-lux LED floodlighting at the velodrome at East Burwood Reserve.

The Local Sports Infrastructure Fund recently closed for applications. I note that both the City of Monash and Whitehorse City Council lodged applications, and I look forward to announcing the successful outcomes in the coming weeks. Round 11 of the Get Active Kids voucher program is currently open, and that is another fantastic initiative of this Labor government to increase participation in sport and active recreation. Basketball has always been hugely popular in this program, and I am pleased to note that the Nunawading Kangas accepts these important vouchers through its association with Basketball Victoria. I thank the member for Glen Waverley for raising this matter and for his tireless advocacy for community sport in his electorate.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Premier) (19:27): I thank the member for Cranbourne for her question, because Victoria, like Cranbourne, is a diverse and great place to live and work. Our difference and our diversity are our secret sauce – different languages, different cultures, different peoples. Victoria was diverse before European settlement, when Indigenous Victorians spoke more than 30 languages; Victoria was diverse at the birth of our democracy, when people from 19 different countries fought at the Eureka Stockade; and Victoria has been increasingly diverse since the post–World War II and millennial migrant booms. It is no coincidence that Victoria has become more prosperous as we have become more diverse. That is because the more open we are as a community to new ideas and new people, the more likely we are as a state to stay ahead of the shifts in the global economy. That is why – and I am speaking as the son of a migrant mum – I believe our diversity is one of our greatest strengths.

Victoria was built on the back of migrants, and it is why I will always back our multicultural and multifaith communities. After all, migrants drove the gold rush, which turned Victoria into the wealthiest colony in the British Empire. Migrants drove Australia’s industrialisation after World War II

and in the process helped create our middle class. And now migrants are driving critical industries such as aged care and agriculture, helping secure our food security and care for older Australians. The point I am driving home is this: Victoria has never been and never will be monocultural. This has always been a great place of great diversity, and it is that diversity that makes us so great.

There are flat-earthers and others out there – and here too – who want to scapegoat diversity. They claim to believe that some Victorians are more Victorian than others. What that will do is divide us and make sure we are more divided than ever before. There are some in politics who like to talk down our multicultural communities based on where they were born, how they pray or the languages they speak at home. This is simply not acceptable. As Premier, I will always fight against division. I will always stand behind our community. I will always fight to protect the democracy and freedoms that we hold dear as Victorians. That is why I am calling for the scapegoating of multicultural and multifaith communities to stop at once.

Hardworking members of our multicultural communities can be found in every part of our state and every part of our society and economy, from police stations to schools to hospitals to farms to construction. They come here to make a better life for their families and in the process make a better life for all of us. They give far more than they take, and they have earned the right to call themselves Victorians.

I meet with people from faiths and communities from all over different parts of Victoria. Regularly I listen to their concerns, and I hear what they are saying. What I tell them is that I am a new Premier and the government I lead is taking a new direction. We are making every dollar count, reducing unnecessary spending, delivering better value and focusing on the things that matter most to Victorians. That is why we are tackling crime, as well as introducing tough laws that target violence in the home and on the street. That is why we are tackling cost-of-living pressures, halving public transport fares, keeping kinder free and making dental free too. That is why we are backing frontline services, employing 17,000 more nurses and midwives, as well as ensuring Victoria has the best paid teachers in the nation. That is why we are helping workers get around, upgrading the Western Freeway, delivering the Bellarine link and fixing 500,000 potholes. We are fighting for working people, including the hardworking families of multicultural and multifaith communities.

This approach stands in stark contrast to the opposition, who plan to deliver \$40 billion in cuts and sack thousands of frontline Victorian workers. That \$40 billion in cuts will threaten the safety and wellbeing of every single Victorian and every single Victorian family. Only Labor will fight for working people, and only Labor can be trusted to back our multicultural and multifaith communities.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:32): I thank the member for Morwell for his question. There is a lot that goes into the allocation of police resources, and it is not up to politicians to allocate those resources. We rely on the independence of the Chief Commissioner of Police to allocate resources. However, I am more than happy to speak with the member for Morwell about his requirements and see if we can work out what they would be and to speak to the chief commissioner about that. Knowing that area very well, having grown up in Churchill and attended school in Traralgon and having parents that still live in Morwell – I know they might be watching now, and they would be rating my performance as well, member for Morwell – if you are around tomorrow, I am certainly happy to answer this question in person and work out what we can do to come to some kind of agreement that would satisfy you.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Victim Support, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Community Sport) (19:33): The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Education, and the action being sought is for the minister to secure ongoing funding for Victorian local learning and employment networks before the current agreements expire. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action being sought is for the minister to visit the Point Cook Road roadworks at Central Avenue in his

electorate now that the lights are on and the next stage begins. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action being sought is for the minister to provide a detailed update on the Box Hill to Hawthorn bike trail. The member for Mulgrave raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action being sought is for the minister to relocate the needle and syringe bin opposite St Joseph's Primary School in Springvale and that the outreach alcohol and other drugs support be bolstered. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action being sought is for the minister to provide an update on the government's work to address vilification and discrimination against multicultural communities. The member for Nepean raised a matter for the Special Minister of State, and the action being sought is for the minister, in the lead-up to the election, to use every measure available to protect Victorians from dangerous electoral misinformation.

I note that a number of members who raised matters are not in the chamber at the moment. There are some valedictories taking place in the other place this evening, so this should not be seen as a reflection on their interest in these matters. They all did advise me that they would be taking a moment to go and be respectful to those valedictories. I will refer all of these matters to the relevant ministers.

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

House adjourned 7:35 pm.