



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 29 July 2026

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew ¹	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaele	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira ²	Western Metropolitan	FFV	Ratnam, Samantha ⁵	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem ⁶	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina ³	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee ⁸	Northern Victoria	ON
Limbrick, David ⁴	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard ⁷	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

¹ Resigned 7 Dec 2023

² Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;

IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;

Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;

Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026

³ Appointed 14 Nov 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 Jul 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 Nov 2024

⁶ DLP until 25 Mar 2024

⁷ Appointed 7 Feb 2024

⁸ PHON until 3 Aug 2026

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 29 July 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Petitions

Pound Road, Narre Warren South, pedestrian safety

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 859 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that a 16-year-old boy was fatally struck by a vehicle while returning from school walking along the unpaved footpath on Pound Road in Narre Warren South. This footpath runs immediately adjacent to high-speed traffic without protective safety barriers. There have been ongoing community concerns regarding pedestrian safety along vulnerable sections of Pound Road, particularly for children travelling to and from school.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to install appropriate safety barriers along Pound Road particularly in the vulnerable sections, relocate the footpath further away from the roadway, reduce the speed limit to 60 km/h in this predominantly residential area, undertake a comprehensive road safety review of Pound Road to prevent further tragedies, and consider updating the relevant legislation or regulations to require footpaths to be a minimum of a metre from high traffic roads.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Functions) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:35): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to repeal the requirement that the commission prioritise the investigation of serious or systemic corrupt conduct and for other purposes. I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Rachel PAYNE: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Electoral Act 2002 – No. 108.

Victoria Police Act 2013 – No. 107.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 76, 100 and 101.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

*Members statements***Melbourne Grand Mosque**

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (09:51): Earlier this month I visited the Melbourne Grand Mosque alongside the member for Tarneit, where I met with the imam and the committee members to hear directly about the issues affecting their community.

David Davis interjected.

Ingrid STITT: MGM has grown to become one of the –

The PRESIDENT: Order! Minister Stitt, can you sit down for a second. Can we just reset the clock and start again. Mr Davis, I spoke about this yesterday. I think sometimes when members are talking about something we could all probably agree with, it would be good if they were left without interjections. Minister Stitt from the start.

Ingrid STITT: Earlier this month I visited the Melbourne Grand Mosque alongside the member for Tarneit, where I met with the imam and the committee members to hear directly about the issues that are affecting our community in Melbourne's western suburbs. MGM has grown to become one of the most significant places of worship, welcoming around 10,000 people for Friday prayers alone. This space is far more than a mosque; it is a place of faith, learning, connection and support for thousands of families in Melbourne's west. During the visit we spoke about the rise of racism and Islamophobia incidents recently, not only with their mosque but with neighbouring mosques and members of the wider Muslim community. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the difficult time that our Muslim community is going through right now and has been over the last couple of years. The Labor government stands with you. We stand against racism, Islamophobia and hatred in all its forms, and we remain committed to ensuring Victoria is a place where every person can live with dignity, with safety and with a true sense of belonging. Victoria is a great place to live, and our multiculturalism is fundamental to that.

Chinese Cancer and Chronic Illness Society of Victoria

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): Cancer and chronic illness are difficult enough without patients also facing language barriers, cultural stigma and isolation. But for 30 years the Chinese Cancer and Chronic Illness Society of Victoria has helped Chinese-speaking Australians, patients and carers, meet these challenges with their own language among people who understand their experience. Founded in 1996 as a Cancer Council Victoria support group, it has grown from a monthly gathering to a trusted community network offering information, practical support, connection and hope. I was absolutely pleased to join with them and celebrate their monumental achievement at their 30th anniversary celebration and congratulate in particular the founder and stalwart president Dorothy Yiu and the volunteers, members and supporters. Their work means illness does not have to be faced alone and there are solutions in the community. They are a marvellous, marvellous group. I commend them deeply.

Commonwealth Games

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:54): I also want to give a shout-out to the 12 athletes across the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region who are representing Australia in Glasgow.

David Davis: How nice if they could have done it here.

Richard WELCH: It would have been nice. They would have loved that, Mr Davis. I want to name them. We have athletes Abbey Caldwell, Stephanie Ratcliffe, Daniel Milone and Lauren Ryan; basketballer Marena Whittle; cyclists Alyssa Polites and Tara Neyland; netballer Kate Moloney; and

swimmers Henry Allan, Tara Kinder, Matthew Temple and William Petric. We wish them all the very best in Glasgow.

Gendered violence

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:55): Layla Jeffery was just 13 years old and lived in Donald, a small town in my electorate. She was described by her family as a gentle, quiet little girl who just loved life. Her friends said she was fiercely loyal and loved shopping and would even buy two of everything she liked so her best friend could wear it too. On 4 July Layla left home in the early hours of the morning, leaving a light on for when she returned. Her family left that light on, but she never came back. A few days later her remains were found in nearby bushland. Layla's death is an individual tragedy, but it also demonstrates the femicide crisis that is worsening across our country. She is one of four women and girls killed across Australia in the very same week, each allegedly by a man who was known to them. This violence does not come from nowhere. It begins with attitudes and words. It begins with the acceptance of language that dehumanises and creates contempt. It begins when sexism and disrespect are accepted in our homes, in our communities, in our sporting clubs, in our workplaces. It is up to all of us to call it out, and it is up to governments that are not treating this crisis with the urgency, funding or resources it desperately deserves to finally step up for Layla and for every family fearful that they too may be one day waiting at home with the light on.

Cohealth

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:56): Community health organisations are the absolute backbone of our primary care system, and I know firsthand just how vital Cohealth is to my community in the Northern Metropolitan Region. Day in and day out they provide essential, compassionate care to some of our most vulnerable locals. That is why our government is so deeply committed to ensuring that these services remain reliable and strong. Over the last year alone we delivered more than \$68 million in funding to Cohealth. Let me be completely clear: with that level of vital public investment comes a fundamental expectation of transparency, strong governance and absolute accountability. Following the recent independent review into Cohealth's general practice model, governance and finances, it became crystal clear that confidence and community trust urgently needed to be restored. The review explicitly recommended that we need to see strengthened senior management and much tighter board governance. We have listened and we have acted. The Minister for Health has appointed Chris Altis as an independent board monitor at Cohealth for an initial 12-month term. They bring over 30 years of deep practical experience in the health sector, including vital work with the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. He will be in the room attending board meetings as an independent observer, providing crucial oversight and reporting back directly to government. It is a necessary opportunity for Cohealth to deliver the safe, sustainable health care that Victorians thoroughly deserve.

Kirralie Smith

Moirá DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:58): I would like to talk today about what has happened to Kirralie Smith. She was found guilty of vilifying a man by repeatedly posting an image of him in a dress receiving an award for the women's soccer team in Wingham, New South Wales. The image was posted on the football team's public Facebook page. She used the image. She never named him, met him or asked anyone to target, harass or intimidate him. She had never been to a game or directed any advocacy towards him as an individual. She only ever repeatedly posted the already posted image and asked, 'Why is a bloke in a frock receiving an award in a women's football team?' Every post was directed at the policy failure. She is under a two-year apprehension of personal violence order, guilty of vilification and has been ordered to pay \$55,000 and pin a post to her social media; along with that is another \$40,000 fine for doing the same thing to another man who was playing in the women's teams. She always directed her comments towards policy and not the individuals. It is a disgrace that women are being forced to make statements that they do not believe

and make confessions of guilt that they do not believe because of delusional men who ignore women's boundaries.

Southern Metropolitan Region schools

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:59): Last month I visited Glen Eira College to officially open Bulukuyt, the school's new senior learning building. The building accommodates modern science labs and classrooms connected by a central shared space that can be used for informal study and small group work, and all the classrooms have direct access to the outdoors. The ground floor is connected to seating areas and upper levels with balconies, but most impressive of all is the roof terrace, which is now the common area for the year 12s, with sweeping views of the bay, of the city and of Caulfield racetrack. Talking to the students, they told me how they are already up there using those learning spaces so productively. This school upgrade at Glen Eira College is one of the more than 2400 upgrades that Labor has delivered to Victorian public schools since coming to government. In Southern Metro alone Labor has opened seven new schools and delivered upgrades to more than 100 others. Works are underway at Caulfield South Primary School, where a new competition-grade gymnasium is being built. At Glen Huntly Primary we have refurbished the school's library and we have built a new gymnasium. Carnegie Primary has a new games hall for specialised learning and a new canteen, and in 2021, upgrades to the main building at Murrumbeena Primary included delivery of new and improved facilities for students and staff. The investments mean that students in Caulfield, Glen Huntly, Carnegie and Murrumbeena can receive the education they deserve from prep right through to year 12 when they graduate, thanks to this Labor government.

National Pain Week

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:01): The last week of July is National Pain Week. Around 3.5 million Australians suffer chronic pain. That is one in seven people, and chronic pain is the leading cause of disability in Australia. The campaign seeks to raise awareness, reduce stigma, advocate for better access to care and highlight the human and economic costs of chronic pain. Chronic pain is not that 'I've got a headache' feeling; it is a complex neurological condition that persists for an extended period and often continues even after the original injury or illness has healed. Along with a number of other members and staff in this Parliament I have experienced such pain. In my case it is two lots of spinal surgery in the last three years. Chronic pain is debilitating, it is exhausting and it is utterly demoralising. Many Legalise Cannabis members and supporters suffer from such pain, and access to cannabis and/or mainstream pharmaceuticals is a critical question in maintaining quality of life. To me it is a profound regret that in this Parliament we have made such little progress in addressing the situation of chronic pain sufferers. Whether it be through access to mainstream pharmaceuticals or cannabis, whether it be in the workplace through random drug testing or whether it be access to the roads, let us hope that the next Parliament can do better.

Workplace safety

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): Retail provides a wonderful opportunity for young Victorians to get their first job, to earn some money and to learn the dignity of work, but that dignity can be undermined when a small number of customers decide to turn violent and abusive towards retail workers. That is why it was great to join this morning with proud former Kmart worker and now Premier of Victoria Ben Carroll at Kmart in the city to announce that the Labor government is today tabling in Parliament its new workplace protection order laws. It was also great to be there with new Deputy Premier Gabrielle Williams and indeed many figures and members from the union movement, including from the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, the Transport Workers' Union and of course the SDA, with Michael Donovan there powerfully speaking up for and representing the interests of his members, as he has done so tenaciously on this issue for such a long period of time. It was wonderful to be there with so many SDA members, including with a former delegate of mine, Tammy. We spoke about the importance of what these new laws will mean for working Victorians in the retail and transport sectors. Workplace protection orders will play a very important role, building upon the

reforms already implemented by the Labor government to toughen penalties for those who assault retail workers, by bringing in court-ordered ban notices for those who do seek to violently or repeatedly abuse retail workers and indeed transport workers. I very much look forward to having more to say on this when it comes into the upper house sometime soon.

Family violence

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (10:04): Yesterday the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence made a ministers statement about a woman being killed every 11 days in Australia and how women's safety is important. This is the most vocal we have seen this minister be about Victorian women being killed at the hands of male violence. She is the fifth minister from this useless Labor government to take on this important portfolio since 2022. It is no wonder we are not seeing this crisis diminish. This government acts as if this job is done and that there is no more to do, beyond the Royal Commission into Family Violence, to save women and children. I pay tribute to Brooke Stephens from Clyde North, who died just over 24 hours ago, a mother allegedly killed by her partner, leaving behind young children who are waking up knowing that their mum will never come home; another Melburnian mum Lavanya Chappa, allegedly killed by male violence at the hands of her partner; and as we heard earlier today, Layla Jeffery, 13 years old. All this government care about are populist announcements. Why won't you listen to victim-survivors, families and the sector – people that know the answers? You know what you need to do. It is not a policy gap that we have here; it is an implementation gap that we have from this government. It is a political choice to stand back and act as if your hands are tied. Enough with the virtue signalling. You pretend that you care about women, yet you will not put in the necessary investment and sustainable funding to fund the front lines, to fund early intervention and prevention and to fund housing for women and children, especially those escaping gender-based violence. Fund the organisations that are doing the work now.

Timber industry

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:06): Last week I was pleased to join the Glenelg Shire Council and the Victorian timber industry to celebrate the completion of the Portland future fibre hardwood timber manufacturing hub feasibility study – there must be a prize for the longest possible name for a project – marking the successful completion of stage 1 of Portland's world-scale manufacturing precinct. Backed by a \$500,000 investment from the Carroll government's Portland Diversification Fund, the study has demonstrated that locally grown blue gum can be transformed into glue-laminated timber, which actually becomes high-value engineered timber that is as strong as steel. This is an exciting opportunity for our region. Importantly, the project has the potential for 74 ongoing jobs and 150 construction jobs, and this is very exciting for the south-west of Victoria. I congratulate Glenelg shire, the industry partners, the Warrnambool Timber Industries team and everyone involved in delivering this important study. It is another example of our government working with regional communities to create local jobs, support innovation and secure Portland's future.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:08): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026.

In my opinion, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

This Bill seeks to ensure the timely tabling of Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) reports in Parliament and to expedite their tabling while preserving relevant protections of the rights of those upon whom IBAC may comment unfavourably.

The Bill preserves the position of the Supreme Court of Victoria while informing the court of Parliament's view that applications be determined with as much speed as the requirements of the Act and proper consideration of an application permits.

It strikes an appropriate balance in preserving the rights of those on whom adverse comments may be made by IBAC and the risk that legal machinery, shenanigans and roadblocks are used to stymie the release of a critical IBAC report in a timely way thereby allowing corruption to thrive and wrongdoers to escape just exposure by IBAC.

I am confident that this strikes an appropriate balance by ensuring that the Operation Richmond report is not excluded from the Bill but the Bill's checks and balances and IBAC's other checks and balances apply to the Operation Richmond report.

It is my view the Bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

The Hon. David Davis MP

Statement of treaty compatibility

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:08): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

In accordance with s 66 of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I table a statement of Treaty compatibility Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026.

In my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the objects set out in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2026 seeks to ensure where an Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) investigation has occurred and a report has been prepared, that unreasonable, unnecessary and inappropriate delays through excessive legal steps do not frustrate IBAC's ability to table a relevant report.

Operation Richmond is such a report and the delays in tabling Operation Sandon are examples of when heavy legal machinery and process unreasonably delayed the tabling of an important report.

Corruption is corruption, it matters not who engages in it. It remains IBAC's role to root out corruption. IBAC has been nobbled by the Labor Government, through reduced funding and steps to weaken its ability to undertake full investigations. In terms of indigenous Victorians if they have engaged in corrupt conduct, the same rules should apply legitimately as those that apply for non-indigenous Victorians.

This Bill will apply entirely even handedly, giving IBAC the capacity to table reports with appropriate checks and balances and after appropriate process this will apply equally to indigenous and non-indigenous individuals and entities who have been subject to IBAC investigation and potential reporting.

I consider the Bill to therefore be compatible with each of the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025.

The Hon. David Davis MP

Second reading

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:08): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill seeks to ensure the timely tabling of Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission reports in Parliament and to expedite their tabling while preserving relevant protections of the rights of those upon whom IBAC may comment unfavourably. It arises because of concerning delays in the tabling of a number of IBAC reports. These reports have been caught up in unnecessary legal delays and roadblocks.

It is in the public interest that these IBAC reports are tabled without undue delay and that any legal processes that result from recommendations are commenced and that any learnings from the report leading to legislative or educational steps are implemented expeditiously.

This Labor government are currently embroiled in numerous inquiries into corruption on their Big Build sites, corruption resulting in the loss of more than \$15 billion of taxpayers funds.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the former Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews, was questioned by IBAC pursuant to at least three – Operations Watts, Sandon and Richmond – inquiries.

IBAC was created by the Baillieu government to clean up the mess left by Labor prior to 2010.

The whole Victorian community understands the importance of IBAC having the resources and powers, with adequate balance, to manage corruption and root out corruption in Victoria.

It is in the interests of all Victorians that state government corruption, corruption at municipal council level, corruption within state government agencies and corruption more broadly in the Victorian community be met with the strongest response possible, because corruption impacts not only the moral position of public officials but also the public's trust in government, and it also has a significant adverse economic impact.

IBAC has an important role in educating the Victorian public and sending a clear signal that corrupt conduct will not be tolerated.

The opposition is concerned at delays in the tabling of IBAC reports and has separately made commitments as an opposition to proper funding to the IBAC, and to the Ombudsman.

We have also indicated that independent agencies need to be on a more secure funding footing long term. Of course, adequate funding is just one important factor in enabling IBAC to complete work in a timely manner. We fully accept there are other factors in addition, including legal processes which have induced delays.

In addition to the increased funding already committed to and the more secure funding process, the opposition has also indicated it will restore the previous position with respect to the tests for public hearings, effectively reversing Labor's recent changes to IBAC legislation.

The bill seeks to expedite legal processes that may otherwise be used to unreasonably obstruct the tabling of an IBAC report by ensuring timeliness is considered.

Clause 4 makes clear Parliament's intention that the determination of claims through the application of section 59M be determined with as much speed as the requirements of this act and the proper consideration of the application permit.

The Supreme Court must be free to make its decisions unimpeded, but it should be aware of Parliament's intention that applications be determined with as much speed as is relevant within the requirements of this act.

Similar provisions apply to section 100 and section 147.

Clause 5 provides a three-month time period for a relevant principal officer of a public body or a person subject to a potential adverse comment or opinion in a report by IBAC to respond and enables IBAC to transmit its report to Parliament if such individuals fail to respond.

Clause 6 introduces a new transitional provision that ensures IBAC must give a relevant principal officer of a public body or another person an opportunity to respond to adverse material in a proposed report under section 162 and provides for a three-month period consistent with other changes in this act. This clause also ensures that the Operation Richmond report is not removed from the new arrangements and is consequently subject to the act.

Operation Richmond can only be tabled if it meets the required hurdles for IBAC to table a report. Equally malevolent actors will not have unlimited opportunity to block the release of a report that is damaging to them or their associates.

These provisions strike an appropriate balance in preserving the rights of those on whom adverse comments may be made by IBAC and the risk that legal machinery, shenanigans and roadblocks are used to stymie the release of a critical IBAC report in a timely way, thereby allowing corruption to thrive and wrongdoers to escape exposure by IBAC.

We believe that critical IBAC reports should not be denied to the Parliament and thereby to the people of Victoria in an untimely way.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:14): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:14): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the *Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026*.

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

Overview of bill

The purpose of the *Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026* is to require that a plebiscite be conducted to determine whether the people of Victoria support legalisation of the personal use of cannabis as proposed in the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023*.

Human Rights Issues

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to this bill:

The *Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026* does not limit any human right, rather it engages and promotes the right to equality before the law, as set out in Section 8 of the Charter, and the right to take part in public life, as set out in Section 18 of the Charter.

Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2):

As the Bill does not limit any human rights, it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

David Ettershank MP

Member for the Western Metropolitan Region

Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Statement of treaty compatibility

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:14): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

Overview

In accordance with section 66 of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I make this Statement of Treaty Compatibility with respect to the Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026.

The Bill provides for the conduct of a statewide plebiscite to determine whether the people of Victoria support the legalisation of cannabis as proposed in the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023*. The plebiscite is non-binding and establishes a mechanism for eligible Victorian electors to vote on that question.

Section 66(3)(a)–(c): Opportunity for advice and representations

The Assembly advised that it did not wish to make a representation at this time, as its Community Governance and Answerability Framework required under the Statewide Treaty Act is yet to be implemented. The Assembly noted that the Framework will provide the mechanism through which the views of Community are reflected in its representations.

Section 66(3)(d): Compatibility with Treaty objectives

In forming my view regarding the compatibility of this Bill with the objectives set out in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025, I have considered whether the establishment of a plebiscite concerning cannabis legalisation may affect First Peoples differently from other Victorians, having regard to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the overrepresentation of First Peoples within Victoria's criminal justice system.

Advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples

The Bill establishes a process by which all eligible Victorian electors may participate in a statewide plebiscite. It does not confer, remove or alter rights specific to First Peoples, nor does it affect arrangements relating to Traditional Owners, self-determination structures, Treaty processes or First Peoples' representative institutions.

The Bill may be regarded as supporting democratic participation by providing all eligible voters, including First Peoples, with an opportunity to express a view on a significant public policy question. However, the Bill does not itself advance or diminish First Peoples' self-determination and does not alter any mechanisms through which First Peoples exercise self-determination rights.

Accordingly, I consider that the Bill is neutral in its effect on the objective of advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples.

Addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation

In considering this objective, I have had regard to the disproportionate impact that drug criminalisation and justice system involvement have historically had on First Peoples. First Peoples continue to experience higher rates of contact with the criminal justice system than non-Indigenous Victorians, reflecting broader patterns of disadvantage associated with colonisation.

The subject matter of the plebiscite – whether cannabis should be legalised – is related to an area of public policy that may have implications for those patterns of criminal justice contact. However, the Bill itself does not legalise cannabis, amend criminal offences, alter policing powers, or change sentencing, prosecution or enforcement arrangements. Rather, it establishes a process for obtaining the views of Victorian voters on whether cannabis should be legalised.

Because the Bill is procedural in nature and does not itself alter the substantive law concerning cannabis, I do not consider that it directly affects the disadvantage experienced by First Peoples arising from historic wrongs and ongoing injustices. Nor do I consider that it compounds that disadvantage.

Ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples

I have considered whether the Bill may affect the equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms by First Peoples when compared with other Victorians.

Eligibility to vote in the plebiscite is based on eligibility to vote at a State election under the Electoral Act 2002, and compulsory voting provisions apply equally to all eligible electors. The Bill does not create different voting entitlements, obligations or procedures for First Peoples and applies uniformly across Victoria.

The Bill also requires the publication of Yes and No cases and the publication of the relevant cannabis legalisation bill, providing voters with access to information regardless of background or identity.

Having regard to these features, I consider that the Bill does not reduce or impair the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples. Any future impacts on rights arising from cannabis legalisation or continued prohibition would arise from separate legislation rather than from this Bill.

Overall assessment

Having regard to the considerations above, I have considered whether the Bill compounds existing disadvantage, undermines self-determination, or increases unequal enjoyment of rights experienced by First Peoples.

I have formed the view that it does not. The Bill establishes a neutral electoral process to gauge public opinion on a policy question. It does not alter substantive criminal law, affect First Peoples-specific rights or

institutions, or create differential treatment of First Peoples. Its operation is procedural, applying equally to all Victorian electors.

Conclusion

Accordingly, in my opinion, the Cannabis Legalisation Plebiscite Bill 2026 is compatible with the objectives set out in section 66(3)(d)(i)–(iii) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025.

While the Bill concerns a policy area that may have particular significance for First Peoples because of the historical and ongoing overrepresentation of First Peoples in the criminal justice system, the Bill itself is limited to establishing a plebiscite and does not alter substantive laws governing cannabis. I therefore consider that the Bill does not adversely affect the advancement of First Peoples' rights and self-determination, does not compound disadvantage resulting from historic wrongs and ongoing injustices, and does not diminish the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.

David Ettershank MP

Member for the Western Metropolitan Region

Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Second reading

David ETTERS Hank (Western Metropolitan) (10:14): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Our bill has one simple goal. We're not asking the government to change the law, but merely to submit the following question to Victorians who are entitled to vote in a Victorian state election: 'Do you support the legalisation of cannabis in Victoria as proposed in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023?' That is the question at the heart of our plebiscite and the purpose of this bill.

So why are we proposing a plebiscite? I might start by sharing some fun facts I have learned about plebiscites, for members who might like a refresher. A plebiscite is not a referendum. A referendum is a vote on a proposed change to the constitution. A plebiscite does not change the constitution, and its result is not binding. A plebiscite is more of a referendum on a policy. We ask the people whether they support or oppose a proposed action on an issue. Both the yes and no sides present their case, and the people decide. In this state there is no general provision in the Electoral Act or other Victorian legislation for a default model of referendums or plebiscites. Since Federation in 1901, there have been 56 such referendums, mostly on policy issues, held across the various states and territories. So they're more common than we might think. Victoria, however, is a bit of an anomaly. We don't tend to utilise them much. Our last such vote was in 1956 in relation to extending closing hours, and it was defeated! A motion to extend pub hours from 6 pm to 10 pm was defeated! So I'm aware that the result could swing either way. That's how it works. It's the most direct form of democracy and an antidote to the deep cynicism people harbour towards the major parties at this point in time.

If the people of Victoria do oppose the decriminalisation of cannabis, we'll take our bat and ball and go back to the drawing board. The people have spoken. But I have faith in the people of Victoria. This is a sensible, evidence-based policy, it's the right thing to do, and it's an important social justice issue that crosses left and right boundaries. I may not agree with people who hold opposing views to mine – but on this question I have absolute confidence in Victorians' ability, their intelligence, their sense of fairness and their ability to see what an obviously flawed, anachronistic policy with no place in our modern society is. Despite the overwhelming evidence of the harms associated with the criminalisation and prohibition of cannabis, the extraordinary cost of enforcing prohibition, the wasted justice resources, et cetera, et cetera, this government will not, for the want of a bit of courage, take the modest and humane step of no longer arresting people for cannabis possession. I believe Victorians do support an end to cannabis prohibition and an end to the discrimination and hypocrisy of criminalising cannabis. I believe they will vote for change. But whatever the result, I believe in democracy.

The model that Victorians will be asked to vote on is the one proposed in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill, introduced in November 2023. The model falls shy of proposing a legal market for cannabis. The bill allows

adults to possess and consume small quantities of cannabis – although not in public – to grow up to six plants at home and to be able to gift to other adults a small quantity of cannabis. The bill contains provisions to prevent children under the age of 18 from accessing cannabis. It's essentially the same model that has been operating in the ACT for over five years now.

Indeed, during the 2024 bill inquiry into our personal use bill, we visited the ACT to see firsthand the benefits of their model, which has been operating successfully for over five years now. And by successfully, I mean the scheme has produced the sort of outcomes we would love to see in Victoria – a reduction in cannabis use amongst young people, no increase in hospital admissions and no changes to the road trauma stats. Arrests are down 94 per cent – Victoria Police could only dream of a 94 per cent reduction in unnecessary arrests. And whatever dire outcomes were predicted, none of them have come to pass – and our delegation heard that directly from no less an authority than the chief police commissioner of the ACT. Crucially the ACT reforms have led to 'reduced stigma, increased willingness to seek support for cannabis use, and improved relations with law enforcement'. Why can't we have that? Sounds better than what we've currently got. And indeed, recommendation 1 of the personal use bill review inquiry was that the Victorian government:

- draw on the experience of the ACT, in successfully decriminalising the cultivation and possession of small quantities of cannabis for personal use with its associated health, social and legal benefits, and
- consider adopting an approach in line with that proposed by the Bill, along with any amendments recommended in this Report.

All the evidence points in the same direction. But the government refuses to heed evidence or expert advice.

Victorians – Australians – support the decriminalisation of cannabis. The national drug strategy household survey conducted annually by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – the largest and most authoritative poll on the community's attitudes and behaviours toward drugs and drug problems – has shown increasing support for the decriminalisation of cannabis. The most recent survey showed 80 per cent of Australians do not believe cannabis should be criminalised. Let's just think about that for a moment: tell me one piece of legislation that this government has proposed that has enjoyed 80 per cent support.

Over a third of Victorian adults have consumed cannabis in their lifetime. Everyone knows someone who uses cannabis – and despite the misinformed anecdotes those opposite will inevitably trot out, those people are functional, happy, taxpaying individuals going about their lives. The most obvious reason to end the prohibition of cannabis is that it is an archaic and failed policy, based on stigma and discrimination. If prohibition worked, it would have worked by now because we have been doing it for close to 100 years. And yet cannabis consumption continues to remain steady. Decades of prohibition have done nothing to diminish demand or supply. We have spent billions over the decades enforcing laws that criminalise otherwise law-abiding citizens and force thousands through the criminal justice system. The harms associated with the criminalisation and prohibition of cannabis are far more damaging than cannabis consumption. And criminalisation disproportionately harms our most disadvantaged Victorians: young working-class people, First Nations, African Australians and Pasifika Australians.

Prohibition also forces people to deal with the black market. I've noted before that the difference between licit and illicit markets is that one contributes to the prosperity of the state and the other enriches criminals and works against the health and wellbeing of our citizens. Criminals don't pay tax. They don't follow regulations, they don't respect age restrictions, nor do they apply rigorous quality control. So, while our personal use bill does not envisage a full legal market, which would start to dismantle the illicit market, the model it proposes would drastically reduce the harms associated with arrests and contact with the criminal justice system, and at least we could free up the police, the courts and the jails to deal with the serious crimes the community want to see prioritised. Police would surely welcome this shift, given what we know of the Victoria Police manual's updated advice on cautioning. Greg Denham, the former senior sergeant and senior advisor on drug policy with Victoria Police stated,

‘Nobody joins Victoria Police to spend their shift busting someone for a joint’. It’s not like they don’t have far more important things to do with their precious time.

The Labor Party’s own rank-and-file members support cannabis law reform. For the third year in a row, ALP members voted at the Victorian state conference for the decriminalisation and legalisation of cannabis. It’s good policy, backed by evidence which has broad support in the community. Let’s put it to the vote.

I will turn to the details of the plebiscite bill.

- clause 1 sets out the Act’s purpose.
- clause 2 provides for its commencement.
- clause 3 defines its key terms.
- clause 4 requires a cannabis legalisation plebiscite to be held and provides that the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) must set the date within two years of the act’s commencement. The VEC may hold it concurrently with a state election, council election or at any time.
- clause 5 sets out the plebiscite question, namely whether eligible voters support the legalisation of cannabis in Victoria as proposed in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023 – which I have pretty comprehensively covered.
- clause 6 sets out who is eligible to vote in the plebiscite.
- clause 7 applies compulsory voting requirements to the plebiscite.
- clause 8 provides for the publication of the yes and no cases.
- clauses 9 to 11 provide for the VEC to publish, conduct and declare the result of the plebiscite.
- clause 12 confers a regulation-making power for the Governor in Council for matters necessary to give effect to the act.

It’s a simple ask. After years of filibustering, of reviews, and of consultations and reviews of the consultations, it seems that the only way to instil some fortitude into our political leaders in this state is to take this binary decision from their hands and give it to the people. Everyone in government is very gun-shy of being the one to pull the trigger, of making the right decision on decriminalisation. It matters not that our proposal is consistent with the government’s own harm reduction policies. It matters not that it is consistent with the ALP’s own, oft-repeated policy platform. And it matters not that, while denying the obvious merits of this policy, our leaders watch our justice system eat our young, our socially marginalised just so that they can be seen to be tougher on crime than their opposition.

Our democracy relies on the assumption that people can make these decisions, they are not stupid. The case for decriminalisation has been made time and time again. It has been repeatedly heard in this Parliament since 1996, when the chambers debated the legalisation of cannabis on the recommendation of the late Professor David Penington. But governments always shy away, overwhelmed by their own gormlessness or political expediency, never bold enough to rise to the moment. Given the facts and the political paralysis of both the government and the opposition over the last 30 years, we believe it is time to rely on the common sense of the Victorian people. We’ve tried everything to get this across the line. How about some direct democracy? Let’s put our faith in the collective wisdom of the Victorian people.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:29): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Biodiversity protection

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:30): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) delivered a thorough assessment of the state government's response to biodiversity decline in 2021;
 - (b) VAGO's *Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity* report found that the former Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning (the department) could not demonstrate if, or how well, it is halting further decline in Victoria's threatened species populations;
 - (c) the department accepted all nine of VAGO's recommendations, including recommendation:
 - (i) 8, that the department 'provides updated, comprehensive, scientific and evidence-based advice to the government on the ongoing resources required to improve the net outlook for all threatened species listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*';
 - (ii) 9, that the department 'provides advice to the government about the investment required to protect and recover prioritised critically endangered species at extreme risk of extinction';
 - (d) the department has since fulfilled both recommendations and provided advice to the government on the investment required to manage Victoria's threatened species crisis and protect and recover critically endangered species;
 - (e) the government has not made this advice public; and
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 60 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, departmental advice developed pursuant to recommendations 8 and 9 of VAGO's *Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity* report regarding the investment required to manage Victoria's threatened species crisis and protect and recover critically endangered species.

I rise to speak on motion 1528 in my name. Back in 2020 the Victorian Auditor-General investigated the management of biodiversity loss and the decline of threatened species in Victoria. Victoria has lost around 80 species since colonisation, with almost 2000 facing extinction. But six years later things are looking worse in Victoria. The latest state of the environment report rated 26 of 42 biodiversity indicators as poor, with 20 deteriorating since 2020.

To understand why, it is worth drilling into that first audit. VAGO acknowledged that this was not a crisis purely of this government's making. The final report notes that our native flora and fauna and their habitats have all been declining since European colonisation. It also acknowledges that current and future threats such as land clearing, the introduction of new pest plants and animals and the impact of climate change continue to put our native plants and animals at increasing risk of decline and extinction. VAGO's conclusions were ultimately damning, finding that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action could not demonstrate if or how well it was halting further decline in Victoria's threatened species populations. Among its critiques of the government's monitoring tools, its data collection and its overall transparency, VAGO found that funding for the department to protect species fell significantly short of what it predicted was needed. Basically, the government did not care enough about combating the extinction crisis to fund the department doing the work. However, VAGO also noted the department had not provided detailed evidence-based advice to the government about the costs and benefits of protecting and monitoring threatened species to support further investment. To its credit, the department accepted all nine subsequent recommendations, including two recommendations to advise the government about genuine funding needs and species prioritisation.

We understand the government has held up its side of the bargain and costed what it would actually take to manage Victoria's extinction crisis, yet Labor has not released those costings. It has not delivered the funding required to address the biodiversity crisis. Again, 20 biodiversity indicators have actually gone backwards since 2020. Instead, in the years since the VAGO report was released the

government has actively cut funding from the environment department. After the Silver review Labor announced it planned to cut a further 350 jobs from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. The thing is they had already reduced DEECA to a shell of itself over years of austerity budgets and the machineries of government. Since 2023 Labor has been quietly but consistently slashing jobs from Parks Victoria, the Victorian Fisheries Authority, the biodiversity division and other DEECA teams and agencies. The government is even facing extended industrial action from Parks Victoria staff, because after starving the agency of funding, Labor cannot even pay park rangers the same as their public sector counterparts. Other environmental agencies have been abolished entirely, including Sustainability Victoria; the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, or VEAC; the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council; the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority; and Recycling Victoria.

While attacking nature experts, the government has actually bent over backwards for game hunters. They have opened up tens of thousands of hectares of national parks for recreational deer hunters, they have rejected their own inquiry's recommendation to ban duck shooting and they have even rejected commonsense ideas like listing deer as pests. That is right: Victoria is the only mainland state in Australia to classify deer as protected species, all because game hunters want to keep their game alive and well so that they can hunt it into the future. That is a ridiculous decision, and it is why we have seen farmers and environmentalists team up for what should be a pretty straightforward demand: classify deer as pests and fund multistakeholder eradication plans.

Throughout all of this, Labor has failed to do any actual conservation work. They have failed to fix our hodgepodge of decades-old wildlife laws, which were designed in the 1970s mainly to regulate the killing of native wildlife. They have failed to prevent developers destroying critically endangered grasslands in Melbourne's west – land that the government was meant to have purchased by 2020. They have also let developers destroy native forests on private land in East Gippsland shire, instead passing responsibility to the local council, and they have failed to futureproof the end of commercial native timber harvesting in Victoria. Instead they have handed millions of dollars meant for transition support for workers to companies that have used that money to prop up native timber logging in Tasmania and then send timber here to be pulped by mills in Victoria, which is why the Greens have developed a bill to close the logging loopholes and protect our precious forests once and for all.

But this disinterest from Labor really makes sense when you realise that no-one in Labor actually wants to be the environment minister. There has been a lot of talk this week about musical chairs when it comes to party leadership from both Labor and the Liberals, but did you know we have seen four environment ministers in the past five years in Victoria, usually tacked on to a bunch of other very significant, substantial portfolios? Seriously, if no-one in Labor cares enough about nature to do the job, why would anyone have any faith in this government? Today we are calling on Labor to show the true scale of what it would take to actually manage and reverse the extinction crisis in Victoria, but we are also demanding that the government do something with those costings. That means funding, and that means actually caring about nature.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:36): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Dr Mansfield's name. It is a short-form documents motion calling on the government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within 60 days of the house agreeing to this resolution departmental advice relating to recommendations 8 and 9 of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office's *Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity* report et cetera.

It is a great pleasure to rise to speak on this motion. I want to thank Dr Mansfield for bringing this motion to the house. It is the government's position, as usual, that we do not oppose documents motions in regard to seeking the tabling of documents. But the substance of this motion is more than just talking about the tabling of documents, it is about Victoria's biodiversity. Despite what Dr Mansfield has outlined, the Victorian government has invested a lot of money in protecting Victoria's environment. There was a seminal report done on Victoria's 20-year biodiversity strategy. It was launched in 2017 and titled *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037*. There was a

lot of work done in that report. It is a very important report. It sets the framework, or the blueprint, for how Victoria will be approaching protecting its biodiversity.

By way of example I will go through and highlight some of the things that the government has invested in. There is an annual investment of \$20 million in the protecting biodiversity program, which delivers on-ground action and improves decisions, support systems and biodiversity reporting. It also empowers traditional owners and protects private land and marine conservation projects. There is \$77 million for BushBank. This is a targeted program to revegetate 20,000 hectares of private and public land by 2035 to benefit a range of species and to sequester carbon. It is the largest such program in Victoria's history. We have significantly invested in parks and public land and further supported other strategies for pest eradication, with \$18.25 million over four years ongoing for pest species eradication.

The government gets just 5 minutes to talk on these documents motions. There is a lot more I could say, but time is against me and unfortunately I cannot go into great detail about the investment that cuts across a whole range of areas. I might just say that following the severe 2019–20 bushfire season we committed \$517 million over four years and \$108 million ongoing to protect Victoria from bushfire risk. The 2026–27 budget delivers a further \$146.8 million for critical aviation firefighting resources and \$44.6 million to maintain essential emergency services management assets and frontline firefighting vehicles.

In terms of Victorians enjoying our natural environments, \$30 million over four years has been allocated for keeping 1.8 million hectares of state forest open, healthy and accessible. This includes the \$4 million in the budget for community-driven healthy forest plans, \$42 million for recreation infrastructure improvements and \$7.2 million for additional rangers to support on-the-ground management. Then there are further programs like BushBank, Landcare and of course the conservation regulator that are delivering practical action on biodiversity, habitat and wildlife across the state. These are all important investments. But also, in protecting Victoria's biodiversity, everyone can play a role, and everyone has a stake in this as well. In terms of non-government investment into biodiversity, the government recognises that it cannot do this alone. There is \$13.67 million in the Nature Fund that was invested in 2022, and it has attracted a further \$23 million in co-contribution investment to protect a range of threatened and culturally significant species and deliver habitat restoration. We are also investing \$30.9 million in our habitat restoration program. I could go on and on. There is loads more, but again time is against me. As I said, the government's position is that we will not be opposing a documents motion, but nevertheless it is not right to say that the government does not take protecting our biodiversity seriously.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:41): It is very clear to many Victorians that the greatest threat to vulnerable species, to threatened species, is out-of-control bushfires, and our state has suffered in the last decade from more than we ever want, need or should. I understand almost 3 billion faunal species were incinerated or were maimed and had to be put down because of the bushfires in 2019–20. If this government wants to talk about its record, then its record needs to be of slowing, mitigating and forward planning and preparing for bushfires. Now, I support this documents motion, as we do, and indeed I would like very much to see, and the Liberals and Nationals would like to see, what is going on with this government. We see this is in their DNA; it is an increasingly regular occurrence. There is a significant problem. There is a review, and it can be an Auditor-General's one – we saw only recently the Victorian Auditor-General's follow-up in terms of bushfire preparedness, and it was a damning report on the government. We see advice from bushfire royal commissions. We see advice from the inspector-general for emergency management and others. We see these reports.

We even see there is an unreleased Parks Victoria report. Only recently Parks Victoria investigated. The minister said, 'Let's have a look at what's going wrong in Victorian parks'. The public does not know. It is an internal document that does not get down to the nitty-gritty. We do not know what is in there about the flaws in this government's management of our public spaces. They have stripped back the bushfire reporting, and that is very clear. They have watered it down. It used to have great detail

about fuel-driven risks, the preparedness, the number of burns and where they were located. What this government has done over the last five or six years is that now it is a vibe. Now we get a document that is called the ‘management report’, and it is far more just, as I said, the vibe. That is not sufficient. It does not talk about fuel breaks. It does not provide depth and quality to Victorians. Surely Victorians deserve to know how at risk they are.

To this point, surely our environment needs to be understood better, and that includes threatened species. I have gone on record a number of times talking about the importance of understanding threatened species. Indeed only recently the Victorian government put forward apparently a vermin-proof fence across the top of Wilsons Promontory. Well, guess what, it has got more holes in it than Swiss cheese. The wombats can go under it, the foxes can go through it, and it finishes metres before the edge of the landform before it goes into the sea. This is what this government is doing. We see that the government is stripping back and editing a clear document that was put forward in a public inquiry – how manipulative is that – in relation to bushfire preparedness. I put this on record. It is a public document. Go and look at our minority report that provides two documents. One is about the unfiltered CFA response to questions on notice, and the other one is a highly sanitised government version.

The Greens and I may have differing views on the drivers of the decline in ecosystems. We know that it is not the timber harvesting. We know that it is not the need to remove trees. We need to actively manage our forests in this state. This government has called for a lock-up of tenure – ‘Let’s transfer a name, create a different title’ – and apparently it serves as conservation. We understand that we need active management. We do need to see these documents. We do need scientific evidence of what is happening in this state, but we certainly do not need more subterfuge, more of a culture of secrecy and more putting it in the bottom drawer, because what is good for our environment and what is good for threatened species is also good for communities and all Victorians. I put on record to this government that if there is another devastating wildfire in the next few years, we are in dire straits.

Motion agreed to.

Construction industry

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:46): I move:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, copies of the following documents:

- (1) the final, unredacted review, report or advice prepared by or involving Mr John Merritt concerning corruption, criminal infiltration, unlawful conduct, industrial misconduct and related probity or governance issues on Big Build or other Victorian government infrastructure worksites;
- (2) all drafts, interim reports, recommendations, appendices, attachments and supporting materials provided by Mr Merritt or any person assisting him;
- (3) all correspondence, including emails, letters and file notes, between Mr Merritt and any minister, ministerial office, department or agency concerning the commissioning, scope, findings, recommendations, release or implementation of the review;
- (4) all briefs, advice, submissions, meeting papers and decision documents provided to or from the Premier, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Police, Attorney-General, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Transport and Planning, Major Transport Infrastructure Authority or Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority concerning the review’s findings or recommendations, including:
 - (a) when it was received by government;
 - (b) any decision not to release it in full;
 - (c) any proposed redactions, legal concerns or communications strategy;
 - (d) any delay in accepting, announcing or implementing recommendations;
 - (e) whether it affected the government’s decision not to establish a royal commission into Big Build corruption; and

- (5) recording implementation plans, timelines, responsible agencies, funding or legislative changes arising from the review.

Nearly six months ago Queensland's commission of inquiry into the CFMEU blew the lid off Labor's dirty secret. Redacted sections of Geoffrey Watson SC's report revealed that \$15 billion was ripped from taxpayers' pockets. Every dollar was siphoned off to criminal elements. Gangsters, bikies, drug dealers, even strippers and organised crime figures enriched themselves while small businesses and families were bled dry. What was once the centrepiece of the Victorian Labor government is now its greatest political liability.

The *Herald Sun* revealed that the government had quietly commissioned its own secret review into corruption and criminality on Big Build worksites. The review was led by John Merritt, a former senior bureaucrat under Bracks, Brumby and Andrews. So secret was the review that there is not a single reference to it outside of a handful of news reports – not one media release, not one press conference mentioned, not one reference on a Victorian government website. When was it commissioned? We do not know. What were its findings and recommendations? We do not know. Beyond reports of a supply chain register and improved industrial relations fixers, we do not know. Why did they sit on these recommendations for more than six months? We do not know. This was not a review into an obscure administrative failure. It concerned allegations of organised crime, corruption and the misuse of billions of dollars of public money on the largest infrastructure program in Victorian history, yet Labor treated it as a political problem to be concealed rather than a public scandal to be confronted.

We know a handful of ministers were so alarmed that they bypassed the then Premier's office and implemented parts of the review themselves. These were not the usual cast of disgruntled backbenchers fearful of losing their seats. They were ministers inside cabinet with powerful portfolios and responsibility for major projects. If Labor's own ministers were sounding the alarm, why were the former and current Premier telling Victorians there was nothing to investigate? Gabrielle Williams directed tier 1 contractors to stop using so-called industrial fixers and established an approved register of consultants. Melissa Horne publicly revealed allegations that pressure had been exerted to remove a subcontractor from the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital redevelopment. These were not anonymous sources or disgruntled backbenchers. These were senior cabinet ministers responsible for delivering Victoria's biggest infrastructure projects. If Labor's own ministers were sounding the alarm, why was the government telling Victorians there was nothing to investigate? Yesterday the Premier announced a royal commission, but in March he rejected a royal commission, claiming it will take twice as long and cost twice as much. So which is it? Was a royal commission unnecessary in March, or was Ben Carroll simply unwilling to support one while he remained Deputy Premier? Did the evidence suddenly change overnight, did the corruption suddenly become more serious or did the only thing that change happen to be the identity of the person occupying the Premier's office?

Mr Carroll wants Victorians to believe that his elevation represents a clean break with the past. He even referenced integrity. But there can be no clean break when the new Premier was a senior author, defender and beneficiary of the old government. We may have a new Premier, but we do not have a new government. For 3½ years this has been the Allan–Carroll Labor government. He cannot now reinvent himself as the independent umpire of a government he helped lead. I challenge the Premier: live up to your name. Backflip Ben – that is your new name. Release the merit report, full and unredacted. Release every briefing, every email, every piece of correspondence associated with it. I commend this motion to the house.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:52): I am very pleased to get up today and speak to Mrs McArthur's documents motion on a range of matters, asking for a range of documents, and we will no doubt get to those. What we have got here in the state of Victoria with Ben Carroll and Gabrielle Williams are a Premier and Deputy Premier determined to take Victoria in a new direction to focus this government on the matters that matter most to Victorians – health, education, cost of living, community safety – and to make sure that Victorians know the risks that a Liberal–One Nation

government, led by Jess Wilson, propped up by One Nation, pose to this state. That is the choice that is going to confront Victorians in November.

We know they are worried because the Liberal Party primary vote is in freefall. The Resolve poll shows it has dropped by 13 points since December under Jess Wilson's leadership. And what we have got now are a Premier and a Deputy Premier who very, very clearly on day one said integrity is not optional. The thing those opposite are scared about the most is that they are facing oblivion in November. We have got the plans that Victoria wants and Victorians need to protect them from the cuts that are coming from the Liberals and One Nation working together to undermine this state.

What we have said right from the start is that, yes, there are issues in the construction sector that need to be addressed. That is why the Premier's first act has been to begin the work –

Members interjecting.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I am sitting right next to Mr Batchelor, and I cannot hear him from the constant loud noise that is coming. Can they just pipe down and let him finish, please. Constant interjections are unruly.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): It has been a lively debate from both sides, but I will ask interjections to be kept to a minimum.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Which is why the Premier has said that his first act is going to be to call a royal commission into the construction sector, and that is exactly what is now being worked on. He has also said that we are immediately going to establish a special prosecutor that will work in parallel with the royal commission, and he has made very clear statements about introducing legislation on IBAC's follow-the-money powers.

What we have seen today with this motion that Mrs McArthur has moved is a request for certain documents. As is the practice, the government will not be opposing the documents motion, but in her speech, Mrs McArthur sought to cast a wide range of assertions and make a wide range of claims. What you have got very clearly from this government under this Premier is a steadfast commitment to ensuring that the matters that have existed in our construction sector are examined by a royal commission, which is exactly what he is doing; that the powers that IBAC needs to follow the money are going to be delivered; and that a special prosecutor is being set up to work in parallel with the royal commission so that where there is evidence of wrongdoing those get brought before the courts and have the appropriate legal action taken against them. You can hear the air coming out of the deflated balloon that is the Liberal Party as they realise that Labor is the party that has the plan that Victorians want. It delivers them what they need and have been asking for on integrity, and more importantly, it protects them from the cuts that we know are coming under the Liberals in partnership with One Nation. The cuts are coming, and that is exactly what the Liberals and One Nation will deliver to Victoria if they are elected.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:57): I rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's excellent motion calling for documents, particularly from this hidden Merritt review into Big Build corruption. We all know the Wilson review was a wet lettuce piece, and even the government will practically admit that, even though they have quoted it many times. I just want to speak to Mr Batchelor's laughable contribution. What he has done now is basically admit that he is not sincere about tackling corruption and does not have a sincere belief in tackling it. What he has basically acknowledged, and I think many of their side have acknowledged, and the Premier has, is that they have changed their view on it because of the opinion polls. They have changed their view on it because of the polls, not a sincere belief in tackling corruption. I do recall Mr Batchelor stridently opposing our private members bill with follow-the-money powers, asking questions and opposing the bill. Again, they were the only party to oppose the bill. And then Mr Batchelor got up and spoke for about 10 to 15 minutes against our motion – which was successfully passed by the upper house – for a royal commission into Big Build corruption.

The Big Build was enabled under this government with the Premier, then transport minister, and with the current Premier Ben Carroll as Jacinta Allan's deputy. They desperately – all of them – tried to oppose a royal commission. Ms Symes, the Treasurer, the leader of your government in the upper house, said that every construction royal commission has failed, the Premier said it will take too long and cost too much, and then Mr Batchelor would walk in and continue to read Premier's private office talking points from Jacinta Allan's office stating that we do not need a royal commission. Well, we do need a royal commission. We have always needed a royal commission, because this government has failed. This government has seen \$15 billion fly out the door to crooks, criminals and strippers, and this government thought, 'Oh, let's call a Wilson review that says nothing, a wet lettuce review. Let's do some things that are not going to expose how we completely enabled this to happen.' Contractors would get calls from the minister's office saying, 'Are you going to do a deal with the union? The minister wants to know.' We know that happened on the Gap Road level crossing removal project in Sunbury. We know that happened with several other projects, where the minister's office would call a contractor and say, 'You're not going to get work on the first stage of the airport rail unless you do a deal over here.' 'You're not going to get work on the North East Link unless this person, that the union does not like, is removed from the site.' Is it any wonder \$15 billion has walked out the door to crooks and criminals? Is it any wonder? I will repeat Mr Batchelor's quote from earlier this year, where he said:

The appropriate body to deal with allegations of criminal activity in this state of Victoria is Victoria Police. No other body, whether it be the standing royal commission, in the form of IBAC, that we have in this state or another royal commission-like process, is going to – because of the way that those processes work – or is empowered with the same prosecutorial vehicles to bring criminal charges and to arrest people. I think that if you are serious about stopping ... behaviour on construction sites, you call the cops, because what the police can do is arrest people and what the police can do is charge people.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: He is opposing IBAC follow-the-money powers. Mr Batchelor and all of them on the other side of the house have consistently enabled the corruption to happen. They have consistently enabled \$15 billion to be fleeced from Victorian taxpayers on construction sites, and now the new Premier – then Deputy Premier to Jacinta Allan – wants to pretend that integrity is not optional. What he is admitting is that under this government, and all the members opposite, integrity has been optional, and for that they should be condemned. I commend this documents motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Road maintenance

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (11:02): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that Victoria's road network is fundamental to the safety, economic prosperity and connectivity of communities across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria;
- (2) acknowledges that Victorians rely on a safe and well-maintained road network for access to employment, education, health care, freight transport, tourism, and emergency services;
- (3) notes:
 - (a) the declining condition of many state-managed roads, including deteriorating surfaces, potholes, damaged shoulders, inadequate drainage, faded line markings and deteriorating safety barriers;
 - (b) that the condition of the Hume, Western, Midland and Goulburn Valley highways have been the subject of sustained community concern;
 - (c) that deteriorating road conditions:
 - (i) increase the likelihood of crashes;
 - (ii) create significant hazards for motorcyclists and cyclists;

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- (iii) increase the risk of tyre failures and vehicle damage;
- (iv) place emergency services personnel at greater risk;
- (v) increase freight operating costs through vehicle damage and delays;
- (4) expresses concern that short-term pothole repairs have failed to provide lasting improvements, resulting in increased maintenance costs and ongoing safety risks;
- (5) condemns the government for its ongoing mismanagement of the road network, its failure to prioritise preventative maintenance and long-term asset renewal, and provide road users with safe and reliable road infrastructure;
- (6) calls on the government to:
 - (a) publish a statewide road condition assessment identifying roads requiring urgent intervention;
 - (b) prioritise permanent surface reconstruction;
 - (c) establish publicly reported maintenance performance targets, including response times for hazardous defects; and
 - (d) provide regular public reporting on the condition of Victoria's arterial road network and maintenance expenditure.

This motion speaks to the concerning condition of Victoria's road network, a matter that affects every Victorian regardless of where they live. Roads are not a luxury; they are essential public infrastructure. They connect our communities, support our economy, allow children to get safely to school, enable patients to access health care, keep freight moving and allow emergency services to respond when every second counts. Yet across Victoria, particularly in regional and rural areas, our roads are deteriorating before our eyes. Anyone who drives through northern Victoria knows exactly what I am talking about. Potholes appear almost overnight, road shoulders are crumbling, line markings have faded to the point where they are almost invisible at night or in wet weather, drainage failures leave roads vulnerable to further damage, and temporary repairs are often washed away within weeks, if not days. It is not simply an inconvenience, it is a genuine public safety issue.

In 2025, 291 people lost their lives on Victorian roads, and 268 fatal crashes occurred across the state. Tragically, 61 of those killed were motorcyclists, one of the groups most vulnerable to poor road surfaces and road defects. Even more concerning is where these tragedies are occurring. The TAC found that more than 70 per cent of people killed on country roads over the past five years died within 30 kilometres of their homes. These are not tourists unfamiliar with the roads; they are local people travelling roads they use every day. The research also found that regional roads continue to account for the majority of fatalities, despite carrying far fewer vehicles than those in metropolitan Melbourne.

Every pothole that forces a driver to swerve, every broken road edge that catches a tyre and every damaged safety barrier left unrepaired increases the risk that something will go wrong. Between January 2023 and December 2024 Victorian motorists lodged 1709 compensation claims for vehicle damage caused on state-managed roads, yet only 23 of those claims resulted in settlement offers, a success rate of just 1.3 per cent. Even more concerning, 73 per cent of those claims involved damaged road surfaces and pavement defects. These figures demonstrate that poor road conditions are not isolated incidents; they are affecting thousands of Victorian motorists. Truck drivers and freight operators also pay the price. Victoria's freight industry depends heavily on our regional highways. Every damaged road surface increases vehicle maintenance costs, tyre wear, suspension damage and fuel compensation. Delivery delays add further costs, and ultimately those costs are passed on to Victorian consumers.

Regional communities feel these impacts more than most. Unlike metropolitan Melbourne, people living in regional Victoria often have no practical alternative to driving. They travel long distances for work, school, medical appointments and everyday services. When roads deteriorate, families pay more, businesses pay more and communities become less connected. The Hume Highway, the Western Highway, the Midland Highway and the Goulburn Valley Highway have all attracted sustained criticism from motorists, freight operators, local councils and community groups.

Motorcyclists and cyclists are particularly vulnerable. What might be a bump for a family sedan can be a life-threatening hazard for someone travelling on two wheels. On the Goulburn Valley Highway and Hume Freeway, the Seymour–Shepparton–Euroa corridor, one Shepparton towing company attended 73 pothole-related vehicle call-outs in just one week, compared with fewer than 10 in a normal week. The RACV attended 49 tyre- and wheel-related breakdowns on the same stretch over an 11-day period: 28 on the Goulburn Valley Freeway and 21 on the Hume Freeway.

These are not back roads; they are among Victoria's most important transport corridors, carrying thousands of vehicles every single day. Yet too often the government's response has been reactive rather than preventative. We continue to see potholes patched instead of roads rebuilt. Temporary repairs may satisfy a maintenance target, but they do not solve the underlying problem. Many are washed away after heavy rain, only to require another repair weeks later. That is not good asset management. It is a false economy. The government proudly announced that during its 2024–25 maintenance program it repaired more than 211,000 potholes across Victoria. But when hundreds of thousands of potholes require filling year after year, that should not be seen as a measure of success. It is evidence of a road network that is falling behind.

Victorians are noticing. Recent community reporting recorded more than 31,000 complaints about road conditions in Victoria in a single year, a 28 per cent increase on the previous year, with many of the sharpest increases occurring in regional centres, including Shepparton and Mildura. We also know that investment in permanent road improvement works. That is why this motion calls for greater transparency and accountability. Victorians deserve to know the true condition of the state's road network. They deserve a statewide assessment identifying roads requiring urgent intervention, they deserve publicly reported maintenance targets so dangerous defects are repaired within clear timeframes and they deserve regular reporting showing where maintenance funding is being spent and whether the overall condition of the network is improving or continuing to decline.

Every responsible asset owner knows the condition of their assets. Every responsible government should do the same. Road users contribute through registration, licensing fees and taxes. They have every right to expect roads that are safe to travel on. This motion is about protecting lives. It is about supporting regional economies. It is about reducing costs for motorists, farmers and freight operators. It is about replacing a culture of patching potholes with a culture of rebuilding roads properly. Preventative maintenance is cheaper than emergency reconstruction. Permanent repairs are cheaper than patching the same pothole over and over again. Most importantly, safer roads save lives. I commend this motion to the house.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:10): It gives me pleasure to rise to talk on Ms Tyrrell's motion in regard to potholes. I thank Ms Tyrrell for bringing this motion to the house and for her interest in these matters, and particularly her interest as a rural and regional MP in rural and regional roads. It gives me pleasure to be able to talk on this, because I have spoken on this previously in the Council, but also to be able to address some of the points in this motion, because unfortunately there is a lot of conflation around what happens when potholes are fixed and the like, and there is actually a lot of information that is publicly available out there on the internet if people just want to search that and have a look at what happens.

I might start with some facts around who owns the road network. Councils own about 90 per cent of the road network and the state government owns only 10 per cent of the network. But of course we have large arterial roads and freeways that are managed by us. Just for information purposes, under the Road Management Act 2004, the Department of Transport and Planning publish statutory road management plans for freeways and arterial roads. So there are road management plans available for roads, and these plans define official intervention levels, which are typically potholes exceeding 50 millimetres in depth and/or 300 millimetres in diameter, and then set response targets based on a road hierarchy and risk. What is important to note about that approach is that this is actually undertaken by people who are road engineers and who know what they are talking about, not keyboard warriors

or people like us here, politicians, who want to rage about things. These are experts who look at this stuff every day and are trained in this stuff.

Basically, the hierarchy response times are by road type and urgency. So if there is a severe or immediate safety hazard, a target is 24 to 48 hours or immediate attendance for major freeway arterial hazards. That is routinely upheld. So then the action is that emergency maintenance crews are dispatched to inspect and implement immediate safety controls. This includes placing warning signs, barriers or speed reductions and applying temporary cold mix asphalt patches to make the road safe again, and I will talk about why patching happens in a minute. Major urgent repairs on state roads can be reported 24/7 via the VicRoads hazard line 13 11 70. So it does not matter what time of day it is, you can ring if it is an urgent or really dangerous pothole. State-managed arterial roads and freeways have two to five business days for initial inspection and temporary patching after a report is lodged. Again, this is not an urgent one, this is something that might be smaller.

Then there are permanent fixes, and this is important for people to understand, because I hear a lot of talk about, 'Oh, you're just patching it up and you don't really care.' That is incorrect. What happens is that temporary patches are followed up with permanent resurfacing or pavement rehabilitation during seasonal maintenance programs, which are primarily run between September and May. 'Why is it only done between September and May?' I hear you ask the question. Because if you are patching roads when it is wet, it is going to fail, okay? And it is also about the temperature of the surface of the road. Again, between September and May there are warmer ground temperatures, which allow hot mix asphalt to cure properly, and if it does not cure properly, it fails. So there are plans about this.

Let us talk about council-managed –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: I know you do not like facts, and that is the problem: you do not like the facts. Let us talk about council-managed municipal roads. For high-volume collector roads, councils have two to five business days to repair them and make them safe once a pothole exceeds the intervention. For local residential streets – in fact I drove over a road today that was a Banyule council road and it was probably one of the worst roads I had ever experienced. But funnily enough in regard to that road, it is the residents who do not want it resealed, because they do not like traffic going down it, so they are quite happy to have it full of potholes, might I add. So not everyone is on board with your pothole thing; they actually like it full of potholes.

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Yes, actually it is. Banyule council have consulted with the residents, and they have just said no. They have said they do not want it resurfaced. Unsealed rural roads managed by scheduled grading cycles take typically four to 12 weeks. So it is wrong, Ms Tyrrell and others, to say that there are no plans to keep our roads safe. That is wrong, because there are road management plans. Again, I urge you and others to go and take the time to look at the department of transport and look at all of these things, because all of these things are publicly available.

I just want to talk about the government's investments. There is some other good news that I just want to talk about for one second. I am a motorcyclist. I ride a motorbike. When I am on a motorbike, I do not have any music on, I do not have the distractions of phones, so I am focused 100 per cent on the road and the traffic around me. What I can say is that when I am riding I am watching out for anything, whether it is a pothole or lifted pavement; whatever it is. I am focusing on that, and of course I drive to the conditions of the road. As part of my job in this place, I am the chair of the motorcycle community engagement panel, and we get regular briefings on motorcycle accidents or deaths. I can say that in all of those reports there is next to none indicated for death. For example, crash statistics and primary attribution is what you are talking about. So what is it if there is a crash? According to road trauma studies on single-vehicle motorcycle crashes – there could be another vehicle involved, there could be lots of things involved, but this is when it is a single-vehicle crash – road surface defects,

potholes and loose gravel are cited as contributing factors, not sole factors, potentially in 10 to 15 per cent of serious motorcycle and bicycle incidents. The data covers both of those modes of transport. Then it talks about the primary contributing factor being roughly 2 to 5 per cent of total police-reported crashes across vehicles and motorcycles. So thankfully we see that the condition of roads is a very low contributing factor. But I understand very clearly that some people get frustrated that when driving on roads there are lots of potholes. I was driving along Manningham Road the other day, and there were no potholes, but there were tree roots lifting the pavement. It was like I was going on a roller-coaster. There are other things that frustrate. It is not just potholes that are a thing.

But nevertheless I want to indicate clearly to you, Ms Tyrrell, and to others who may be watching this at home that the department does have road management plans. Regular inspection of our roads is undertaken, and in the 2025–26 budget and in this budget we have announced \$1 billion towards road maintenance funding. I will just go through and talk about some of the delivery performance achieved from the 2025–26 budget and our network conditions across regional Victoria: 97.3 per cent of regional roads are meeting the standard; 95 per cent are meeting the roughness standard; 97.9 per cent are meeting cracking standards; and 99.6 per cent of regional bridges are assessed as acceptable for legal road vehicles. So again, there are standards that are put in place by road engineers and experts. They regularly inspect our road network, and they are indicating that 97.3 per cent of regional roads are meeting the standards. It is not a static thing. I have heard those opposite, the Liberals, say, ‘Oh, we’re going to fix potholes forever.’ You cannot fix potholes forever, because our roads actually have about a million-plus trips every single day by people, whether it is by car, motorcycle, truck or the like. Our roads get used each and every day, not just once or twice, but a million trips a day. So our roads require ongoing maintenance and upkeep. That is why our government invested \$653 million over two years in the 2020–21 state budget just in resurfacing roads across the state. Then, as I said, we have announced we are going to invest \$1 billion towards maintaining and improving our road network, and 70 per cent of that is actually going to rural and regional roads.

We are not in denial over here about the state of our roads. There are lots of trucks, there are lots of trips, and we have had very heavy rain events that have occurred recently. As Ms Tyrrell talked about earlier, when road surfaces crack, water gets through those cracks and the constant usage undermines the surface soil underneath the asphalt and the hot mix, and that is how potholes form. Might I say in regard to the infamous Nar Nar Goon pothole incident, that is exactly what happened. Because there was a really heavy rain event, that pothole opened really quickly, and that is why people did not see it and they ran into it. But thankfully, our road crews were out there that night and actually put signs around it indicating there was a hazard, and it was repaired that night with a temporary fix and then later repaired quickly. So again, I thank all of our road crews, who are doing fantastic work across the network in repairing our roads and keeping them safe.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (11:20): I am of course happy to stand and support this motion. I know there has been a lot of talk in the last 24 hours about new directions, but it is pretty hard to tell someone that you are going in a new direction when you have just done a hub cap and you are sitting on the side of the road because you are not going anywhere. That is the experience of many people on our road network that experience it day in, day out. I have seen it on many country roads in particular.

Ms Terpstra, I do have great respect for you, but one of the things that you said was that people are not ‘on board with your pothole thing’, and you said that of us.

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Joe McCracken: Our pothole thing, which means we have obviously been raising it as a significant issue. You are saying that people are not on board with it. I have got to say that I completely disagree with that. It is one of the biggest issues that gets raised with me every single day I go out and talk to constituents. It is one of the most common issues that comes up. It might be different in your

electorate in metro Melbourne, but it is certainly a huge issue in my electorate of Western Victoria. I would never, ever seek to downplay for anyone in this place that roads are a huge issue.

Point (1) of this motion says that the state's road network is fundamental to safety, economic prosperity and connected communities, especially I would say across regional Victoria, because we do not have tram stops every couple of hundred metres. We do not have the public transport system that many others across the state enjoy. We do rely on roads. To have this motion acknowledge that fact is fundamental to the lived experience that many regional Victorians face every single day because there is no option other than to use a public road. That is the only option that exists – full stop. There is nothing else – no trams, no trains, nothing – just the ability to use a road. So roads are fundamentally important to the experience of country people and how they get around.

Point (2) of this motion acknowledges the fact that many people in the Victorian community rely on roads, including for employment, education, health care, freight transport, tourism and emergency services. Just think about all the commuters that use the state's roads. Think about the school buses or the parents during morning drop-off or afternoon pick-up. Think about the billions of dollars in food, fibre and produce that flow from country Victoria every single day and the transport network across the state. Think about all the freight that gets moved across the state every single day. Think about tourism. Most interstate travellers get to Victoria and think, 'Jeez, what happened here?' That is how bad our roads are in comparison to the rest of the country. Think about our emergency services workers – our fireies, our ambos, our police officers, the SES, all our wonderful volunteers. Every emergency services worker has to use our crumbling road network, but their job is made that much more challenging when they are not only turning up to an incredibly difficult situation but they have got to consider their own safety very carefully when they are trying to navigate roads on the state's broken road network.

Point (3) of this motion talks about the deteriorating conditions of the state-managed road network across Victoria, and surely those opposite cannot argue that that is not the case. Point (3)(c) in the motion is critical here because it does not just talk about the fact that the roads are in incredibly poor condition, but it talks about the impact, the increase in the likelihood of crashes, creating significant hazards for motorcyclists and cyclists, increasing the risk of tyre failure and vehicle damage, which is not just in the hundreds of dollars; it can be in the thousands. It places emergency services personnel at risk and increases the cost of freight, primarily due to delays and damage caused by road conditions to freight vehicles. That is the real impact and that is the cost to Victorians, costs that they incur every single day, every single week, every single month. It is a cost that we on this side think is one that they should not have to bear.

Point (4) of this motion is excellent, and it expresses concern for the short-term pothole repairs that have failed to provide any lasting improvements, resulting in overall increased costs. I would actually go one step further and say that it does not just result in overall increased costs in the dollar sense but also increases the safety risks to all road users. The government's solution to this has been incredibly lacklustre. Just last week I was driving on the Western Highway not too far from Ballarat, and I saw one of those electronic signs right on the side of the road saying that there was storm damage that had impacted the roads. I can tell you I am not a meteorologist, but I do live in Ballarat and there had been no storm there in recent times. For the department to get up there and say that there had been storm damage is a slap in the face to every single person that drives the Western Highway every day. It reeks of gaslighting. It reeks of a government that will not take responsibility for problems. They have been in power for nearly 12 years and will not even acknowledge that pure, simple fact. Blame it on storms? No, no, no. Take responsibility for a problem that has been created by you.

Point (5) condemns the government. We know the government love to talk about the money that they put into roads, but it clearly is not hitting the mark. You can spend all the money you want, but it does not guarantee that you get value for money. But how can you get value for money when you do not know how to manage money? That has been one of the defining characteristics of this Labor government. In fact even the new Premier yesterday said in his press release that Victorians are

concerned with how government money is spent. If he is saying that, why won't those opposite acknowledge that fact? If you cannot manage money, you cannot manage major projects and you cannot manage roads – barely managing themselves over there. It is a totally inward focus and not acknowledging the very real concerns that many people have on Victoria's road network.

Point (6) of this motion calls on the government to establish a statewide road condition assessment which identifies roads requiring urgent intervention, prioritise permanent surface reconstruction, establish publicly reported maintenance and performance targets – jeez, that suspiciously sounds like accountability – and provide regular public reporting on the condition of Victoria's arterial road network and maintenance expenditure. Again, all this talk about accountability must be making other people quite nervous in this place.

I think Victorians know that thanks to Labor, our roads are completely ruined. We used to be the envy of the nation, but now Victoria is the laughing-stock – on a number of fronts, but roads is certainly one. And that is Labor's legacy. You have systematically dismantled anything resembling a world-class road network and instead let corruption run rife on Big Build projects that are supposed to build our roads, not build the wealth of those opposite's friends. One of those Big Build projects is in my electorate. It is near Ararat. It is the Buangor to Ararat Western Highway upgrade, and goodness knows what has gone on there. That should be the subject of a royal commission as well. But like many other Big Build subjects, we have not really got clear answers on that. It is like those opposite have had a road to Damascus moment. They think, 'Oh, yes, maybe we should have a royal commission now because the polling says we should.' It is just amazing actually that you can do a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Now you supposedly support it even though weeks ago you were saying it should not happen. It is ridiculous. But we will see if there really is a true commitment to getting to the bottom of things when we see the release of the terms of reference.

I fully support this motion, and I thank Ms Tyrrell for bringing it to the chamber. I hope we can all get behind it, because I am sure we can all agree that roads in Victoria need a hell of a lot of work. We on this side at least have a plan to fix them.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:29): There is no doubt that the road network in Victoria is vital for regional Victorians, and it is in a pretty poor state. As a regional MP who spends a lot of time on our roads, I can attest to the challenges of navigating pothole-ridden roads for hours on end. It is stressful, it causes damage to cars and it is, frankly, really dangerous. This is not just anecdotal. Analysis of Snap Send Solve reports showed a 28 per cent increase in pothole reports year on year in Victoria, with the Warrnambool area recording a staggering 149 per cent increase. We have heard about how a simple patch job is often not enough to solve the problem. What we need is a lasting solution that really gets down to the substrate of the road and fixes the underlying problem. That is true in a literal sense, but it is a perfect metaphor too. We need to understand the systemic underlying issues that are causing our roads to deteriorate like this if we want to really solve the problems rather than just continually patching things up.

Transport is supply led: you reap what you sow. If you lean into expanding the road network, you encourage more people to drive, but if you invest in railways, you encourage more of our transport task to go by rail. This is true for passengers just as it is for freight. Let us be clear about what ultimately causes the damage we see on our roads: it is the wear and tear caused by vehicles travelling on them. The more vehicles and the heavier they are, the more damage is done. When you double the weight of a vehicle it increases the road damage by 16 times, so the bigger American-style utes we are seeing increasingly on our roads and an increase in trucks translates exponentially to more road damage.

What we face today is in large part the legacy of decades of underinvestment in our regional railways. For about 50 years Labor and Liberal governments charged ahead with building huge motorways while starving Victoria's regional railways of funding. That is a recipe for fewer people on trains and more cars on the road, less freight on the rails and more trucks on the road, both of which are a recipe for more damage to the road surface. We will always need some freight on trucks, and people will

always need to drive for some trips, but the proportions matter. The more we can help freight and passengers shift to rail, the more we protect our roads for those who really need them.

There has been a shift in the 21st century with renewed investment in regional passenger rail, and it has been a huge success, with V/Line passenger numbers quadrupling since 2004. But there is a long way to go in catching up on 50 lost years – 50 years when our population grew but our railways did not. There are a lot of trips that regional Victorians should be able to take by train that they still cannot. There are more than 50,000 people in the Mildura area, but they have no passenger rail. A good 300,000 people live in Geelong, Ballarat or the communities in between, but there is no passenger rail linking them. Stawell and Horsham have a combined population over 20,000, but they have to make do with the privately run Overland twice a week. In all these cases the tracks exist but V/Line does not run passenger trains on them. Even in the places that do have rail services, the services are so unreliable that anyone needing to be anywhere on time currently thinks twice about catching the train. We created a V/Line bingo card in my office because of the number of times that a service was cancelled, too crowded, delayed or terminated inexplicably at a station before you had reached your destination. How many car trips could be taken off the road if passenger rail was a viable option for these trips? How much damage to our roads could be avoided if they did?

Ms Tyrrell's motion notes the safety implications of a broken road network. Fatigue is another big factor, particularly with the long distances involved in some regional trips. How many lives could be saved if more regional Victorians could get on the train for part or all of their long-distance trips and relax, even have a nap, get some work done, while the train takes the strain? When it comes to freight, the situation is even more dire. Passenger rail's renaissance in the last 20 years has not extended to freight. Funding was provided for the Murray Basin rail project to upgrade and standardise freight railways in the state's north-west commencing in 2016, but it proved more expensive than expected, and when the money ran out halfway through the project the government put it in the too-hard basket and descope the later stages. With the project abandoned half finished, freight trains from Mildura have to divert 128 kilometres out of their way to get to port, leaving them worse off than before the project began.

This never happens for motorways in Melbourne. When the West Gate Tunnel's price tag blew out by \$3.3 billion, the government kept charging ahead. When North East Link's cost blew out from \$10 billion to \$16 billion to \$26 billion, the government kept charging ahead. It seems there is no price too high to pay for these huge, city-destroying motorways, but there is never enough money for rail freight. This does not mean that you do not need to invest in roads. There will always be a need for regional people to drive their cars to get around and for trucks to move our freight, and the roads they drive on should be maintained to a high standard; the big problem is the irrational insistence on building these new urban motorways. Projects like the West Gate Tunnel and the North East Link take up a ridiculous amount of the transport budget, and they are simply the wrong tool for the job. The \$26 billion price tag of the North East Link could fund a lot of regional road maintenance and a lot of regional rail upgrades to address the systemic imbalance that puts those roads under so much pressure.

Fixing regional roads is not simply a matter of filling the potholes faster. It is a bit like health care: if you want to make any long-term difference, you have to try and prevent it happening in the first place. What we need is a system reform so that we can reduce the number of potholes and ideally give people more options that get them off the roads altogether. We need an integrated transport plan that looks at all of the pieces of our transport system and critically backs this up with funding. Until that happens, unfortunately I am pretty sure dodging potholes will be a firm feature of my trips and those of many others around regional Victoria, and I think we deserve better.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (11:36): Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise today and make a contribution on this motion regarding our state's road network. I want to start by acknowledging something that we all fundamentally agree on: our road network is absolutely vital. We know that whether you live right here in the heart of Melbourne or out in the beautiful corners of regional and rural Victoria, a safe and reliable road network is what connects you to everything that

matters. It connects people to their jobs, to education, to health care and to the people they love. It is the absolute lifeblood of our freight operators, the backbone of our tourism industry and a critical path for our emergency services, so there is no dispute about the importance of our roads.

What I do dispute, however, is the narrative that is embedded in this motion that somehow ignores the reality of the challenges we have faced and the sheer scale of the work our government is doing right now to rebuild and strengthen our network. Over the last few years Victoria has experienced some of the wettest periods in our recorded history. We have seen record rainfall impact almost every single part of the state. We endured devastating widespread flood events in October 2022 – for which there was an inquiry that I sat on during this term of government – and then again more recently in December 2023 and January 2024. The extreme weather did not just wash away the top layer of bitumen, it actually caused some structural damage deep underneath the surface of our roads. When you look at the level of damage, you cannot quickly patch a pothole and walk away; you have to rebuild and strengthen those roads from the ground up so they are able to handle our rapidly growing population and the massive increase in our freight task. That is why in this year's state budget our government has committed more than \$1 billion towards maintaining and improving Victoria's road network. This is the largest single-year investment in road maintenance ever delivered in this state. It is a massive historical blitz designed to get our roads back to the standard that Victorians expect and deserve.

Despite the enormous challenges thrown at us by the weather, our delivery record is incredibly strong. In 2025–26 the Department of Transport and Planning successfully delivered 100 per cent of its planned regional road maintenance program within the agreed timelines. But they did not just meet the targets, they absolutely smashed them. We aimed to resurface or rehabilitate just over 2.7 million square metres of regional roads, and our crew actually delivered almost 3.8 million square metres; that is more than 40 per cent above our planned levels. We also set a target of 70,000 square metres for major patching activity, but we completed around 181,000 square metres. Right now across regional Victoria 97.3 per cent of roads are meeting running standards, 95 per cent are meeting roughness standards, nearly 98 per cent are meeting cracking standards and practically every single regional bridge – 99.6 per cent – is assessed as accessible for legal road vehicles. These outcomes do not happen by accident; they are the result of a maintenance program guided by hard work, rigorous network inspections, proper engineering assessments and real feedback from local communities.

We invest where the need is greatest and where it delivers the most benefit for the people using those roads every single day. But our commitment goes beyond maintenance: we are also investing heavily in targeted capital upgrades to make our network safer and more efficient. The budget announced a \$102.6 million investment for 26 vital road projects right across the state, including 15 projects across metropolitan Melbourne and 11 specific high-priority projects across regional Victoria. That includes the allocation of \$73.4 million under the regional roads upgrade program, where we are working alongside the federal government to deliver and develop projects that will make a tangible difference to regional communities.

Let me talk about what that looks like in practice, because these are projects that locals have been calling for, and we are delivering them in northern Victoria. We are making a massive intersection upgrade at the Calder Highway in Maiden Gully Road. Anyone who knows that road and knows that area will know that it is absolutely booming. The population is sitting at around 7500 right now, but there is a lot of development going on and it is expected to hit 10,000 in the next 10 years. That is indeed a very large growth, and right now that intersection is beyond capacity, it is dangerous and there have been two crashes in the last five years. This upgrade will make it safer and easier for people to access the Maiden Gully activity centre and the growing residential centres and areas to the west.

In northern Victoria we are funding the project for the vital overtaking lane on the Strzelecki Highway between Mirboo North and Leongatha at Boorool. This is such a critical north–south link for freight and for the local communities in South Gippsland and Latrobe, one that I know a member for Eastern Victoria over on this side has some familiarity with. It is a hilly, a windy and a tough spot to find somewhere to overtake. Combined with growing traffic, this has led to some really terrible outcomes,

including two serious injuries and nine minor injuries recently, and because full road widening is just not feasible there, an overtaking lane is the smartest, most effective way to improve travel times and stop people from taking some really dangerous risks.

Over in eastern Victoria of course we are moving ahead with the alternative freight route stage 2 project in Leongatha. Right now we have got the heavy freight trucks that have had to rumble right through the middle of the township, and it creates some bottlenecks, ruins the local amenity and is incredibly dangerous. To that end we have seen 48 near misses recorded at the intersection of the Bass Highway and South Gippsland Highway between 2020 and 2025. By developing an alternative route, we can get those heavy trucks out of the town centre, making Leongatha safer for locals and far better for freight operators. We are also delivering brand new traffic signals at the intersection of Princes Highway East, Davey Drive and Waterloo Road in Trafalgar. This is in the heart of Trafalgar, but the current layout makes it so difficult for local businesses and services to be safely accessed. With more people moving to the area and more tourists passing through, the safety risks are escalating. Tragically there have been seven casualty crashes there over the last five years, and we are stepping in to fix it, fully integrating the new signals with the nearby railway level crossing. This project, which we are delivering through Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority Roads with proposed 50 per cent Commonwealth funding, will be an absolute game changer for the livability of Trafalgar.

Back up to northern Victoria again, we are funding the project development to rehabilitate and upgrade the historic Tooleybuc Bridge over the Murray River. That is the single-lane timber bridge that dates back to 1925 – and I think I was actually on that over the break – and it has served us well but has safety and capacity risks that need to be urgently addressed. Upgrading that crossing is vital for keeping our regional connections strong and supporting local agricultural and tourism industries that rely on access between Victoria and New South Wales.

In western Victoria we are taking decisive action on safety at the intersection in Lubeck. There are some really tragic crashes that have happened there, including a really heartbreaking fatality. I could go on to list all of the upgrades that we are taking, but let me just discuss one. I have got seven examples of projects that we are about to do and have funded and are working with the Commonwealth to deliver. With all of these projects, some that I have talked about and some that I know others in this place will talk about, what they demonstrate is our \$1 billion maintenance blitz and that we are not just talking about regional upgrades but absolutely funding them, fixing them and upgrading them. There is more work to be done, there is no doubt about it, especially as we continue to recover from the historic floods and deal with the growing population.

To suggest that we are mismanaging the network or failing to prioritise maintenance is simply incorrect. We are making the largest investment in the history of this state. We are exceeding our delivery targets, and we are methodically working through the evidence-based upgrades that regional Victorians actually need. We are getting on with the job of rebuilding our roads so that they are stronger, safer and ready for the future. I know that I live between the tram tracks, but I do spend a lot of my time out there on our regional roads, particularly over this last summer as I supported communities recovering from the bushfires. I do know just how much these upgrades are necessary, and so can I finish by paying my respects to all the road workers who are doing an extraordinary job in some really troubling circumstances, and I encourage everybody to drive safely around those workers because they absolutely deserve it. They are doing a job that serves many, many Victorians. In fact all of us that have the benefit of living, working or eating in this state need safe roads, and so please be careful around our road workers.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:46): Today I rise to support Ms Tyrrell's motion, which rightly points out that Victoria's road network is fundamental to safety, economic prosperity and connectivity, and that Victoria's roads are failing Victoria's people at the moment. I want to start by saying from the outset that a Liberal and National government will invest \$5 billion into repairing Victoria's roads and eliminating 1 million potholes and re-establish a proper, planned system of preventative road maintenance. This is a 25 per cent increase on the current spending, and we are going

to invest that money over a four-year period. We are going to establish Better Roads Victoria, a standalone division of the Department of Transport and Planning, to rebuild the technical and engineering expertise that has been lost. We are going to restore that, and we are going to boost roadside maintenance, such as grass slashing, graffiti removal and drain clearance, which are really ruining our roads, making them look terrible and making them less safe. We will lift departmental and contractor accountability through a review of construction standards and maintenance contracts. That is one that I really want to talk about later on, because Victorians should be getting the roads that they deserve. They should be able to drive on a road that is not littered with potholes, but the maintenance of that road should not cut off access to businesses for years. The government should be held to the same standard when building roads or when fixing roads that a local business would be. We do not see that happen as it is, and this is why we are going to do it.

I am just going to read some quotes from Jess Wilson and then Danny O'Brien. Jess said:

While \$15 billion has been lost to corruption on the Big Build, our roads are littered with dangerous potholes that are causing untold damage to vehicles – leaving motorists thousands of dollars out of pocket.

Drivers shouldn't be the ones footing the bill for blown tyres, cracked rims and worse because –

the Allan Labor government, but Ben Carroll has been side by side in each of these, so I will just say the Labor government –

... cannot get the basics right.

Danny O'Brien said this:

Roads have been falling apart all across Victoria and Victorians are fed-up with half-hearted patch up jobs that quickly fall apart. The Liberals and Nationals will finally address the roads crisis ...

so that Victorians will not have to put up with this anymore. I am so thankful for this, because in 2026 in a place like Victoria, people should not have to play 'dodge the pothole'.

I want to read in some local media that shows what people have to put up with. This one was from *Mornington Peninsula News* on 12 June, and the headline was 'Nepean highway funds reallocated':

The cost of planned upgrades to the Nepean Highway has been revised, with \$15 million promised to the project ...

This is another issue I have: if you promise it, deliver it. Do not promise something then pull it out and say, 'Tricked you. You voted for us, but we're actually not going to use it for that.' But anyway:

THE cost of planned upgrades to the Nepean Highway has been revised, with \$15 million promised to the project now expected to be spent elsewhere.

\$15 million of a promised \$50 million for upgrades to the Nepean Highway and Overton Road intersection is set to be diverted to other Victorian roads. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese promised the money for the Nepean Highway/Overton Road project during the 2025 election campaign.

That was last year that the Albanese Labor government promised that money. People voted accordingly, and now he has turned around and ripped it from them. It is not the first time that this has happened in my region, by the way. The sealing the hills project in the Emerald area had amazing funding secured by Aaron Violi and Jason Wood, only for Albo to take that money out too. I have just got an email here from somebody in that area. Clare Fitzmaurice and I went with the Cockatoo 21st Century Roads Action Group recently, who are the people that are advocating in this area to have that money restored. He said:

I appreciate your time to drive around Cockatoo, Emerald and Avonsleigh unsealed roads today. I hope it gave you some insight into what the residents need to endure.

What we saw there was beautiful houses that have been built up and these unsealed roads that are so unsafe that you have to pull over to one side if a car is coming the other way, and it is just not acceptable. I want to read out a couple of other things that I raised in the Monbulk region, which still have not had attention from the minister. A couple of years ago I raised an adjournment for the Minister

for Roads and Road Safety. The action that I sought was that the Department of Transport and Planning urgently inspect the intersection of Monbulk Road and Perrins Creek Road in Kallista to identify improvements for motorists and pedestrians. This is still an issue that is ongoing and this is what people from the region there say. I do not live there, I live in East Gippsland, and I am so aware of these roads because people continually write to me about them, yet nothing is done. It says:

Drivers make unsafe, illegal U-turns, including left into Monbulk Road and right into Perrins Creek Road at this intersection with Perrins Creek Road.

Residents have raised serious safety concerns. They are worried that there is soon going to be a death there. They said:

At the top of the intersection, there is not enough space for pedestrians, and this forces people to have to walk on this dangerous stretch of road while cars are speeding by. That should not happen at an intersection used by local families, older residents and some of the 5.5 million visitors to Dandenong Ranges.

They said:

The people of Kallista and the Dandenong Ranges deserve basic road safety. They should not have to wait for another tragic accident to happen there.

I am going to read another one that has been raised, not just by me but by many people on the crossbench and many people on this side. This one was asked years ago first, then it was asked again, and then it has been asked again. The minister for road safety did go down to this one to meet with the Lang Lang community group, but the meeting had to be put off because they were waiting for somebody and, sadly, there was a fatality on the road while they were waiting for this meeting. Anyway, it said:

Lang Lang residents have called for the truck bypass for years, but again, the Labor government has refused to act on their concerns. And despite ongoing near misses from heavy vehicles travelling through the township's main street, instead, the state government used its budget to announce a new extractive resource area for Lang Lang, which would make more sandmines in this area, overshadowing people's land rights and still ignoring the fact that about 50 trucks pass through this main township area per hour.

Fifty trucks per hour. I have stood there when little kids have been waiting with their little backpacks, or their big backpacks, for the lights to change as these huge trucks have sped past on these really dangerous roads. And I tell you what, Victorians deserve better.

What I do want to say as well on this is that we will make sure that these roadworks are done in a timely manner, because people deserve the infrastructure that is required for growing communities. They all pay their taxes, particularly in regional areas. Of their taxes, they get about a 12 per cent investment back in infrastructure, but they have the same crushing burden as everyone else. In fact they will have a greater burden when those exemptions from the emergency services levy are lifted and it is again charged on the value of farming land, causing more of these country people to go broke. Regardless there have been businesses that have gone broke because of the roadworks that have continued to cut off access to businesses, like in Bald Hill Road where 1 kilometre of road has cut off business access for two years. I do not know if that would ever be acceptable in a private business setting. One stretch of road, if it was a private business and not the government, would they get away with that?

I have got about 30 seconds left, so I will close with this story. The other day I was getting signatures for the Bald Hill Road petition that I tabled yesterday down in Officer. The owner of the Officer Bakehouse came up to me and said, 'You do know that Bald Hill isn't the only area that is experiencing this?' Sadly, I said, 'Yeah, I do know, but what's your story?' Her husband and her daughter have run this business successfully for years. In her words, it has never recovered from the government's ongoing roadworks, which caused people to not be able to get there and then after years of it to change their habits. I commend this motion to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:56): When I was a kid I used to play this game – I am sure many of you in here played it – called *SimCity*. One of the things in *SimCity* – it was quite advanced for its time – is it allows you to manage city budgets. On one side you get your money through taxation, fines and fees and selling bonds and on the other side you have to spend it on things like police, ambulance and roads. You have the ability to manage that budget. It is just like a real budget. One of the things that *SimCity* did not take into account was money that was spent and did not actually have any effect, like through corruption or waste and this sort of thing. But leaving that to one side for a minute, one of the interesting things that *SimCity* did was that when you tried to reduce the road budget, unlike any other budget that you tried to reduce, it popped up this warning on the screen and said, ‘If you reduce the road budget, in the short term you may save some money but over the longer term you will pay big time.’ It warned you against doing that. In fact one of the bravest things that you could do in *SimCity* was to reduce the roads budget.

Katherine Copsey interjected.

David LIMBRICK: You could have rail instead in *SimCity*. Yes, the Greens like rail. You could also have fusion reactors in *SimCity*, which do not exist. Nevertheless I have been talking to many constituents in the south-east at lots of different events, and roads are not the number one issue – in fact the number one issue is crime at the moment – but certainly roads are well up there.

I know many people talk about the poor state of regional roads. That is true; I am not disputing that. But it is not just regional roads at all. If you drive down Warrigal Road, you will just about wreck your suspension. I got informed by people on social media about the detour for the Ballarto Road roadworks that were happening, so one of my staff members and I went for a drive down there, and we ended up making a video about it. The road was so rough that I decided that the postapocalyptic soundtrack from the movie *28 Days* was the most appropriate thing. But as was pointed out to me by constituents, I had driven down the road the day after it had been graded. They showed me pictures of the day before it had been graded, and one of those pictures had a pothole so deep that it would have just about killed someone. One of the local residents had put a brick and a piece of wood over the pothole to try and smooth the surface for any cars or trucks – there are lots of trucks going down that road. It is a nightmarish scenario.

I went for a drive down Glasscocks Road in Lyndhurst. The road itself is in terrible condition, but alongside the road is rubbish like you have never seen. The entire area has been turned into a landfill. We will be hearing more about unregulated landfills in question time I believe. Nevertheless the government needs to do something about the roads. I know they are talking. They are saying that they are going to act. But I urge the government to not just spend money and make announcements on how they are going to spend money but actually make the money have effect and not get wasted, because we know for a fact that so much of the money that is being spent by the government in these packages that they always announce just gets wasted. Let us not waste it. Let us make it count.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Data centres

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:00): (1381) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Yesterday Hobsons Bay council voiced its opposition to the proposed Stockland data centre in Brooklyn. In a letter to the Department of Transport and Planning, it stated that the 14-day notice period was insufficient to undertake a comprehensive and coordinated assessment on the impacts of a billion-dollar hyperscale data centre. Concerns centred around substations, generators, fuel and battery storage and fire equipment, and the proposed site proximity to residential areas, including a childcare centre which is literally situated across the road. No sustainability management plan was provided to council, and requests for further justification and mitigation measures were not responded to within the timeframe given by DTP to the council. My question to the minister is: how can the government

claim it has consulted properly on this matter given it allowed only 14 days and did not provide the necessary information to council?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:01): Thank you, Mr Ettershank. I am very happy to provide this question to the Minister for Planning in the other place and to seek an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

David ETTERS Hank (Western Metropolitan) (12:01): Thank you, Minister; I appreciate that. We have consulted across western and north-western councils, who have all shared concerns about the referral process being imposed upon them. These reduce council and community involvement to a procedural tick-a-box exercise rather than being a meaningful mechanism through which advice from council or input from the community can be properly considered and concerns adequately addressed. There is no social licence for these facilities, which are being fast-tracked with no rigour and no regard to the complexities of the project. The workings of the development facilitation program of the DTP to expedite these projects are completely opaque and operate in an apparent regulatory vacuum. So I ask: what is the framework for approvals of this scale, and will the government release full details of timeframes and evaluative criteria to be applied to these projects?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:02): Thanks, Mr Ettershank. As stated in response to your substantive question, the matter will be referred to the Minister for Planning for an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:03): (1382) My question is to the Treasurer. The latest Labor Premier Mr Carroll has changed the government's position on a royal commission into Labor's Big Build corruption. Is it still the government's position under the Carroll–Williams government to support the Allan–Carroll government's emergency services levy, which is a massive impost on families, regional communities and every small business across the state?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:03): Mr Mulholland, there are no changes to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund that I can discuss with the chamber today.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:03): My supplementary question to the Treasurer is: under Labor's increased emergency services volunteer tax, Victoria now collects \$221 per resident a year – \$43 above the national average of \$177 per person and the highest in Australia. How can you continue to justify this massive tax grab while starving the SES, CFA and FRV of trucks and investment that are needed to keep our community safe?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:04): Mr Mulholland, it probably would have been a greater opportunity to be –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can we reset the clock in case the Treasurer wants to use her minute? The Treasurer, without interjections, please.

Jaclyn SYMES: Your question was, I think, trying to combine ESVF totals that the government collects, then I think you were trying to combine that with other taxes. I think that is what your question was, because you referred to a figure of \$221. It was very unclear from your question, but at the end of the day what you have demonstrated is that –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Actually, no, it is not. New South Wales collects more taxes than Victoria.

Georgie Crozier: No, we are the highest taxed state in the country.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is just not true. But in relation to the question that Mr Mulholland has asked in relation to the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, we proudly support our emergency services. We invest in them.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I will take that up. \$66 million was cut from the CFA when you were last in government.

David Davis interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is not a lie, Mr Davis.

Members interjecting.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, I ask that Mr Davis withdraw that unparliamentary remark. He was warned about the use of that term yesterday, and he should withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, I uphold Ms Terpstra's point of order and warn members about calling individual MPs liars. I think it was more directed at a government policy or an alternate policy; that is my understanding.

Ministers statements: fruit tree netting

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:06): I rise today to update the house on the success of our net swap program across five metropolitan council areas, helping households replace illegal fruit tree netting with safer, wildlife-friendly alternatives. The wrong kind of fruit tree netting can have devastating consequences for our native wildlife. Inappropriate fruit tree netting is one of the major causes of injury and death for flying foxes in Victoria. It can also entangle birds and possums. Wildlife can suffer serious injuries when they become trapped and struggle to free themselves. That is why household fruit tree netting must have a mesh of 5 millimetres by 5 millimetres or less at full stretch. Through the net swap program, delivered between November and March, 614 illegal nets were surrendered by Melbourne households, 359 legal nets were provided to residents and around 450 kilograms of old netting was sent for recycling.

By removing illegal netting and replacing it with safe alternatives, this pilot has reduced a known and avoidable risk to birds, possums and flying foxes. This is exactly the kind of practical prevention that can save native animals before they need to be rescued or treated. It also helps residents understand that choices they make in their own backyards can have a direct impact on our wildlife. It shows what can be achieved when government, councils and households work together to prevent avoidable harm to native animals. I might give a shout-out to the councils that participated – Boroondara, Brimbank, Manningham, Merri-bek and Yarra – and delivered this program. I want to thank everyone. The message to all Victorians is clear: if you are protecting fruit trees at home, use wildlife-safe netting, check your trees regularly and make sure your netting is legal. Small changes in backyards can make a big difference in preventing serious harm to our wildlife.

Waste and recycling management

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:08): (1383) My question is for the Minister for Environment. In what appears to be a large-scale illegal organised dumping operation, a tenant has allowed an estimated 2000 tonnes of building waste, including asbestos, to be dumped at a 15-acre property near Diggers Rest. The owner of the property has bravely done everything they could to try and stop it, including notifying the EPA and police early. The landowner says that she has been badly let down by the EPA, her council and also by the police and that those responsible are not going to

clean up the mess. I believe the government should protect property rights. Given the lack of support she has been given, I am asking the minister to use his discretion to direct the EPA to step in and help this landowner fix this terrible situation.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:09): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and his interest in this matter. It is an important matter of public interest, the matter of illegal dumping. It is a matter that the Carroll government is taking very seriously. That is why we have committed \$21.5 million to crack down on illegal dumping and \$13 million to bolster the illegal dumping taskforce, led by the EPA in partnership with the conservation regulator, DEECA and Parks Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Limbrick wants to hear the answer. The minister to continue.

Enver ERDOGAN: Hopefully uninterrupted this time. There is an additional \$8.5 million for the clean-up rebate program to help councils and public land managers recover costs. This taskforce is taking action, but we do know that there is a need for more targeted action. As the minister I have made clear to the EPA my expectations. If you go online, you can check the updated statement of ministerial expectations where I have made it clear that I want a stronger enforcement posture. I think that is what the community is calling for. I have asked them to take tough action on polluters. I want them to consider the social licence and social equity considerations going forward.

These are all important factors. It is a consistent theme I hear. It is a shared responsibility between local government and state government and the agencies we are responsible for. I do offer deepest sympathies to that resident and that story I did read online. To be honest, it would be quite difficult and traumatising for the landholder in that situation. It is an ongoing operation, so I am always limited in what I can say without breaching anyone's privacy. This is an ongoing operational matter that the EPA is dealing with. My message has been clear: I want to see strong enforcement action. We have provided more tools to the regulator to do that work, and that is my expectation.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:11): I thank the minister for that answer. It does appear, however, that organised groups are very easily setting up these operations and then moving on to the next operation, so whatever is happening at the moment is not stopping this at all. In fact, even though the EPA was notified early in the piece, they did not intervene to stop this becoming a worse problem than what it should have been. My question is: what is the minister doing to stop this happening in the future? Because it is a continuing problem that does not appear to be slowing down at all.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:11): I thank Mr Limbrick for his supplementary question and his concern with the performance of the EPA. What I will say is as a government we are equipping the EPA with additional resources. I will have further announcements to make in the coming weeks – I do not want to pre-empt them – in relation to the resources. We definitely need a better mix of technology, but a much stronger enforcement posture is what is necessary. I think that we need to hold polluters to account, and that is why I have updated my statement of expectations with that in mind.

The PRESIDENT: Can I acknowledge in the gallery former member of the Victorian Parliament Donna Hope.

Construction industry

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:12): (1384) My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Minister, in February of this year you stated that four royal commissions and 20 years of various forms of a building and construction agency have failed to justify rejecting a royal

commission into the construction sector, yet on his very first day Premier Ben Carroll, who was Jacinta Allan's deputy, called for an exhaustive royal commission into this exact issue. Do you now concede that your previous approach of stridently rejecting a royal commission into the Big Build corruption was in fact wrong?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:13): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question. Mr Mulholland, as you have identified, the Premier yesterday announced that there will be a royal commission into the construction sector. As I said at the time of those comments, what is very important is to take decisive action in relation to acting on these matters. The announcement yesterday complements all of the measures that we have taken to date: labour hire reform –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister is trying to answer the question that was asked by the people who are drowning her out while she is answering.

Jaclyn SYMES: Quite similar to the conversation that we were having in the chamber yesterday, taking action in relation to these matters through the prism of the industrial –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister without any assistance, please.

Jaclyn SYMES: In terms of where I was up to in my answer, the work that we have been doing, as I outlined yesterday and am happy to do again, is acquitting the Wilson recommendations and empowering and supporting the Labour Hire Authority, which again I will put on record you opposed the establishment of. You had very, very serious concerns about broadening its remit. You were worried about who would be captured under a fit and proper person test. These are measures that you have opposed each and every day, so you can keep your politicking going as much as you want. We have taken action, and a royal commission was announced yesterday that will complement the actions today.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, my question went to whether the minister's previous approach in stridently rejecting a royal commission was in fact wrong.

The PRESIDENT: The minister was relevant. If people were listening instead of yelling, they would have heard that the minister was relevant in the first 10 seconds that she answered the question.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:15): On the supplementary question, Minister, if a royal commission now, as you say, complements decisive action, would you concede that the government's position is now that the previous action was not strong enough?

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure if that is asking for an opinion.

David Davis: It was asking for a fact.

The PRESIDENT: I believe it was asking for an opinion, but I am happy for Mr Mulholland to rephrase.

Evan MULHOLLAND: As I said, given the minister has stated a royal commission now complements decisive action, is it not government policy that the previous action was not strong enough?

The PRESIDENT: The minister can answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:16): Mr Mulholland, what I take from your question is that you do not support strengthening labour hire, that you do not support a police taskforce, that you do

not support the arrests that have been made to date and that you do not support the administration's work at the CFMEU. That is what I take from your question.

Ministers statements: desalination plant

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:17): I am just going to pour myself a glass of water from the desalination plant over here. It is good water, this water from the desalination plant. That is a desalination plant that those opposite opposed. It is a desalination plant that you called a white elephant, that you said –

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, it is a long-established practice in this place – though I am happy for the practice to change – in respect of props, and clearly the minister has props. I am all for props, but I am all for consistency too.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: It is hard for me to say. There have been glasses of water in this chamber since I started 100 years ago, so I am not too sure if it is a prop.

A member interjected.

The PRESIDENT: That is a prop.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I am seriously going to throw myself out.

Harriet SHING: I am very happy to perhaps circulate some water around the chamber, should you wish to taste this water from the desalination plant. It is water which has come from a plant that you opposed. Those opposite called it a white elephant, called it too expensive, called it unnecessary. And what we have done this year is –

David Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis!

Harriet SHING: See, it is good water. See, everyone is having some.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I am confident we are going to get through this today. I am confident, but Mr Davis, you are on a warning. Ms Crozier, I did not see the bottle of water; I thought it was a glass.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: No, I did not, but you stop with your prop and you stop with your prop. Mr McGowan, you are on a warning from yesterday.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I can do that. People are telling me I cannot do it. I can do whatever I want.

Harriet SHING: I am a bit parched after all of that. The desalination plant has this year made its largest available order, and what this does is take us in total to delivery of water from a plant which many of your supporters over there across the way in the Liberal–One Nation coalition think we have not even turned on to two-thirds of a trillion litres of water. When you turn on the tap – hold on; it is good water –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, it is very clear that the minister is flouting your ruling by using the water as a prop. There is no doubt that is what she is doing. You know the rules in this chamber with respect to props, even if they are props that would normally be in the chamber.

The PRESIDENT: Like I said, glasses of water have been in this chamber for a long time. I actually did not turn around and see that the minister had a bottle. I would ask the minister not to –

Harriet SHING: I don't have a bottle.

The PRESIDENT: You did. Do not flaunt that around. As far as drinking from a glass goes, it is very difficult, but I would ask you not to parade the bottle around. Minister, you have got 35 seconds to do your best.

Harriet SHING: What we can do our best with is water from the desalination plant. A quarter of every glass that comes out of taps across the Melbourne grid is coming from the desalination plant. Our water storages are at about 60 per cent. They are falling more significantly than in previous years. If those opposite had their way, there would be no desalination plant. Geelong would be on 10 per cent water reserves. What we see now is that we are in a position to be able to shore up water security, despite the fact that you opposed it.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, President, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. Bring her back to the question, please.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order, but I do say that comparing policies is okay.

Harriet SHING: What a shame you think that water security is an attack on the Liberal–One Nation coalition. That speaks to your priorities rather than those of Victorians.

High Country tourism

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:22): (1385) My question today is for the minister representing the Minister for Tourism. An unusually warm start to winter has left High Country communities such as Mount Buller, Falls Creek and Mansfield with weeks of cancellations and empty beds. There is a precedent for the federal government to support regional tourism when facing hardship in Queensland. Will the minister advocate on behalf of High Country communities for support from their federal counterparts?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:23): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her question and her interest, and what I will do is, in line with the standing orders, I will pass it on to the Minister for Tourism in the other place for an appropriate response.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:23): I thank the minister for passing that on. Our alpine economy is iconic, it is seasonal and it is hurting right now. Due to the slowest snow season start in 70 years this economy has lost millions in revenue. Will the government ease the burden on alpine and High Country businesses by immediately granting rate relief and payroll tax deferrals?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:24): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her question and her interest in this matter. I will make sure that is passed on to the Minister for Tourism in the Legislative Assembly for a response in line with the standing orders.

Construction industry

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:24): (1386) My question is for the Minister for Industrial Relations. Nick McKenzie and Kieran Rooney have reported in the *Age* that in 2023 the government received a detailed written warning from four high-ranking public servants and that this document was made a cabinet document. The document made clear that criminal and bkie infiltration of the Big Build was known, understood and of significant concern. It made clear it created a risk to 'significantly' – their emphasis – impact project costs and schedule if not addressed. The report described how a lawless CFMEU was driving an industrial relations environment on the Big Build that was not only highly challenging but 'having a bearing on project costs, program, productivity and

culture'. As the Minister for Industrial Relations, given this is of material significance, when were you briefed on this?

The PRESIDENT: I am unsure whether the minister was the minister for IR in 2023, but I call the minister and she can answer as she sees fit.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: She may not have been briefed, because she may not have been the IR minister.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:25): Mr Welch, it is my view and most other ministers' view that you do not comment on cabinet discussions outside of cabinet, short of making government announcements as a result of decisions that have been made in the cabinet room. You have referenced a document and asked about its relevance to me as the minister at a time when I was not the minister, so I could not be briefed as the Minister for Industrial Relations at that time.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:26): I did not say, 'When you were not the minister.' I said, 'When you became the minister, were you briefed as the incoming minister?' What we have is a document of material significance, of material consequence to your portfolio, but you were not curious enough to read it or get a briefing on it. The supplementary question is quite simple in that context: will you undertake to the Parliament to go and get a briefing on that and report back to this Parliament on it?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:26): I do not accept the premise of your question, Mr Welch. You are asserting knowledge of the status of a document – a cabinet document, a briefing document, the timing. I do not support the premise of your question.

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: To the interjections, I take my role as a member of cabinet, as a member of the executive, very, very seriously and act in accordance with my views of integrity at all times. But I do not accept your characterisation of a question when you do not sit in the cabinet room.

Ministers statements: Barwon and Grampians mental health services

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:27): I rise to highlight the Labor government's commitment to ensuring that a person's postcode does not determine their access to mental health care. Through significant investments in the Barwon and Grampians regions the government is delivering a transformed mental health system, one that is community based, recovery focused and shaped by the voices of people with lived experience. In Barwon the opening of the Peer Healing Space marks a significant step forward in expanding peer-led mental health care. Led by Mind Australia, with support from Barwon Health and Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, the service recognises the unique expertise of people with lived and living experience of mental ill health. It provides a welcoming, culturally safe space where peer workers draw on their own expertise to foster hope, connection and recovery. This innovative model demonstrates the government's commitment to embedding lived experience leadership and delivering compassionate, person-centred mental health care that is shaped by the communities it serves. The Labor government is also delivering new youth prevention and recovery care centres in the Grampians and Barwon regions. These YPARCs will provide young people experiencing mental health challenges with short-term residential support in a therapeutic, community-based setting. They will offer an alternative to hospital admission, where appropriate, and support young people to recover while remaining connected to their families, education and local communities. These investments demonstrate the government's ongoing commitment to implementing the recommendations of the royal commission. They reflect a vision for a system that is community based, recovery focused and

available closer to where people live. Every Victorian, regardless of their postcode, deserves access to high-quality mental health care. These investments in the Grampians and Barwon regions are helping to make that vision a reality.

Education system

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:29): (1387) My question today is to the Treasurer. Public school teachers and education support staff continue to fight for better pay and conditions. We saw thousands just recently rallying on the steps of our state Parliament. They want a decent pay rise but also real changes that reduce workloads, unpaid overtime and class sizes to address teacher retention and for our public schools to finally be fully funded. In terms of our state finances is it a fact that Victoria has sufficient funds to cover everything that the teachers and support staff are requesting – that is to say, if you wanted to fund them for what they are asking for, you could?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:30): Thank you, Mr Puglielli. At the outset, I would make a comment in relation to the government's continued discussions with teachers through their industrial representation, the AEU. Those negotiations continue in good faith. More so my capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations is probably what that leans on. You ask an interesting question in terms of 'Can the government afford this, that, whatever?' We have a substantial budget. We have a budget that is in surplus, but all decisions of government come down to priorities. It is difficult to answer your question, because the answer is going to be always, 'Yes, but you have got to consider all of the moving parts of what your government is responsible for funding.' I do not want to set up an example where every single person that receives a pay cheque from government comes and says, 'Well, you can pay us whatever you want because you've got such a substantial budget.' It is not really how the budget works. So your question is difficult to answer in a simple way, because being in government is about priorities. It is about choices. There is a substantial budget that we hope can facilitate all of the priorities of the Victorian government, and we do our very best to address all of those.

Members interjecting.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:31): Treasurer, I concur. It is about priorities. That is for sure. You could prioritise giving the teachers and support staff everything that they are asking for, because that is exactly what they deserve. Treasurer, is there a fiscal justification for why Victoria continues to pay teachers the least in the country?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:32): Thank you, Mr Puglielli. Yes, budgets are about choices. We have chosen to make an offer that provides an outcome where teachers will be the highest paid in the country. That is the choice that we made. We want Victorian teachers to be the highest paid in the country, and that is what the offer represents.

Ambulance services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): (1388) My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. Minister, Norma is 92 years old. On 28 June she had a fall at home, causing a head laceration with steady bleeding. Her family called 000 and was advised no ambulance was available and to wait for a call back. An hour later they called again and were told no ambulance was available and they would have to transport Norma to hospital themselves for a CT scan. Lorraine is 82, and on 14 June she suffered a fall. Suspecting that she may have a hip or pelvis fracture, her family called for an ambulance. Lorraine remained lying on the cold, wet ground for approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes until an ambulance finally arrived. Why are elderly Victorians in regional Victoria like Norma and Lorraine not getting the care they need when they are at their most vulnerable?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:33): Thanks, Ms Crozier, for that question. We have had this conversation

before in the chamber. I am not able to go into the details of the experiences that Norma and Lorraine had for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I do not have the information about what occurred in relation to the matters that you have just canvassed. In addition to that, Ms Crozier, there are issues that need to be discussed and managed very carefully around patient safety and confidentiality, and you have just gone to detail around that that I do not have consent from Norma or Lorraine or their families to talk about. What I would say to you, though, Ms Crozier – and I have said this before – is with details like this please talk with my office and we can have conversations about Norma and Lorraine's circumstances.

Bev McArthur: It is just a general trend.

Harriet SHING: I will take that up, Mrs McArthur. Ms Crozier and I have actually been able to have discussions as recently as last night, yesterday and today about specific matters which have been able to be addressed and resolved, which is exactly why these conversations are so important – because in a facilitative way I am able to help when I have got those details and we can we can provide further information.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I know the minister is spinning and wasting time in her argument, but this is an example of what is happening within our ambulance system. I used these two examples to point out to the chamber and to the rest of Victorians who are watching us today that the system is failing. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back and answer the question: why the system is failing, as these two examples demonstrate. It is not breaching any privacy and the garbled rubbish that the minister is going on about.

The PRESIDENT: You are debating the point of order. I believe the minister was responding to your preamble, but I believe she will get to the substantive answer now.

Harriet SHING: Again, Ms Crozier, the matters that you have raised about Norma and Lorraine are not garbled rubbish. It is a real shame that we are not able to have a mature conversation in this place about the issues relating to ambulance performance, response and resourcing. We have seen a range of reports that have led to significant investment in ambulance services – some \$2 billion – and we have increased the ambulance workforce by 53.9 per cent. Most recently we have additional recruits that are hitting the ground on 17 August. Our response times are actually comparably faster than other jurisdictions, including New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and others. There is always more work to do, and as I have said very clearly, there is no finish line when it comes to making sure that people have what they need. We have \$146 million in the budget to assist with support for faster emergency care across the state and around \$50 million to help paramedics to get back on the road sooner after patients have been moved through a secondary triage process. That triage process is really important because what it helps us to do is ensure that people who call for assistance are getting assistance in a form which best meets their needs. That might mean the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, it might mean lights and sirens or it might mean alternate processes for treatment and for care. We continue to invest record funding into our services because we know that is what Victorians deserve.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:37): They certainly deserve more than that garbled response. Minister, the ambulance union recently reported that ambulance crews were waiting up to 2.5 hours at Bendigo Hospital and crews from Beaufort, Majorca, Moyston, Teesdale, Hepburn and patient transport were all ramped, leaving no crews available between Ballarat and Horsham. That is a quote in a social media post that they did last week. Minister, I will ask again, because you did not answer the question. I gave the examples of two elderly women and their families who were dealing with the issue around the ambulance system failing. It is about the performance of our ambulance services not meeting the needs of regional Victorians. I will ask again: when regional Victorians need help in a medical emergency, why is the system failing them so badly, with ambulances ramped and elderly people lying on the ground for hours waiting for an emergency response?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:38): Again, Ms Crozier, following up on my earlier answer, you asked about Victorians getting the help that they need, and one of the things we have done, with the secondary triage process and investing \$50.7 million into that, is to make sure that we can actually divert people who do not need code 1 lights and sirens into alternative pathways for care. This is a really important way to make sure that people, including your constituents, my constituents and our constituents, can get care pathways that meet their needs. This means that it sits on top of the work that we are doing for ambulance allocation, an operational matter for Ambulance Victoria. We also operate flexible rostering arrangements, overtime and other operational changes to manage shift vacancies. We also make operational decisions in real time to distribute resources, including the digital coordination centre. You are actually going to sack and scrap all of these things under a Liberal–One Nation coalition government. All of those things will disappear and people will find it so much more difficult to access a paramedic and care when they need it.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the minister knows she is not to attack the opposition in questions.

A member interjected.

David Davis: It is an attack, and you know that is true.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): I move:

That the minister's answers be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

The PRESIDENT: To address Mr Davis's point of order, there have been a number of rulings about ministers not attacking the opposition during question time, and I would expect those to be adhered to. I would also say that interjections are unruly and maybe sometimes ministers are responding to interjections. I would ask them not to do that.

Ministers statements: Pick My Park

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:41): It is a good opportunity to talk about something I am sure no-one will have an issue with. I think everybody would be quite excited to hear about the investments in the City of Ballarat. Ballarat, as we know, is one of the great regional success stories. It is a city that is growing rapidly, backed by more than \$1.1 billion in government investments since we were elected. We have invested in transformative projects like the base hospital, the GovHub, the station precinct redevelopment and the employment zone. It is our investment that is building the critical community services that make this city thrive, both now and into the future.

But it is not just about building the big things; it is also about providing for the small things that make life better, a bit easier and sometimes a bit fun. Last week I joined the member for Wendouree Juliana Addison to announce successful Ballarat projects under round 2 of Pick My Park. Open space in Havelock Street will be transformed into a new local park, with paths creating a welcoming green space for residents and visitors. The Hill Street reserve will be upgraded with new seating and shade, and a new Parks Victoria trail head in Mount Clear will build on our earlier investment in the trail loop, improving access and helping more people access this natural asset.

When families are juggling work, school, bills –

Nick McGowan: On a point of order, President, ministers statements are an opportunity for ministers to provide statements in respect of their portfolios. This is in respect to the environment portfolio, it is not in respect to the minister's portfolio – unless the minister, as Treasurer, wants to open that up to every question on every portfolio.

Harriet Shing: Further to the point of order, President, what a shame that Mr McGowan, whilst looking at props, has not bothered to read the general order, which refers to Development Victoria sitting with the minister for Development Victoria – who sits right here as Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts – which has carriage of the program being referred to, Mr McGowan.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I will rule on the points of order. The standing orders say that a minister can make a statement, and there is nothing else, so it does not really matter. The minister to continue – 50 seconds.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Mr McGowan. But you are right: I stick within my portfolio responsibilities when delivering ministers statements, despite the fact that you do not have to. But in this instance, the Pick My Park initiative is a responsibility of the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. It is a small component of the everyday work that I do, I appreciate that, but it is important and it can make a real difference to people's lives. I probably do not get to parks as much as I would like to, but when I had little kids, that is the way you got through a weekend – wearing them out at a park. The fact that we have invested in improvements in Ballarat is something that I am very proud to have been a part of in my relatively new portfolio of precincts and Development Victoria.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:44): I thank Ms Shing, who will chase up, under the standing orders, questions from Mr Ettershank to the Minister for Planning. Minister Erdogan, you kindly offered to chase up, under standing orders, Ms Tyrrell's questions to the Minister for Tourism.

Constituency questions

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:45): (2441) Victoria is growing, and we know that to tackle the housing challenge we need to build more homes where people actually want to live, close to transport, jobs and services, and our government is taking decisive action to make this happen. I was thrilled to see the recent announcement regarding the Arden precinct in North Melbourne, in my electorate. Through the development facilitation program, a major new residential project has been approved for construction on Arden Street, right next door to the incredible new Arden station. This development will deliver two buildings, ranging from 24 to 37 storeys, featuring a variety of one-, two- and three-bedroom homes. Importantly, it includes a 15 per cent affordable housing allocation, with communal open spaces, retail and unparalleled access to the Metro Tunnel. This project is a shining example of excellent urban renewal, and the program itself has already fast-tracked more than 12,000 homes right across Victoria. My question is: how can more people take advantage?

The PRESIDENT: Ms Watt, can I check which minister your matter was directed to?

Sheena Watt: The Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): (2442) My constituency question is for the Minister for Local Government. The Moorabbin traffic school has been a much-loved feature of the community for more than half a century. Many local residents have happy memories of riding their bikes and scooters there while learning about road safety and following traffic rules. The facility closed in 2022 and has been missed, but plans for reopening were revived by local MP Nick Staikos earlier this year, when he secured \$250,000 in funding for Glen Eira council and announced on social media:

We are reopening the old Moorabbin Traffic School!

He has got a raft of social media here, and he is spruiking this and that and carrying on. On 17 July Mr Staikos provided an update with the mayor, who said, 'The site itself will become a park' with 'traffic ... elements'. Minister, can you tell my constituents why the promised return of the popular traffic school has become just a park with a few speed humps?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): (2443) My question is for the Minister for Environment. My Seaford-based constituent volunteers with the Seaford Beach Patrol. She has raised concerns about the microplastic nurdles washing up on Seaford beach in their tens of thousands. My constituent has picked up all of these by hand on patrols monthly with the beach clean-up days. Nurdles are raw plastic resin pellets, smaller than 5 millimetres in diameter. They are either created to be melted down and made into plastic objects or a by-product of larger object manufacturing. These are a hazard to our marine life who ingest them, thinking that they are food. My constituent informs me that the Victorian EPA and the minister were provided with a report last year titled *Microplastic Pollution in Melbourne's Waterways: Existing Legal Solutions*. So my question is: will the minister adopt the report's recommendations to combat the microplastic issue, particularly on Seaford beach in my electorate?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (2444) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Small and Family Business. Smaller family businesses make up the backbone of the Victorian economy and the economy in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region. They are the foundation of well-connected communities that keep local economies and social connections strong. Particularly in my constituency, small businesses make up a large proportion of the economic activity that takes place. A good percentage of my constituents, especially those among the younger demographic, are employed by small businesses. For that reason I hold a keen interest in making sure that small and family-run businesses are well supported by this Labor government. I note it has been an ongoing commitment of the Labor government since coming into office in 2014 to continue to support small and family business owners. My question to the minister is: what initiatives has the Labor government introduced in recent years to ensure that small and family businesses continue to thrive in my constituency of the Southern Metropolitan Region?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:49): (2445) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Recently I visited the Dandenong Ranges with local resident and Liberal candidate for Monbulk Clare Fitzmaurice. Paul Keen from the Cockatoo Action Group drove us around Cardinia's top five unsealed roads, including Fern Gully Road, View Hill Road, Wright Road, Kimmicks Road and Station Avenue. These roads are unbelievable. There are plenty of houses on them, but they are still unsealed. Residents are subject to travelling on roads that would be considered unacceptable in other parts of metropolitan Melbourne. It is a highly disaster-prone area of the state. Unsealed roads compromise safety and emergency access. Locals around the Dandenongs have been left wanting after Albanese cut all this money from Australians, from the Sealing the Hills project. So my question is: will the minister commit to providing state funding to seal these top priority roads?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (2446) My question is to the Minister for Education. The Glenferrie Primary School community are proud of their 150-year-old public school, but it needs support to continue to provide an environment for kids to thrive in. The school community are particularly concerned about inadequate shaded outdoor space for children, playgrounds and ovals that are growing unsafe and need repair, old toilet facilities that are no longer fit for purpose and two key learning and administrative spaces that require refurbishment. The school community want funding for infrastructure upgrades at Glenferrie Primary School: renewal of ageing facilities to meet

modern safety, accessibility and learning standards; investment in safe outdoor environments; and a fair and equitable approach to public school infrastructure that ensures that long-established schools are not left behind. Minister, will you answer these calls from the Glenferrie Primary School community to make sure the school remains a safe, inclusive and high-quality learning environment for all students?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2447) It is important that when the new education minister is appointed they give some consideration, I hope very quickly, to Heathmont East Primary School, President, which I know you too are very passionate about. Heathmont East Primary School have, unbelievably perhaps, 18 portables – that is, 18 temporary classrooms. That is to say, put differently, they have six permanent classrooms. For any school that is quite an astronomical figure. Over the winter break they had the destruction, the demolition, of a previous wing, which contained 11 classrooms. You can imagine what kind of void that has left at that school. The school has had previous funding. However, stages 2 and 3 have not been committed to. I ask the incoming Minister for Education to urgently look at Heathmont East Primary School funding. We desperately need stages 2 and 3 funded to ensure that our children have the best possible education locally. They have sensational teachers and a sensational leadership team. We want to have these classrooms. They are desperately needed.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2448) My question is for the Minister for Health. We know that cancer touches the lives of many families across Victoria and indeed across Melbourne's south-east, and access to high-quality treatment, research and support can make an enormous difference. I recently had the privilege of attending a forum, alongside the members for Ashwood and Clarinda, of the Monash Partners Comprehensive Cancer Consortium, which brought together researchers, clinicians, health professionals and consumers to discuss how strong collaboration can improve cancer care. Minister, how is the Labor government supporting cancer research and translating the amazing work that they do into better care for people in my electorate?

Western Metropolitan Region

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:53): (2449) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The Labor government told us that the West Gate Tunnel Project would cost \$400 million, but now we know that it has cost \$4 billion. They told us that it would take 28,000 cars off the West Gate Bridge, and we know that it is taking less than half that number. They told us it would take 9000 trucks off local roads, but we know that the City of Melbourne has counted three times as many trucks avoiding the tolls and on local roads compared with the same period last year. We know that the automatic height clearance rates of 4.6 metres mean that the majority of B-double trucks cannot even use it anyway. The government signed a contract for Transurban to cover about \$6 billion of costs, but recent analysis has suggested that they will make close to \$40 billion off the deal. The question is: what is the point of this tunnel, and how much money is it going to give to Transurban compared to the benefits for Victorians?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:54): (2450) My question is to the Minister for Planning. The member for Ripon has created a petition against a proposed data centre in Miners Rest. The petition calls for the planning minister to decline an application made by a proponent. This is despite the Labor government actively promoting data centres, including in the AI mission statement and on the Invest Victoria website. It seems truly odd that a government backbencher needs to get a petition organised to change a government minister's approach. It looks desperate and it reeks of being utterly disingenuous. I visited the site just the other day with the Liberal candidate for Ripon Megan Read. We think the community should be listened to and their voices should be respected. My question

to the minister is this: will you listen to the Miners Rest community and take their views into account, or will you just listen to the member for Ripon?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:55): (2451) My question today is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Hiba is a single mother of five children who is currently staying in crisis accommodation in my region due to family violence. I am asking this question with her full permission, and I am happy to provide further information to relevant staff. She contacted my office to receive support with her social housing application. My office called the Broadmeadows housing office to check on the status of her application and was asked to send an email. We sent an email the same day to the Broadmeadows office and asked for an urgent response. After 11 days and no response my staff forwarded this email directly to your office, again asking for assistance with information on the status of Hiba's application. This was now over a month ago, and we have not received any response from either the Broadmeadows housing office or your office. The emails and inquiries on Hiba's behalf have been flat out ignored. Minister, can you please make inquiries as to the status of Hiba's priority housing application for her and her children?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (2452) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister urgently fix the potholes on the C318, the Kyneton-Trentham Road? Kate Kendall, the Liberal candidate for the seat of Macedon, has asked me to raise this road on her behalf because both Kate and I have heard from Macedon Ranges residents about the dangerous state of the Kyneton-Trentham Road. One of the biggest issues affecting Macedon Ranges residents is the dangerous condition of the arterial roads in the area. One resident was driving between Tylden and Trentham when she hit a massive pothole that damaged the driver's side front wheel. Thankfully, only the car was impacted and she was not injured, but it could have been far more serious for the constituent. Victorians are sick and tired of the disgraceful state of our roads after 12 years of Labor neglect. Only the Liberals will invest \$5 billion to eliminate potholes and implement a proper scheme of road maintenance and repair, but Kyneton-Trentham Road cannot wait until after the election. The minister for roads must order an urgent fix now.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:57): (2453) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. My constituents at the Yarra Jets Football Club use the Fairlea sporting precinct in Yarra Bend Park, which is managed by Parks Victoria. However, the precinct is in desperate need of upgrades, and the community is concerned about a lack of coordination between state government agencies in relation to the Eastern Freeway upgrade and the Thomas Embling Hospital expansion. Local clubs want assurance that these projects will not reduce sporting space, compromise future investment or undermine opportunities to meet growing community demand. Minister, will you commit to protecting Fairlea sporting precinct from the impacts of surrounding developments and work with Parks Victoria to deliver the upgrades needed to make the precinct fit for purpose?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:58): (2454) My constituency question is for the Minister for Local Government, and it comes from mayors across south-west Victoria publicly opposing Labor's proposed changes to Victoria's rate-capping regime. Minister, will you rule out gutting the rate cap, or do you expect ratepayers to be punished for this government's cost shifting? For months the Australian Services Union have demanded higher council wages and higher rates, and the government is now caving in to their edicts. The government already plans to increase councils' employment costs with its dodgy jobs code, and the *Herald Sun* has reported it is now considering gutting the rate-capping framework. With four cabinet ministers and nearly half of Labor's Legislative

Council members holding ASU membership, the union's influence over this government is impossible to ignore. Will the minister stand up for Victorian ratepayers, or will the union bosses get another victory?

Eastern Victoria Region

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:59): (2455) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place. Nar Nar Goon CFA have a very substandard building to work from. The building was first constructed in the 1940s and has been modified over the last 80 or so years, but it is not up to the job, and it is imperative that they be moved as soon as possible, even if it is to a temporary site, because their current building is creating a lot of problems with storage of the vehicles. There are a lot of people with cancer coming from there, and it is time to move on. There was land at one stage that was going to be donated to the cause, and that seems to have slipped through the fingers of the government. My question is: will the minister fast-track a new station upon the acquisition of suitable land and give Nar Nar Goon CFA somewhere to go?

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:03 pm.

Motions

Road maintenance

Debate resumed.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:03): I rise to speak on the motion raised by my colleague from northern Victoria regarding the conditions of roads in Victoria. There is no doubt that the road network of Victoria is an incredibly important piece of infrastructure. The network is an expansive piece of infrastructure and is the only piece of infrastructure that links the entire state together. The road network spans over 220,000 kilometres when including local roads. These span across the entire diversity of the state and the diverse areas therein, from the alpine regions and the Dandenong Ranges to the Grampians and all the way out to the plains of the Mallee and to inner-city places like Prahran. The network is vastly diverse and as such has faced a diversity of challenges. Every road faces differing conditions, and that can impact the rate at which the conditions of the roads deteriorate. Whether it be extreme weather or heavy freight usage, all of these things create unique yet important challenges to the road network. Because the road network provides crucial links for people all across Victoria, it makes addressing those challenges all the more important. Roads create vital connections between communities, particularly in regional Victoria, where they can often be the only means to get from one place to another.

They are also critical arteries in the logistics systems of the economy, providing the laneways that deliver goods and services to communities throughout Victoria. These connections provide critical lifelines for communities across the state. A solid road network improves the overall wealth and prosperity for regional areas through enabling tourism, shipping and other generalised commerce. Ensuring that the state has a well-functioning and well-looked-after road network is critical to maintaining a high-productivity capacity. The manufacturing and agricultural industries in Victoria rely on there being a strong and reliable road network. Having a strong and reliable network that can be used safely is of benefit to the economy and it is also of benefit to workers. As a former secretary of the Transport Workers' Union, these are facts I know very well.

Ensuring that the road network remains well maintained is about more than just getting from point A to point B comfortably and reliably. Well-maintained roads are safer and mean less needless deaths. They also keep communities connected, improve quality of life and support economic activity by providing reliable access to work, education, health care and other essential services. Whether it is a worker commuting to their job, a student travelling to school or a family accessing medical care, a well-maintained road network helps ensure people get where they need to get safely and efficiently.

In the 2026–27 Victorian budget this Labor government announced a \$1 billion initiative to rebuild and repair road surfaces across Victoria. That is enough to get rid of 200,000 potholes and much more. This represents one of the biggest single investments in the upgrading and maintaining of road networks in this state's history. The vast majority of these funds, in fact 70 per cent of it, will be going to regional Victoria in areas that desperately need maintenance and repair. These funds will be used to ensure that arterial roads are resurfaced, repaired and maintained; to ensure that bridges, traffic lights and other intersections throughout the state remain as safe as possible; to clear dangerous foliage along roadways in metropolitan and regional areas; and to deliver critical repairs and replacements to damaged or old road signs. This is about more than the aesthetics. It is about improving the lives of motorists and improving road safety. It is also about extending the life of the roadways that we currently have in place.

We know well that poor road quality can have adverse outcomes for everyone on the road. It creates hazards for those on motorcycles and on bicycles. Poor road conditions can make it harder for emergency vehicles to get where they need to be both quickly and safely and they can cause unneeded damage to vehicles, which costs private individuals and businesses too much money in repairs, especially in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. The reason I am talking about this is because I want to push back on the notion that this Labor government is unaware of those issues or that we are not acting on those issues when we are acting through the largest investment in road repair this state has ever seen.

But this is by far not the only thing the Labor government has done. One of the most dangerous things that can happen on the road is for a driver to get behind the wheel while fatigued. Driving tired is a killer on our roads. That is why it is so important to invest in adequate roadside infrastructure that allows drivers to rest when they are tired, rather than continue driving. These rest stops are used by regional commuters of all types, from local residents to those travelling and engaging in tourism to drivers of heavy trucks and vehicles. Ensuring that these commuters have a safe but comfortable place to stop and rest is of great importance. We have heard the community's concerns about some of these rest stops – that facilities are outdated or that people do not feel safe whilst they are stopped there. Labor has listened and responded. In partnership with the federal government, we have begun upgrading rest stops along Victoria's regional freeways. This will give commuters a comfortable and safe place to rest. While we know that well-rested drivers means less accidents and fewer deaths on the road, roads and road safety is of deep importance to this Labor government.

I know the importance of safe roads and road infrastructure. Last month I had the honour of heading up to Alexandra to the annual Victorian Truck Drivers Memorial. This is a memorial to honour and remember all truck drivers killed on Victoria's roads over the past year, and it was a sobering experience. Truck drivers are some of the most important workers in our modern economy. They are the key players making sure that our logistics runs smoothly. That means food on the shelves and products in the shops, that means businesses have a steady flow of goods and it means that families and communities can access the essentials that they need. Truck drivers are the backbone of our economy and play a vital role in keeping the economy moving. It is a tragedy and unacceptable that any truck driver should be killed on our roads due to the poor quality or maintenance of those roads. Being at that service was a stark reminder of the importance of improving safety on our roads and the real human impact. That is why the Carroll Labor government is committed to making Victorian roads safer by improving maintenance and repair operations and by investing in initiatives to drive down the rates of deaths caused by fatigued drivers. We can and must save lives on our roads. This is why Labor will continue to invest in ensuring that the road network is safe for all commuters that use it. This is all happening because the Carroll Labor government understands the importance of the road network.

What we see in this motion before us today is not an attempt to improve anything, rather an opportunity for those on the crossbench to grandstand. This is an issue of critical importance for Victorians, whether they live in Brunswick, Ballan or Benalla. They do not want stunts for social media or the political theatre that some are trying to engage in in this place. They want real action on the issues that

matter to them, and they know that they can only get that action from a Labor government. That is because we have a strong track record of investing in our state's infrastructure and delivering on the things that matter. Labor has invested nearly \$3 billion over the past three years, the largest sustained investment in road maintenance in Victoria's history. In that time we have averaged \$993 million in funding towards maintaining our roads, including rebuilding, repairing and resurfacing arterial roads. Victorians are already seeing the results, with 187,000 potholes removed this year.

We are delivering safer, better roads, and with 20 per cent off rego, we are making it cheaper for everyone to go around. The investment that this Labor government has made is reducing travel disruptions and ensuring people can spend less time worrying about their safety on the roads and more time getting to where they need to go. This is what good governments do: invest in the infrastructure our communities rely on and deliver the outcomes that benefit all Victorians.

The reason I oppose this motion is the fact that this motion is nothing but a stunt that does nothing to address any of the concerns of Victorians. I encourage my colleagues in this chamber to oppose this motion as well.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:12): I also rise to speak on motion 1526. I want to start by acknowledging some of the words in the motion. It reads:

That this house:

- (1) notes that Victoria's road network is fundamental to the safety, economic prosperity and connectivity of communities across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria;

I must add to that that one of the things you do notice when you go to another country – let us just take a place like Singapore – is how well they look after their roads. Their roads are looked after with so much pride because they see that as a symbol of the wealth of their nation. The motion continues:

- (2) acknowledges that Victorians rely on a safe and well-maintained road network for access to employment, education, health care, freight transport, tourism, and emergency services;

Let me just say that out in the south-east, where people have to travel long distances on a regular basis on our roads, they do not have the ability to tolerate the poor conditions, the potholes, that they encounter on a regular basis that do damage to their cars. In 2022 one of our candidates had her car upgraded with new tyres and everything. That very same day her daughter, driving that car, drove through a pothole and blew out two tyres at once.

This is not an unusual event in Victoria. You are not going to convince a single Victorian – those on the other side of the chamber – that you have maintained our roads, because there would not be a single person who drives on our roads and has driven on them from 2022, since you have been in government, until today that has not hit a pothole or had to swerve around a pothole or drive over cracks or avoid cracks or enjoy the weeds and trees that grow alongside the road.

In my region there have been serious consequences as a result of these roads not being properly maintained. We have had many fatalities. One of the more recent and more tragic ones that is well known and documented through the news is that of a 16-year-old boy. It was a 5- to 10-minute drive on Pound Road. He was fatally hit while walking home from school, not far from his home. It was the most tragic loss, with the community coming together. He was on the phone to his father when he said, 'I'm not far from home,' and that was the last bit of communication. We also had a fatal accident on the Belgrave-Hallam Road, where a 33-year-old was struck by a car and killed while going on his daily run. Constituents continuously report to me that they have approached their local Labor members of Parliament about this tragic accident and others with disappointing outcomes. Continually this government turns a blind eye to where these fatalities are taking place and does nothing to rectify the situation. The Allan Labor government continue to forget that even one fatality on this road that was caused as a result of their failures to the Victorian people is blood on their hands, and it impacts a whole community. These accidents, these two that I have just mentioned, are well known.

Just recently I was at the intersection of Hallam South and Centre and O'Grady roads in Hallam. In fact I was there on Monday last week. This is a crossroad intersection on a main road in an area that has continual traffic as a result of its workplaces. People in the south-east have to get to their businesses and to their work, yet this government has not installed traffic lights. When they did an upgrade to remove the level crossing, what they forgot, what they failed to do, was to understand the conditions that would take place on the roads and make them unsafe. The traffic used to stop at certain times while waiting for those boom gates, and now that the boom gates have been removed, they do not stop. So people have to try to get through without traffic lights because they have not done proper infrastructure. Where is the actual research that they were supposed to do? They are actually meant to be doing research on the development of roads and anything else that they are upgrading. If they did their job properly, there would be less accidents, there would be some people alive today and there would be families enjoying their family members instead of grieving for those that they have so tragically lost.

In this particular motion, whilst it focuses a lot on regional and rural Victoria, it mentions the deteriorating road conditions, which have, as I have mentioned, increased the likelihood of crashes. It has increased the risk of tyre failures and vehicle damage. In fact talking to constituents, what is just outrageous to me is that some of the businesses actually take that into account. Businesses in Braeside, Carrum Downs and Seaford have said to me that they budget for tyre damage and suspension repairs because they know the roads they rely on are deteriorating. You have to remember that the growth in the south-east has been extraordinary, yet road maintenance has not kept up with the pace. The people who live and work in these communities deserve more than a temporary patch job. Local councils have done community surveys that show that potholes are the number one complaint about roads. The government puts its head in the sand – until we come towards an election, when it wants to look busy and look like it is listening and caring for us. Well, what about those families that have lost their loved ones because you did not do regular maintenance?

If we are going to talk about road maintenance, let us not forget that this is a state that is in debt because of this particular government. It can waste \$589 million on the Commonwealth Games with no discernible benefit for the taxpayer, yet it has failed to do proper maintenance on a number of roads in the south-east. I am just going to quickly mention some of them. The South Gippsland Highway should have been widened. It should have been well maintained but is not. If you want to get a tree, come down the road. The Princes Highway – I mean, they are doing little bits here and there, but honestly the Princes Highway still has potholes. Thompsons Road, Pound Road, Hall Road – Pound Road, as I said, is where we have had tragic accidents. They do not look at where pavements are and how pedestrians are meant to walk. They do not consider when they are doing any form of construction or sticking out their witches hats what the impact is going to be on the pedestrians. These things need to be done properly. Heatherton Road, Springvale Road, Police Road, Greens Road, Clyde Road, Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road – and let us not forget what has not yet been developed, Berwick's Clyde Road. It has not even had its two lanes put in.

Along heavy freight routes in places like Springvale and in the Braeside area, where there is an industrial precinct, in the Mordialloc electorate, we find that residents complain continually about deteriorating road surfaces and potholes as a result of prolonged wet weather and high volumes of trucks that accelerate and cause pavement deterioration. On Lower Dandenong Road, one of the busiest east-west arterials in the Kingston area, we have frequent complaints about rough pavement, patchwork repairs and uneven road surfaces. In fact in the service lane just outside my office there is a big pothole. After I spoke about it in Parliament it was quickly patched up. It was about a foot deep, and no sooner had they patched it up – because they did such a terrible job and waited for such a long time – it was only a week before it sank, so it is still there. It is still a pothole. It might not be as deep as it was before, but because you did such a terrible job it is now a pothole that I have to drive over every time I go to my electorate office, which is often.

Then there is the Carrum electorate. In fact Thompsons Road goes right across a number of electorates that are very important to the Labor Party, and yet they do not consider this busy arterial to be something that they can do something about, with heavy traffic contributing to the pavement wear and to the potholes, which continually have to be repaired. Hall Road, of course, is very congested. There is rapid population growth, and so you have to maintain these roads on a regular basis, otherwise these potholes continue to appear. This never used to happen under a Liberal government, and it will not happen again if the Liberals are elected. Local residents have consistently raised concerns about places like McLeod Road. And let us take Frankston-Dandenong Road – again, a freight corridor. Businesses are constantly reporting damage to vehicles and increased maintenance costs. Frankston-Flinders Road in the Frankston electorate, Cranbourne Road, Skye Road, the highway in Frankston – I mean, the list goes on and on and I am out of time. We need to see changes, and this government has failed Victorians.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:22): I rise to speak on the motion that has been brought before the house that deals with the fundamental safety, economic prosperity and connectivity of communities across Victoria because of the dreadful state that our roads are in. When I read through the full motion that we are debating today, it actually reads very similarly to a letter that I wrote to the minister on 2 July. I wrote this to the minister because I am constantly, together with all of my colleagues, getting up and raising the condition of roads – particularly roads in rural and regional Victoria – in this house and the minister does nothing about them. I wrote this as an open letter to the minister, which I released to the media so the minister might take a little bit more notice of it. Unfortunately, the minister has not responded yet, so I cannot tell you what her response is, but I wrote:

Dear Minister ...

I write to you regarding the critically dangerous condition of Victoria's regional roads.

This situation has become so dire that it demands you act urgently to significantly increase investment in the road repair program, and ensure Victorians have the smooth and safe regional roads they deserve.

Over a decade of Labor neglect has left our road network with massive potholes, crumbling road edges, ripples and large cracks that have gone unrepaired for long periods. It is Victorian motorists who are suffering the consequences as large potholes damage their vehicles by smashing wheel rims and puncturing tyres.

Blowing out a tyre or swerving to avoid a damaged road surface can cause accidents, and the dangerous state of Victoria's roads is putting lives at risk.

Recent wet weather has exposed the extent of deterioration on our roads. High rainfall has filled many deep potholes with water and hidden them from unsuspecting drivers, while heavy fog has reduced road visibility, leaving motorists unable to see and avoid hazards ahead.

Even our major highways in northern Victoria, including the Hume, Calder, Midland, Maroondah, Murray Valley and Goulburn Valley Highways, have fallen into a state of dangerous disrepair.

Many other state arterial roads also suffer from a lack of maintenance, and are in desperate need of repair and full rehabilitation of the worst sections. These include, but are not limited to, Katamatite-Shepparton Road, Great Alpine Road, Echuca Road, Murchison-Tatura Road, Murray River Road and Benalla-Tocumwal Road. This list is not exhaustive, and my constituents have reported dozens more roads that require urgent attention.

The Labor Government abandoned its responsibility to carry out proper road maintenance over the past 12 years, and this year's budget once again reduced the amount of road area that will be repaired.

Regional Victorians are disgusted with Labor's city-centric approach that has left them behind. You must reverse the trend of Labor's long-term underinvestment, and significantly expand the road repair program.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Lovell MP

Member for Northern Victoria Region

I wrote that as an open letter, and it has been published in many of the papers throughout northern Victoria because the whole of regional Victoria is sick and tired of Labor neglecting the state of our roads. In regional Victoria roads are fundamental to us having connectivity, whether it be to our local town or whether it be to the capital here in Melbourne, because we do not have adequate public transport. In Shepparton we were promised nine return train services a day back in 2021. It was

promised that we would have those by the end of 2023. We were promised we would have five return services on a weekend, but we do not. We still only have five daily services, and I am not sure exactly how many there are on the weekend, but we certainly do not have the five. I think it is four. The lack of train services means overcrowding on the trains, so people are being forced to use their car, but the state of the Goulburn Valley Highway and the Hume Highway is making it extremely dangerous for people who are driving on those roads. We hear daily in our office of people who have blown a tyre or damaged the rim of their vehicle. They are not getting compensated by the government, and yet it is government's fault because the roads are so bad.

Sonja Terpstra in her contribution blamed the rain for undermining the road surface. Well, the rain only undermines the road surface when the road surface is already bad anyway, and sometimes it is just a lack of maintenance that leads to the road surfaces being undermined. I can tell you the Midland Highway is being undermined because the government does not maintain the safety barriers in the middle of the road. The safety barriers are not only down and not doing their job, but there are trees growing out of them. A little while ago there were some trees that were as tall as me growing in the middle of the road. It was like having another reserve in the middle of the road. I made a video of that and then posted it with *Highway to Hell* blaring over the top of it. I am told that that actually caused quite a stir in the department, and many of those trees were removed and the barriers repaired at that time. But the barriers have again fallen into a state of disrepair and new trees and shrubs have started to emerge in the middle of the road.

It is not only the maintenance that is lacking in rural and regional Victoria. We are also lacking in investment in new roads and roads that need to be upgraded. There is Donnybrook Road, which Evan Mulholland and I talk about regularly in here. If we do not mention Donnybrook Road every week, there is something wrong, because Donnybrook Road is a disgrace. It is a two-lane – one lane each way – goat track; an old farm road that is now servicing thousands of new residents who have settled into estates on the eastern side of the Hume Freeway. It can take people 45 minutes just to get out of their estate in the morning, let alone get down Donnybrook Road and onto the freeway. There are no footpaths that make it safe for people to walk to the train station. I would not cycle along there; it is a very narrow road and would be extremely dangerous, and it is riddled with potholes. And yet the Labor government are prepared to let people live in those conditions.

The bypass of Shepparton is another case in point where during the floods, the causeway was closed off between Shepparton and Mooroopna. This cut residents of Mooroopna off from many services like the hospital and other services that are located in Shepparton. The bypass has been on the agenda for I think the past 30 years. I was on a committee to get the bypass built before I was a member of Parliament, and here we still are, waiting for something to happen. We need a second river crossing in Shepparton, and we need it sooner rather than later. RACV, of course, have done an analysis of the most dangerous roads in regional Victoria, and these include Calder Highway, Loddon Valley Highway, Mallee Highway, Murray Valley Highway, Northern Highway, McIvor Highway, Pyrenees Highway, Robinvale-Sea Lake Road, Sunraysia Highway, Beechworth-Wangaratta Road, Goulburn Valley Highway, Maroondah Highway, Great Alpine Road, Melba Highway and Midland Highway. *(Time expired)*

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (14:31): I thank everybody for their contributions. Roads are one of the most vital pieces of infrastructure Victoria has. The current state of our roads is a damning indictment of the current government. This is an issue that affects every single electorate in this state. Every single road user has been in some way affected by the deterioration of our roads network. Our cars must be roadworthy, yet our roads are not carworthy. There must be transparency surrounding the maintenance and construction of the road network, because what is being done now is obviously not good enough. The claims process for motorists who have damage to their vehicles caused by failing road surfaces must be made easier, and more must be done to support them in a cost-of-living crisis. This government needs to do the right thing, be transparent and listen to its constituents. Unfortunately, many of the words expressed to me by Victorians regarding our road

infrastructure are deemed too fruity for this chamber, according to our President, so I will narrow them down to a final sentence as professionally as possible. Fix the darn roads properly the first time.

Motion agreed to.

Government performance

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:32): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that after more than a decade of Labor government, Victorians now have their third Labor Premier in three years, the second in a row installed by factions of the Labor Party;
- (2) further notes that the new Premier, the Honourable Ben Carroll MP:
 - (a) served as Deputy Premier throughout a government mired in CFMEU corruption allegations, record debt approaching \$200 billion and record crime;
 - (b) as Minister for Education, presided over botched VCE exams, the collapse of teacher pay negotiations, statewide strikes and lost learning for Victorian children;
 - (c) refused to support a royal commission into Big Build corruption, dismissing it as something that would take too long and cost too much;
- (3) observes that Mr Carroll's sudden leadership challenge, after publicly looking Premier Allan in the eye, pledging loyalty only weeks earlier, exposes the division, dishonesty and desperation inside Victorian Labor;
- (4) further observes that elevating the Deputy Premier of a failing government is not 'renewal' but rewarding failure, and that swapping one architect of the mess for another is factional juggling, not real change;
- (5) declares that every crisis confronting Victoria today, in crime, health, education, housing, debt and integrity, was created by the cabinet in which Mr Carroll sat as Deputy Premier; and
- (6) concludes that the only leadership ballot that can fix Victoria is November's election, when Victorians finally get the vote Labor's factions have twice denied them and can throw this entire failed government out of office.

I move the motion on the order paper in my name just one day after Victoria acquired yet another Premier that not one Victorian has voted for. Yesterday, at half past 12 at Government House, Ben Carroll was sworn in as the 50th Premier of Victoria, 90 minutes after a caucus meeting that the *Herald Sun* this morning described as descending into 'shouting, fake tears' and manoeuvres one Labor MP called 'straight out of Dan's playbook'. Another MP told the paper:

There was more tension in the room than the season finale of *Married At First Sight*.

Michael Galea: Your favourite show!

Bev McARTHUR: I might never have watched *Married at First Sight*, Mr Galea, but I do understand the format. Strangers are paired off by a panel of experts, the arrangement has no legal standing and it usually ends in tears. I can see the resemblance.

So let us recap what Victorians witnessed yesterday: a government so divided, so desperate that its own ministers were yelling at each other behind closed doors four months out from an election. What happened? How did we get here? The factional convenors met on Sunday night and decided the Premier had lost the numbers. A delegation told her so on Monday. She demanded six ministers resign. They refused. On Tuesday morning she resigned, and then within the hour signed the nomination form of a rival candidate against the very man to whom she had pledged unqualified support. The whole thing collapsed only after a proxy vote on the deputy leadership, and a deal was struck at 11:56 am, 4 minutes before the bells, with a cabinet seat for the member for Mordialloc thrown in as part of the price. It does not sound much like renewal to me, more like a hostage negotiation with a lunchtime deadline.

Rather more than incidentally, who exactly was running Victoria while the Labor Party ripped itself apart and laid the foundation for years, if not decades, of future internal resentment? Not the outgoing Premier – she resigned at 9:30. Not the incoming Premier – he had not yet been chosen. For 2 hours this state made do with a caretaker, and every minute those members spent shouting at one another behind that door was a minute not spent on Victorians waiting for ambulances, families whose cars were stolen from their driveways or small business owners opening crippling new land tax bills. The fact is Victorians deserve a government focused on them, not a government focused on saving its seats through bad-tempered, last-minute factional deals.

Apparently the new Premier has been installed to save the furniture for the Labor Party. That tells you all you need to know about the contempt they have for the rest of Victoria. Backflip Ben is the third Labor Premier in three years and the second in a row installed by factional bosses rather than being elected by real people. What do we have to show for it? A new Premier who at half past 1 stood before the cameras and said, and I quote him directly:

Let me make one thing clear: I am not Daniel Andrews; I am not Jacinta Allan.

A sharp-lensed photographer even caught it on his notes – ‘I am not Daniel Andrews, not Jacinta Allan.’ I am sure we are all reassured Mr Carroll needed his notes to tell him that. Goodness. What an extraordinary thing to lead with in an opening pitch for the highest office in the state: listing the colleagues you are not. It sounds more like an excuse than an argument. What he means is that Labor’s 12-year record is indefensible. That is what it means: indefensible. If that record could be defended, he would have stood there and defended it, and goodness knows he has had enough practice at doing that. He spent years as Deputy Premier defending the very government he now promises will do differently. It is the same laughable nonsense we heard this morning from Mr Batchelor. He too parroted the line ‘Integrity is not optional.’ He talked about a new direction. What was wrong with the old direction, Mr Batchelor, the one you spent years in this place desperately defending?

In all this time neither Mr Batchelor nor Mr Carroll was once heard publicly demanding the royal commission that is now the Premier’s signature announcement. In fact the Premier twice as Deputy Premier said such an inquiry would take too long and cost too much. That is what Mr Carroll said: it would take too long and cost too much. Now he is a convert to our policy. Enough, it turns out, only became enough once the job was his.

Ben Carroll did not merely sit at the Andrews–Allen cabinet table; he voted for every budget, every tax rise and every debt blowout that has broken this state, every single one. What exactly is he asking Victorians to believe – that he was a hostage in the cabinet room, held there against his will for a decade, forced to vote for tax grab after tax grab, frogmarched into press conferences and made to grin, compelled – presumably under duress – to film all those cheerful social media videos praising the Big Build? I have heard of Stockholm syndrome, but that is just ridiculous, which brings us to the royal commission.

Geoffrey Watson SC estimates \$15 billion has been lost to the CFMEU’s rackets on government construction sites, and for two years the response from our friends across the chamber here – I call you friends – was delay, denial and dismissal. That is what you did: delay, deny and dismiss. I note the *Age*’s Resolve polling, which shows seven in 10 Victorians, nearly two-thirds of Labor’s own voters among them, wanted this inquiry – seven in 10 – and this government fought them the whole way; now on day one we get a royal commission. Announcing this royal commission that will be like a Coate inquiry – ‘I do not recall’ – is not some breathtaking, praiseworthy act of courage or morality; it is a cynical political survival tactic, a desperate attempt by the new Premier to wash his hands of corruption he ignored for years as Deputy Premier. He ignored the corruption.

There is a complication: we have always had a proposal for a royal commission, a real royal commission – yours will be a fake royal commission. The *Australian Financial Review* reports that the new Premier may himself be called to give evidence at his own royal commission, with the same newspaper having reported in 2022 that he attended a private CFMEU function – with John Setka –

as a guest of honour just weeks before the last election. The man who may end up in the witness box is now picking up the pen to write his own terms of reference. We often talk about this Labor government marking its own homework on integrity matters; in this case it is back to the future. There is no new direction at all. It is the same old Labor. As Jess Wilson said, it is a Temu royal commission: arriving late, looking nothing like the picture and falling apart the first time anyone tries to use it. Sadly, I doubt it will be as cheap as a Temu product.

In any case there is a kind of corruption, a Labor speciality, which no inquiry will reach. It is the grey kind: the jobs for mates, the appointment never advertised, the consultancy for the former staffer, the board seat for the faction. None of it is illegal, and that is precisely the problem. You do not clean up that culture by promoting a man who was mentored, staffed and installed by it. The basic, unavoidable truth for Labor is this: changing the leader does not wipe the slate clean. It does not cancel the debt nearing \$200 billion, growing \$1.2 million every hour and this year costing our state more in interest than we spend on Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and every kindergarten in the state combined. It does not fix a single corrupt and blown-out infrastructure project. The east-west link – \$1 billion paid to not build a road. The West Gate Tunnel – \$5.5 billion becoming more than \$10 billion, three years late. The North East Link – \$16 billion, becoming \$26 billion. There is the Commonwealth Games we begged for and then cancelled, with \$200 million posted to Glasgow. The Suburban Rail Loop – announced on Facebook, now costed by the Parliamentary Budget Office at close to a quarter of a trillion dollars. Who was Minister for Roads and Road Safety while the blowouts rolled in? Who was Minister for Public Transport, changing policy, changing position? None of this matters; it is just too late.

Look at the problems our state faces. Ben Carroll is not the cure; he is the cause. A new name on the office door is not going to cut crime. There is a criminal offence in this state every 50 seconds; 735 Victorians become victims of crime every single day. There are 405 fewer sworn police than when the last Premier took office, 1500 vacancies on the roster and 41 police stations closed or on reduced hours. A new name on the door does not treat a single patient. 68,116 Victorians are waiting for elective surgery.

Michael Galea interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: This is not funny, Mr Galea, this is serious. People are dying, people are waiting for surgery, and you treat it with contempt. You are a disgrace. Fewer than two in three code 1 ambulance call-outs arrived within 15 minutes. The median wait for general dental care is 151 days; in New South Wales it is eight. A new name on a door does not build a single home. 55,000 homes were built in the year to March, the fewest since 2016, all while 56,000 Victorians sit on the social housing waiting list. And notably, a new captain for Labor's sinking ship will not fix the schools. In the new Premier's own portfolio until the day before yesterday, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority board was sacked over the exam scandal and the teachers walked off the job after rejecting his pay offer. The Premier's most urgent task now is to land the very deal he spent months failing to land as minister.

Labor has changed its leader because it cannot change its record. The debt, the crime, the corruption and the failing services remain exactly where they were yesterday. All that has changed is a rearrangement of the nodding dogs at the media conference. So why did they bother? We know the answer, really. It is electoral arithmetic rather than some sudden moral conversion on corruption. Labor MPs have spent months having doors slammed in their faces in streets that used to be safe Labor territory.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs McArthur has referred to members of Parliament standing at media conferences with the Premier as dogs. Can I ask that she unequivocally withdraw that, because that is just an extraordinarily offensive thing to have said.

Bev McARTHUR: If you are offended, Minister, I will withdraw.

Harriet Shing: No, no.

Bev McARTHUR: I withdraw. Satisfied?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): As Mrs McArthur has actually unequivocally withdrawn –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Let us move on from here. It has been withdrawn. Mrs McArthur to continue.

Bev McARTHUR: So why did they bother? Well, we know, really. It is electoral arithmetic rather than some sudden moral conversion on corruption. Labor MPs have spent months having doors slammed in their faces in streets that used to be safe Labor territory. Even RedBridge's June survey put the former Premier at 17 per cent favourable and 59 per cent unfavourable – minus 42. The final Newspoll of her premiership was worse again: 25 per cent approval, 71 per cent disapproval, the worst net rating for any state Premier in the entire history of Newspoll. That means that Jacinta Allan left office less liked by Victorians than Donald Trump is by Americans. That is some record. And it was not remotely close. She left that particular achievement out of her resignation speech yesterday.

It seems the Premier's chief electoral asset, as Chip Le Grand noted, is that only about one voter in five knows enough about him to hold any view at all. That is the entire Labor strategy. Pick some random on the basis they will, by definition, automatically be more popular than Jacinta Allan. Even the details of Mr Carroll's rise do Labor no credit. We know about how much his promise to his daughter is worth. On the same day we saw the former Premier pledging him her 'unqualified support' and then promptly signing his rival's nomination form. If that is the loyalty Labor MPs show their families and one another, Victorians can well imagine what loyalty they show this state.

But I want to end on a more positive note. While Labor spent its winter counting factional numbers inside Parliament, Jess Wilson travelled to all 88 electorates listening to Victorians outside it – 36 days, 137 towns and suburbs, 6000 kilometres. I was with her on some of these visits, supporting our outstanding candidates in Western Victoria Region and recognising the genuine connection Jess is making with Victorian voters desperate for change. One side of politics was counting its own numbers, the other counting the things that matter: the police not there, the ambulances not arriving, the homes not built.

Four months from an election, recognise yesterday's events for what they are. Labor has not renewed itself. It has simply repackaged itself – the same product, the same factory, the same defects, just a new label. The Premier might steal our policies, but he cannot steal our integrity. He cannot ditch his record. He cannot hide his history. The fundamental choice on 28 November is not between Jacinta Allan's Labor and Ben Carroll's Labor; it is between four more years of the same tired, divided, debt-ridden Labor government and a fresh Liberal government with the energy and ideas to fix this state. I commend the motion to the house.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:53): Well, they are worried. They are rattled. You can tell from the contribution that Mrs McArthur has made that the Liberal Party, having sent their leader on a coronation tour of the state – and I do not know whether Mrs McArthur had some commemorative teaspoons minted up for that tour, but it is possible –

Harriet Shing interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Ten minutes in each electorate, that is right. As the Premier described it, the Leader of the Opposition went on her 'false start tour' over the last few weeks, and what we have seen today is just how worried the Liberal Party now are about the new direction that Labor is on under Ben Carroll and Gabrielle Williams. What they are soon going to be talking about inside their rooms is what is happening to their primary vote. What does it mean for them now that they have spent the

last couple of weeks on a coronation tour and the rest of the time measuring for drapes in the Premier's office? That is what they have been doing. Have a look at the latest Resolve poll and compare it to the poll that was published in December last year, just after the Leader of the Opposition took over. Since the latest – the sixth in seven years – Leader of the Opposition took over leading the Liberal Party, where they have come up with an idea for some fresh starts, the false dawn that is coming for them shows that their primary vote in the Resolve poll has dropped by 12 points in six months. In December the Resolve poll had the Liberal Party on 39 per cent of the primary vote, and in July it was 27. That seems like a catastrophic fall in the Liberal Party's primary vote. If you are going to come into this chamber and bring forward a motion about leadership, at least have the guts to admit the terminal state of the leadership of the Liberal Party when its primary vote has declined by 30 per cent in six months. The polls do not lie.

They are desperate to come up with something. They are now scrambling with the new Premier and new Deputy Premier, the new direction that they are setting for this government and the laser-sharp focus that the new Premier and new Deputy Premier have on the issues that absolutely concern Victorians. The first act of our new Premier was to say that there will be a royal commission into the Big Build and the construction sector. What do we see a day later from the Liberal Party? They are already backing away from their support for a royal commission. What we have seen today from the Leader of the Liberal Party is her now trying to discredit the notion of a royal commission, saying 'When we said we wanted a royal commission, we really didn't mean we wanted a royal commission.' We had Mrs McArthur come in here and give us some description, trying to compare the royal commission to some online shopping forum. I do not think anyone in the chamber quite understood what she was getting at quite clearly.

The Liberal Party are now running away from their support for a royal commission into the construction sector in this state. If that is wrong, then they should come out and back what the Premier is doing right now unequivocally. That is what they have got to do if they are to be taken seriously on the issue of who is best placed to tackle corruption, because the new Premier in this state has been absolutely clear about what he has said is a priority for him on tackling corruption and a priority for the government: royal commission – coming; special prosecutor – coming; standalone legislation to implement the follow-the-dollar powers for IBAC – coming.

While I am on the topic of IBAC powers, one of the things that we do know, if you want to get into the question of leadership and integrity, is that when the government announced that it was going to implement the recommendations of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's inquiry into the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, the first substantive, and I think the most far-reaching, recommendation that the IOC made and that the government accepted was amending the definition of 'corrupt conduct' so that conduct did not have to constitute a criminal offence to be investigated by IBAC. What did the Leader of the Liberal Party have to say about that change? The Leader of the Liberal Party Jess Wilson went on radio and said she did not support the change. She thinks that IBAC should not have the power to investigate corrupt conduct unless it constitutes a criminal offence, a threshold that even her own members on the Integrity and Oversight Committee, by supporting the report, think is unacceptable in Victoria today. The Liberal Party claim a moral high ground on integrity, but when it comes to the crunch, they do not support real action on it. They do not support changing the definition of 'corrupt conduct' here in the state of Victoria to remove the requirement that conduct must constitute a criminal offence before it can be investigated by IBAC.

Harriet Shing: They voted against it already in this house: serious misconduct in public office, they opposed.

Ryan BATCHELOR: That is right. The Liberal Party have got form on voting against measures to strengthen Victoria's integrity framework, to strengthen Victoria's corruption framework, because in 2018, when the government brought forward proposals to introduce and strengthen the definition of 'corrupt conduct' that IBAC could investigate to include serious misconduct in public office as one

of the elements, the Liberal Party voted against it. I have got a pretty sneaking suspicion that if we bring a piece of legislation to the Parliament to expand the definition of 'corrupt conduct', they will vote against it again, because that is what they do. What we have seen today, as I said before, is the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Party, already backing away from their support of a royal commission into the construction sector here in the state of Victoria, refusing to support what the Premier is doing. They say one thing at one time and they change their mind a moment later.

No wonder the people of Victoria are sceptical of the Leader of the Opposition and what her plans are for Victoria. We actually know what her plans are for Victoria. Her plans for Victoria – the Liberal Party's plans for Victoria – are to cut services. That is what they have said they are going to do. They have made a whole lot of promises, and the only way to keep their promises, particularly those that are cutting taxes, is to cut services, because that is what Liberals do. They did it last time. They cut funding out of our health system. They cut funding from our paramedics. They have got a long track record of closing schools, and the last time they were in government they even cut funding to the CFA. We know that a Liberal and One Nation government are going to be sharpening the axe for services that Victorians rely on and that what is going to be in their sights are the health and education services that the state provides, that Victorians rely on. What is going to be on the chopping block is the cost-of-living support that we give when we can. What is going to be on the chopping block are the investments in local communities that make our state a great place to live. We know the Liberal Party is sharpening the axe. We know the Liberals have cuts on their agenda. What they have revealed today is that they are not serious about integrity either. They have refused to back the Premier's moves on a royal commission. They have refused to back our changes to the definition of 'corrupt conduct'. If you want to have a debate about leadership, they are failing.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (15:03): I have got to say that was an Oscar-winning performance. It really was. I think actually you missed your calling, Mr Batchelor, because you could have been in the movie which won the Best Picture Oscar this year, called *One Battle After Another*. I think you would have had a starring role in that, because we have seen battle after battle after battle. In fact we even heard it around the chamber yesterday, particularly up a storey or so. There was a lot of shouting going on up there. Who knows what was happening there. But yes, *One Battle After Another*. We see this tired old Labor government battle and battle and battle on, limping on. It will end in four months time.

I am very, very pleased to be here supporting Mrs McArthur's motion 1527 on the notice paper, which talks about the failed leadership of the Australian Labor Party and in particular Ben Carroll. It is true that Ben Carroll was sitting at the table when key decisions were made. It is true that Ben Carroll publicly supported these decisions of government at every single turn. And in recent weeks on the public record on multiple occasions he has backed in Jacinta Allan and her leadership, saying that he was proud to support her and that he has the job that he wants. This is the same person who bungled VCE exams not once but twice. This is the same person who cannot land a deal with public school teachers and support staff despite the rhetoric of the Australian Labor Party that they are the only ones that deliver an Education State. I mean, the only state that has been delivered this week is a state of paralysis. He also sat by idly, and we have seen it in the crime statistics as they have continued to escalate, which has caused widespread fear in the Victorian community. He supported machete bins. He supported the machete bans, and that was their answer to knife crime. He sat there and supported them. We cannot forget that Mr Carroll also publicly backed Ms Allan as Premier when she refused to call a royal commission into corruption on Big Build sites. After Mr Carroll's ascension yesterday, all of a sudden it has become this unbelievable road-to-Damascus moment, and the Victorian community are rightly asking what has changed.

Victorians know that there are serious problems with the Victorian government, but I do not think anyone could put it better than the new Premier himself. I would like to quote the media release that

he put out yesterday. He started off by saying he was humbled to be elected unanimously in the party room that we heard from yesterday. He said that:

Yesterday, a group of my colleagues approached me and informed me Jacinta Allan no longer had the support of our caucus.

I do not know who it was across there. If you want to put your hand up, please tell us, but I am sure we will hear it in the media. He said the decision was not an easy one but the stakes of this election remain high. He went on about some fake coalition that he thinks has been formed, but has not, and then he said:

But it is clear that on key issues that matter to Victorians, our government needs to go in a new direction.

It needs to go in a new direction – what does that say for the direction that it has been going in for the last 11½ years? You have just had a Premier of the governing party here in Victoria say that the last 11 years were the wrong direction. Really? That is what the new Premier is saying – the last 11½ years have been the wrong direction because a new one is needed right now and as Premier he is somehow going to deliver that new direction.

He continued:

That's why today we are saying enough is enough.

In my Government, integrity will not be optional.

Whether in business, politics or the union movement –

there is a lot to see there –

there will be zero tolerance for those who misuse their positions.

Is this the Premier talking, or is it the Leader of the Opposition? Because these do not sound like the words of a Premier. They sound like the words of a Leader of the Opposition. We have said this as well, that we want to bring about change. Hello? This is coming from a man that has been at the table and has been at the heart of the government. You cannot just say, 'Oh, I want to bring about change' when you have been part of it. He went on:

... we will strengthen IBAC by giving them follow the money powers this term. Not in 2027, now.

It was not that long ago that people in this place were saying, 'No, no, no. We can't do it now. We need to get it right. We need to take the time to get it right. We need to work through all the detail.' But it can be done now, because your new Premier says so. How does that marry up at all? It does not. He continued:

I will do things differently, because different times require a new approach ...

or maybe it is just different polling figures. He went on to talk about how he was raised in the western suburbs, his first job was at Kmart, he grew up in Airport West, and this is a great one:

I still remember the feeling of receiving my first pay cheque.

It taught me, from a young age, the value of a dollar.

That's why I understand why Victorians are concerned about government spending.

Let me repeat that: 'That's why I understand why Victorians are concerned about government spending.' For the last 11½ years this person has sat around the cabinet table looking at all the budgets, ticking them off, ticking his departmental budgets off, and he comes out and says, 'Oh, but I know the Victorian people are concerned about government spending.' How disingenuous can you be? He went on to talk about basic services that he is allegedly going to fund:

And under my Victorian Government, when crimes are committed they will be dealt with as communities expect.

So they were not being dealt with before? Clearly not. I cannot believe that the new Premier has completely and utterly thrown 11½ years of Labor government under the bus – thump, thump, thump, thump, thump under every single tyre. He said:

Labor will always be the party of working people, but Victoria's economy is a partnership between working people, government and business.

He went on to say:

A government I lead will respect that partnership – by making sure that Victoria is the best place for business to invest, and a place that Victorians want to start a business in.

But there was zero mention of reducing any taxes that he had been a part of introducing – the GP tax, the schools tax, the windfall gains tax, even the immensely unpopular emergency services tax. There was no mention of reform whatsoever. He said:

Together, we will start a new chapter for Victoria ...

a new chapter. He said:

It is clear that Victorians want change.

Well, yes, that is pretty clear.

That change starts today.

You have basically got a Premier that says that the last 11½ years of his Labor government have been hopeless – absolutely hopeless. One of the final comments is that:

My focus will always be on you.

- On the family working hard to build a better future.
- On the nurse caring for the sick.
- On the teacher inspiring the next generation.

Jeez, this is coming from the bloke that could not land a pay deal, not once but twice. He has had two pay deals rejected by the teachers union – not one, two. He has bungled exams not once but twice. How on earth can we expect anyone that has that track record to run Victoria when they cannot even run their own department?

There are plenty more articles circulating around which go into great detail about comments that were made yesterday by anonymous Labor MPs. Yesterday's meeting was described by Labor MPs who spoke on the condition of anonymity as 'a debacle', 'unhinged' and 'sad and chaotic'. That is what defines this Premier.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:13): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mrs McArthur's name in regard to the Labor leadership. I had the benefit of listening to some of the contribution that Mr McCracken made and others in the chamber, and it just seems that this motion is founded on business as usual for those opposite, which is to launch into personal attacks and Olympic-level complaining about everything that this government has ever done or that any other iteration of any other Labor government has ever done.

I think what has happened in opposition is that those opposite have become experts at complaining and Olympic-level whingeing, but I am yet to hear one policy idea or anything from those opposite other than to slash \$40 billion from the budget, and there is the very strong likelihood that if they ever had the privilege of being elected to govern this state they would not be able to do it in their own right. They will be forming a coalition with One Nation, and the problem for them will be that they will not be doing anything other than what Pauline is telling them she wants to be done. So for them to talk about leadership is the most hypocritical thing I have heard. I hear a lot of hypocrisy in this place from those opposite actually, but this one has to take the cake.

When we talk about leadership, oh my goodness, for those opposite there have been six leaders in seven years. Six leaders in seven years, and you want to point the finger at Labor over here and talk about us. I could go on and on and on, but I will not, because when we talk about leadership we also get to talk about legacy and we get to talk about the things that we have actually delivered on, why people voted for our government three times in a row and why they are asking for a fourth. Our record, under the leadership of Labor premiers, particularly in health, for example, is that we have invested in 11 new hospitals and upgraded 40, including the new Footscray and Frankston hospitals. There are 17,000 more nurses and midwives and improved nurse-to-patient ratios, and we have given a 28.4 per cent pay rise to nurses and midwives.

I am going to stop there and just inject a little bit of information for those opposite, because clearly they are not the party of the workers. They went to war with so many workers when they were last in government some time ago. Mr McCracken in his contribution went to, 'Oh, this is a failed Premier because he can't even fix the teachers dispute. An offer has been rejected twice.' Actually, that is called normal enterprise bargaining. Offers are made and rejected. That happens all the time. As a former union official who has probably done more enterprise agreement negotiations than I have had hot dinners, I can tell you that that is nothing unusual; offers are made. Striking is not unusual either. That is an international human right that workers have under International Labour Organization conventions. It is not unusual for workers to strike. In fact that is what they do to actually advance their pay negotiations. I can say I have attended many rallies and stoppages with workers because they actually help facilitate changes in position for bargaining. It is all completely normal. It is nothing unusual. In fact I encourage workers to strike. It is exercising their international political rights under international labour conventions. Again I had to go into a bit of a history lesson and a bit of a union bargaining lesson. I know there are not many union members over there on the opposition benches; I can say that with some certainty.

We struck a deal with the nurses union: 28.4 per cent pay rises. We have also –

Georgie Crozier: What about the teachers?

Sonja TERPSTRA: Well, you were not here, Ms Crozier. If you had been here, you would have understood what I was just talking about. Fifty thousand more surgeries, specialist appointments for kids, a free virtual emergency department, Chemist Care Now, 212,000 planned surgeries – the Liberals' record on health is closing hospitals and cutting nurses. Last time they were in government they cut \$1 billion from health and closed hospitals in 12 regional towns – that is just on health. When we talk about leadership – leading on health – that is one of our core-and-grid issues. We talk about investment in public health and public education. You can see where our investments lie, but what we know from those opposite is very little policy. All they have announced is \$40 billion in cuts, and the One Nation–Liberal coalition will make sure they land that. What this means – and if you want to talk about leadership, you can see the negative leadership – is that our approach is to have positivity and optimism because we know what people want. That is why they keep voting for Labor governments. They know that they can trust us to deliver on public health and public education. That is why they keep voting for us.

I will talk about public education for a minute. I am going to look at free TAFE. That is one of our signature policies. Let us just look at TAFE when those opposite were last in government. The TAFE system was on its knees. They cut and closed and sold off campuses. I mean, the Lilydale campus, I remember, was a signature campaign when Labor was in opposition. It was a successful campaign, because when we came back into government that campus was saved. Again, at every opportunity, when we talk about leadership, those opposite, should they ever get the opportunity to lead, will cut and close and sell. Privatisation is in their DNA. Cuts and closures are in their DNA. What we do is actually invest in people having social mobility. That is what those opposite do not understand: if you invest in education and you invest in health, you actually lift people and give them the opportunity to contribute to the economy as well. But they do not get that. They do not understand that. That is why we grow jobs. For example, our economy has grown faster than any other state over the last decade,

with 500,000 jobs created since 2020. Victoria has the only budget surplus on the east coast. When we talk about leadership, you can see what our plans demonstrate through the leadership of our Premiers.

I will talk again about those opposite: six leaders in seven years. Jess is the leader now, but who would be the leader if a Liberal–One Nation coalition were to win government? Who would be the leader? Would we have a One Nation deputy? This is what people say to me when I am out in my electorate and talking to people at festivals. They say to me, ‘Sonja, I am actually terrified about the prospect of a Liberal–One Nation coalition government.’ That is seriously what people say to me. And I know those opposite will not acquiesce to that, but the bottom line is they would absolutely, if they are ever given the privilege of governing this state, form a coalition with One Nation, and goodness knows what would happen.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Absolutely, Mr McIntosh. I will take up that interjection. They would absolutely be led by One Nation, because they have got no ideas of their own over there. It is like 17 weeks out to an election, and I am still yet to hear any cogent, detailed policies or plans from those opposite other than to cut \$40 billion from the budget, which equates to sacking one in seven public servants. I would really like to know what they might do with the Labour Hire Authority. We have all heard all this week about corruption and all of this. But the Labour Hire Authority is doing good work, cancelling the licences of businesses because they do not meet the fit and proper person test and they should not have a licence. I guarantee you that one of the first orders of business of those opposite, should they ever have the privilege of getting elected, would be to cut that authority and axe it – because they would go, ‘Oh, business doesn’t want red tape.’ But there is a very important example of why we need to have regulatory bodies to enforce licences and the like – because what the Labour Hire Authority is doing is ensuring that labour hire businesses that are operating are fit for purpose and operating effectively and properly under the act. So I want those opposite – and I have not heard them – to commit to not axing that agency.

Richard Welch interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Go on. I look forward to it – through you, Acting President. Mr Welch, as the Shadow Minister for Industry, should commit to not axing the Labour Hire Authority. In fact let us look at other states on the eastern seaboard. I think Queensland have kept their labour hire authority. I know we have a Labor government in New South Wales. But, you know, the Labour Hire Authority here does critically important work. I reckon – I feel it in my bones, I feel it in my waters – that should those opposite be given the chance, their first order of business would be to cut and close the Labour Hire Authority and sack all those public servants. Like I said earlier, there will be \$40 billion in cuts. That equates to sacking one in seven public servants. They cannot do that without cutting into services.

Again, our budget goes to health and education. We develop people; we invest in people so they can have social mobility, build capital, contribute to the economy and have an economy that services them. Goodness only knows what would happen with them over there, should those opposite ever be elected. But I know, as I said earlier, it would be a Liberal–One Nation coalition, and it would just be utter chaos for Victoria. I will leave my remarks there. Needless to say, the government will be opposing this motion.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:23): I rise to speak to Mrs McArthur’s motion 1527, which outlines that:

... after more than a decade of Labor government, Victorians now have their third Labor Premier in three years, the second in a row installed by factions of the Labor Party ...

I think that is a very important point, and I want to speak to that. The motion goes on to state that:

... the new Premier, the Honourable Ben Carroll MP:

served as Deputy Premier throughout a government mired in CFMEU corruption allegations, record debt approaching \$200 billion and record crime ...

and importantly –

as Minister for Education, presided over botched VCE exams, the collapse of teacher pay negotiations, statewide strikes and lost learning for Victorian children;

refused to support a royal commission into Big Build corruption, dismissing it as something that would take too long and cost too much ...

The sudden leadership challenge that he undertook was done after he publicly looked former Premier Allan in the eye and pledged loyalty. That just exposes the depth of division within this government and the chaos it is overseeing. If you look at Victoria today, the motion goes on to speak about the crisis that we are seeing in very important areas like crime, health, education, housing, debt and integrity. It was the cabinet that Mr Carroll has sat in for many years that presided over this entire mess.

I agree with the final point of Mrs McArthur's motion, which says – and I will read it word for word:

concludes that the only leadership ballot that can fix Victoria is November's election, when Victorians finally get the vote Labor's factions have twice denied them and can throw this entire failed government out of office.

I could not agree more with that sentiment of Mrs McArthur, because as we have seen, we have got virtually a failed state. We have a state that is so dysfunctional, and what happened yesterday was extraordinary. We had members of the caucus yelling at one another, and with just moments before coming into this chamber, who knew who the Premier of this state was? We have this ongoing factional division. The power plays of Labor are just incredible. We have a Premier now installed who was Deputy Premier to former Premier Allan, who oversaw so many issues.

I want to go to the issue of corruption. This is an extraordinary state that we are in. We have the power plays of Labor factional infighting because the polling was so bad, because Victorians have woken up to what is happening to our great state under the administration of Labor. It does not matter who is leading them. We saw what happened with Daniel Andrews. I mean, look at that legacy: the COVID legacy, the lies, the deception, the cover-ups and what he did to this state. He set it up with Jacinta Allan and then Ben Carroll. He sat around that cabinet table and made decisions that have not been in the best interests of all Victorians: the debt that is reaching \$200 billion, the interest repayments of \$24 million a day. I have got stakeholders that come to me saying, 'We need support and assistance, Georgie, because if we don't get that, if we don't get the support of government, we're going to collapse. Our industry sector is going to collapse.' That is the legacy of Labor. I explain to them, 'You're asking for four days of interest-free payments that you need. You're asking for that, but there's no money. The government can't provide you that money despite the advocacy and despite the need.'

That is what I am so concerned about. Labor do not care. They care about their own seats, and we saw that play out in their party room yesterday. The polling shows that they are going to lose in November, after 12 years of administration, where corruption is rife, where firebombings are commonplace, where aggravated burglaries by machete-wielding thugs are commonplace, where unemployment is the highest in the country, where our health system is absolutely dysfunctional because of the ineptitude of this current administration and the previous ones. And I go back to Daniel Andrews, with his red shirts rorts, the corruption, the cover-ups and the deception of the Victorian people. Jacinta Allan was his deputy and oversaw all of this. Then we have got the corruption, as has so beautifully been played out in the public domain through the media. There was Jacinta Allan, the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery responsible for that debacle and the embarrassment. Our athletes are over there now. These MPs disregard anything, disregard what it means. They should all hang their heads in shame.

Most importantly, they should hang their heads in shame and ask what is in the best interests of the state. It is to clean up the corruption. It is to stop the crime. It is to bring down the debt. It is to give hope to Victorian businesses and families and not be corrupted and have the ongoing cover-up of this

dreadful government that has overseen so much mess. I am so pleased. Jacinta Allan and her MPs could not go and knock on doors. It is reported that they could not knock on doors. People were slamming doors in their faces and saying 'You're toxic. Go away. We want change.' That is all we hear when we are out. And let me tell you, everywhere we go people are saying they we want change: 'Enough, we want this government to be gone.'

What does this Premier that we now have do? He has sat around the cabinet table. It is the same government; it just has a different head. That is all it is. It is the same government that has overseen the same level of corruption, the same level of mismanagement, the same level of deception, the same level of destruction and policymaking that is destroying the state. I want to say that Ben Carroll has come out and taken the policies from us. We have a plan. He said, 'We're going to do a royal commission,' after saying he would not do a royal commission and that it was going to cost too much. He is going to open police stations that Labor has closed. He is going to put a pause on the Suburban Rail Loop, which has all been just marvellous and an absolutely must-do project that he as Deputy Premier stood by the former Premier and said had to be. I cannot believe what is going on. And the tough-on-crime approach – give me a break. Victorians can see through the spin. They can see through the deception. They are sick of it. They know this is a tired, desperate government that needs to go. We need to sweep them from power so we can clean up the corruption, clean up the mess, clean up the crime, clean up the cover-ups. The royal commission, goodness me – as Nick McKenzie quite eloquently says:

More than anything, Carroll's royal commission must exhaustively probe the political decision-making that enabled the CFMEU's Big Build operation and overlapping corruption and wrongdoing that flowed from it.

It must grill both Allan and Daniel Andrews, and examine whether Victoria's public servants acted without fear or favour overseeing the Big Build and reporting to ministers.

We do not want another COVID inquiry. That was just a sham, a farce. If you look at those terms of reference, they sounded all right, but it was a farce. It did not get to what it needed to get to. This Labor government will do anything, just like they did with the red shirts, just like they have done with every decision around the SRL. Let us look at it: 'to be confirmed'. We cannot even get the true figure. It is in the budget papers: 'to be confirmed'. What does that mean to the Victorian taxpayer? We do not know the extent of that cost, let alone what we discovered this week, which is that there are more costs added to it, with another \$6 billion that has been discovered. You will not get the truth out of this government. They cover up, they lie, they are deceptive and they are desperate. The only thing that Victorians want and need is, in the words of Malinauskas this morning, a fresh start. That is not with Ben Carroll, that is with Jess Wilson and the Liberal and Nationals team. I urge all members to support this motion.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:32): Once again we see the Victorian Liberal Party using Parliament not to debate legislation, not to put forward ideas, not to improve the lives of Victorians but to stage yet another political stunt in this chamber. This motion essentially asks us to pass judgement on leadership. On leadership I would first like to say and point out that our new Labor government, led by Ben Carroll and Gabrielle Williams, is determined to take Victoria in a new direction. Our new government will return the focus to the issues that matter most to Victorians: health, education, cost of living and community safety.

There is too much at risk at this election. The polling says that Victoria is on a path to elect the first-ever Liberal–One Nation government. This Liberal–One Nation government would cut frontline workers, hospitals and schools. If that is the debate the opposition wants to have about leadership, then let us have it honestly, because no political party in modern Victorian politics has been more consumed by leadership turmoil, factional warfare, internal instability and litigation than the Victorian Liberal Party. The motion completely ignores –

Tom McIntosh: Talk straight.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you, Mr McIntosh. I will do that. The motion completely ignores that those opposite, the Liberal Party of Victoria, have spent more than a decade changing leaders because they cannot stop fighting themselves. Let us look at the record. After 11 years in opposition, Ted Baillieu became Premier in 2010. After serving only two years as Premier he was replaced by Denis Napthine. Denis Napthine went on to oversee the Liberal government's defeat in 2014, with instability continuing. Matthew Guy became opposition leader. After he led the coalition to defeat in 2018, Matthew Guy resigned. That campaign had been overshadowed by what became the lobster with a mobster dinner, a meeting with alleged underworld figures that defined Liberal integrity in the worst possible way. And the Liberals have not learned, because in May this year Ms Wilson, the current leader, appeared at a news conference alongside Elsternwick restaurateur Perry Le Greco, presenting him as a small business voice. Mr Le Greco was previously convicted and jailed for dishonesty offences, including siphoning more than \$224,000 from a kindergarten's accounts in 2012.

Back to 2018: Michael O'Brien replaces Mr Guy. But here is where it gets particularly remarkable. In 2021 there were two spill motions against Mr O'Brien, one in March and one in September. The September spill was successful, and Matthew Guy was returned to the role, the same Matthew Guy who had already lost one election and resigned – recycling. He then failed to win the 2022 election and resigned again. John Pesutto then became opposition leader, and the leadership instability did not stop there. Victorians then watched as the Liberal Party descended into months of bitter conflict over the Moira Deeming affair. Members publicly attacked each other. Former leaders intervened. Liberals were distrustfully recording each other in private meetings, and as we all know, the dispute spilled into the courts. The Federal Court found in favour of Moira Deeming in her defamation case against John Pesutto, resulting in significant political and financial consequences for the Liberal Party, and indeed personally for John Pesutto. The fallout ultimately contributed to the end of Mr Pesutto's leadership. So then we had Brad Battin, from December 2024 until November 2025.

By any measure this is extraordinary. This is not the history of a stable leadership or a stable political party – any wonder the polling has dived in recent years. That is the history of a party permanently and structurally at war with itself. Instead of developing policies and focusing on housing or health or education or cost-of-living relief, the Liberal Party spent years consumed by internal warfare. And where has all the instability left them today? After cycling through seven different leadership changes in little more than a decade, with numerous court hearings costing them millions of dollars, the Liberal Party now ask Victorians to place their confidence in yet another leader. After more than a decade of internal coups, leadership spills, factional conflict and Liberal Party –

Members interjecting.

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, Acting President, I am sitting about three chairs down from Ms Ermacora and I can barely hear her. Could you ask those opposite to please tone it down a bit?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I will ask Ms Ermacora to continue, and if we can bring the volume down a bit in the chamber, that would be appreciated.

Jacinta ERMACORA: The current leader Jess Wilson is desperately trying to hold together a party room that includes deeply conservative MPs, who are anti abortion, who hold extremely concerning values about multicultural communities, as well as MPs who are small-l liberals and socially more progressive. We saw the abstentions when you shamefully voted against treaty. We saw it when Mrs Hermans was the only Liberal to vote for the petition on Guru Nanak Lake. We have seen it when you have been unable to talk to each other sometimes and even occasionally scowling at each other. After all of this instability, after years of leadership spills and internal warfare, the Victorian Liberal Party now asks Victorians to place their confidence in a team that can only form government in partnership with a third party. If Ms Wilson is serious about asking Victorians to trust her with government, she owes Victorians an honest answer: how does she intend to form government, based on the current numbers? The question before Victorians is not simply who leads the Liberal Party, it

is about their culture and their default position on many issues. Not only do we want to know how they are prioritising the community –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, I notice motion 1527 does not mention the Liberal Party. It mentions and talks about the Victorian Labor Party. As far as I can see, Ms Ermacora has devoted her entire contribution to a discussion of the Liberal Party. Actually this is about the governing party at the moment, which is the Labor Party in case you have lost track of it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Thank you, Mr Davis, but it has been a very wideranging debate and I have been here for the duration of it. I ask Ms Ermacora to continue.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I come back to who is the third party that they might partner with. Pauline Hanson believes that workers are lazy and should be easier to sack and that childcare funding is out of control. What we can be sure of is that the state of Victoria under a Liberal government with One Nation will be meaner and less safe for women. Child care will be more expensive and families will struggle to pay for ordinary things. Pauline Hanson also believes that family violence is a two-way street, completely diminishing the power dynamic that research has shown causes violence against women. The Liberals have not spoken out against violent language against women. What we do know from all of this is that Victoria under the Liberals, Nats and One Nation will be a state where it will be okay to attack women with violent language, a state where workers will feel unsafe against being sacked. Victorians deserve to know –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I appreciate that you are trying to stop me because I have made a good point. Victorians deserve to know what deals might be struck, what compromises might be made and what price would be paid to secure the numbers to govern. It is breathtakingly hypocritical for the Liberal Party to raise this issue about leadership when their own is an absolute failure.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:43): There is a Neil Sedaka song that goes, ‘Oh! Carol, I am but a fool.’ Let me change it to ‘Oh! Carroll, Victoria you are making of fools.’ It goes on, and I am not going to wax lyrical because clearly I have thought about this for a long time, but it is just repeating in my head. There is another line that says, ‘You treat me cruel.’ I think what this government has done to the Victorian population for the last decade is absolutely cruel.

I want to start off with some commentary about my electorate, my dear electorate, the one that I love and live in. That is a novel thought for some on the other side of the chamber. When I first came in the government was hell-bent on closing down a coal-fired power station, the Hazelwood power station. There were recommendations to do a slow close, but the government came in and trebled the coal royalties and shut that power station down. Lo and behold, what happened at that time was they decided to sprinkle some money around and they started up the Latrobe Valley Authority. That was a huge and utter waste of time other than the initial funding for transferring some workers into Loy Yang A and B and Yallourn. I say this because at the time, 30 October 2018, the then Minister for Industry and Employment Mr Carroll and the Premier stood side by side in Morwell flagging the solution, flagging a great white hope down there in terms of an electric vehicle manufacturing plant.

They came down and they stood with hand on heart, ‘We care about the valley’ apparently. It was going to be a massive electric vehicle manufacturing plant in the Latrobe Valley, promising 500 local jobs and up to around 2000 electric vehicles annually; that is the bill we were sold. It was on the eve of the election, and Minister Carroll at the time promised us 5000 jobs. With the closure of Hazelwood power station, we had just lost straight, direct, full-time jobs, around 750 to 1000, and then you have to look at all those other complementary services. We lost those. He stood down there with hand on heart telling the people of the Latrobe Valley, ‘We’re going to create another 500 jobs.’ Let me find

some quotes for you. This was in the *Age*, and there were other ones that were in the *Latrobe Valley Express*, our local paper. He said:

The auto sector is going to change more in the next five years than it has in the past 50, and this investment in 500 jobs building these SEA Electric vehicles, proven and tested already in Dandenong, are now going to be distributed and built right here in the Valley is wonderful news for the Valley.

He went on to say the Latrobe Valley and the state were:

... on the path to being the national leader in electrical vehicles.

On and on it goes. Well, guess what happened to electric vehicles in the Latrobe Valley, something that Mr Carroll had promised our region. Zip, nada, nothing – no jobs.

Let me go on. Steelvion was another one that he announced down in the valley, again as a placating measure and as hope during the closure for our wonderful power workers that we saw over many years. He promised Steelvion 55 new jobs, diversifying, and this left a trail of debt right across not only the valley for small businesses that had connected with Steelvion, potentially under this tag, under this investment potentially from the government under Mr Carroll. So when I hear in my head, 'Oh! Carol, I have been but a fool' – that is the commentary – well, Mr Carroll has been very cruel to the people in the Latrobe Valley by pushing that barrow and selling us a bill of goods that never came to fruition.

I wanted to put that on record because it seems there is such a lot of discussion about members of Parliament et cetera. But what this government has done in the last decade is not only impacting Victorians now, in this era, but will impact our children and our children's children. Mr Carroll has been part of the architecture, part of the inner circle and part of the inner wheel that has seen a debt of \$200 billion in the next forward estimates.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Melina BATH: It is eye-watering and difficult to get your head around. Well, let us see what it could have built in our region. It could have built the Wonthaggi Hospital. The Liberals and Nationals have promised stage 2 of the Wonthaggi Hospital. I was very much aware in the last election, in 2022, that we heard the good news from Labor that they were going to produce stages 2 and 3. Then what is there? They are so adept at it: 'Oh, there's planning.' Then there is, 'Oh, we're looking into the dirt, the grass' or whatever it is. And then there is just this elongated trail-off into the never-never land, the fantasy land of 'We're not getting it done.' Then there is the West Gippsland Hospital. We promised in 2018, we promised in 2022 and we promised again only last week with Wayne Farnham, Jess Wilson and Danny O'Brien the West Gippsland Hospital. We have been sold a dud bill by this government. That is what some of the corrupt money on the Big Build project could have funded. Fifteen billion dollars – that is the one thing my Liberal colleagues and the Acting President, who is my National Party colleague, say when they go out into the regions, when they go out into their communities and into their local town halls. What do they say above everything? The number that is on everybody's lips is the \$15 billion that is gone and that was wasted on thugs, on criminals, on bikies and whatever else.

Richard Welch interjected.

Melina BATH: That was the one I missed: strippers. It was not an issue for the now Premier while he stood beside and behind the former Premier. Where was his punch? Where was his soul? Where was he saying he wants to actually fund these things in Gippsland or Eastern Victoria Region and he wants to do that work? No, he was just staying schtum because he was either controlled by the Premier or he did not have the intestinal fortitude to stand up and punch and say, 'We need a royal commission.' The Liberals and Nationals have called for that for months, and we would deliver that in November. Indeed it might be worth having a look at the terms of reference now that we see this potential royal commission to see if they are going to go soft in terms of the royal commission.

I just want to go to some other things that I think are important to put on record. It is no great sleight that, under the minister's portfolio, he moved from not delivering jobs in the valley and into the education sphere. I spoke yesterday on this – to bungle VCE exams is abominable.

A member: Twice.

Melina BATH: To bungle it in consecutive years is shocking. There are families, children and schools who work so hard to do that, who work toward achieving their outcomes. But to bungle that – if you cannot get these sorts of things right. There are such a lot of people in the education sphere, so many of them are working hard. Why couldn't he put processes in place? Whether it was lack of staff, whether it was pressure, whatever it was, it is the minister's responsibility to get that right.

The other things he has not got right in my electorate, in Eastern Victoria Region: 19 of the state school buildings are rated as poor at last count, and there could be more because we are still yet to see the new condition report. Nineteen of them, and 26 are average. If you want to wonder where money from this \$15 billion of corrupt money should go, then take a look at some of the schools in my electorate that could have their roofs fixed, their gutters cleaned and renewed and their carpets replaced. It does matter how you operate. It does matter the integrity. This Premier has been in the driver's seat, in the car, in the bus for all that has existed in this state in the last decade, except in my electorate, where those electric vehicles did not exist and never will, because people promised things, like this Premier, and failed to deliver.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:53): It is interesting the member from the Nationals talks about 'her' electorate. It is interesting that she probably has not visited 60 per cent of her electorate in her time, which is probably a grave mistake, given that the One Nation political party will be running candidates across the entire election. So yes, members of the Nationals would probably be wise to get out of their comfort zone and talk to voters across their entire electorate and would probably do well, when they talk about jobs, to get out of the way of jobs being delivered in the valley – the Delburn wind farm has 300 jobs and is under construction right now – rather than coming into this place with petitions. Although we know that is what they are good at, the LNP – petitions about what they are against, petitions about stopping a project under construction with line of sight to Hazelwood pit mine, line of sight to the transmission lines, line of sight to 200 megawatts of generation that will keep power prices down for this whole state. We know what the LNP are against, but we will never hear what they will do. We look at Marinus Link, we look at offshore wind, we look at these various projects. There was the announcement by the SEC two weeks ago with the long duration storage. These are real projects delivering power and delivering jobs, but of course it is beneath the Nationals and the Liberals to acknowledge them. In fact they oppose them.

It is very interesting we have this motion. Some of my colleagues here and I were actually trying to – I refrained from going to Google to try and remember all the leaders that the Liberals have had. By memory, we had Baillieu, we had Napthine, we had lobster with the mobster Guy, we had O'Brien, we had Guy, we had Pesutto – I actually forgot about Pesutto – we had Battin, and we have Wilson. So it is Baillieu, Napthine, Guy, O'Brien, Guy, Pesutto, Battin, Wilson, and not to mention Sam Groth, who is no longer there – the deputy leader decided to pack up and leave. And of course we had this chamber's favourite. I have forgotten his name. Someone help me out here, who went to England?

Ingrid Stitt: Mr Bath.

Tom McINTOSH: Mr Bath. I have got Bath here, but I thought it did not sound right – Dr Bath. I said 'mister', not 'doctor'. Dr Bath was in the leadership group, but he decided halfway through the term to pack up and go –

Melina Bath: I am Bath. It is not Bath.

Evan Mulholland: It is Bach.

Tom McINTOSH: Bach. Sorry. I knew something was wrong. Something was very wrong. He decided to pack up and go to the other side of the world.

The problem underpinning the Liberals and the Nationals is that there are no shared values. You do not know what you believe in. You have your leadership challenges, and each of you make 31 phone calls saying how toxic and how wrong everyone else in your party is. You drag each other down, and you are not focusing on improving the lives of Victorians. We are seeing this play out as a slow-motion car wreck with the federal Liberal–National parties. We are down to the famous electric Kombi van worth of federal Liberal members in Victoria. We are seeing it continue that Liberals are changing their leadership federally. I am terrible with names today. You had your leader that took over after the election. You had Dutton.

Richard Welch: On a point of order, Acting President, I appreciate it has been a wideranging debate, but we are now introducing the novel element of the federal Liberal government rather than the actual contents of the motion. I ask that the member be brought back to the motion.

Tom McINTOSH: You are absolutely right. I will come back to state politics.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Thank you, Mr McIntosh, if you can.

Tom McINTOSH: Mrs Deeming is a great example of state politics, of Liberals unable to stay inside whatever on earth is going on over there. It is a great example of it. We know that this rabble of valueless Liberals will be led by One Nation. They have been drawn around by the nose this year. After years of dog whistling, after years of attacking minorities, after years of low, despicable politics you have now been caught out trying to chase the ground, and it is One Nation who are going to come in here and drag you by the nose to your policies. That is a real risk and a real threat to Victoria, and it cannot happen. That is the reality of the situation.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:58): I have got to first go back to Mr Batchelor, who kept quoting a Resolve poll, which actually, Mr Batchelor, showed that 30 per cent of respondents believed that the Labor government deserved re-election – only 30 per cent. You are in real trouble. Sonja Terpstra – that superstar – said we were an opposition of experts in complaining. Let me suggest that the government are experts in corruption – \$15 billion worth. Backflip Ben stood side by side with the Premier absolutely defending everything that was going on. How can you possibly turn around and say this is a whole new start, a whole new era? It is anything but, because Backflip Ben was there at the kitchen table throughout the whole meal of disaster that this Labor government has put upon the whole of Victoria.

What did Ms Terpstra say? Something about that the Liberals will close hospitals and cut nurses. Let me tell you, as Ms Crozier said, it is the Liberals who have a plan to invest in health care and build new hospitals in Mildura, West Gippsland, Wonthaggi and Hamilton, not the Labor Party; it is the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party proposed the royal commission. You are now agreeing to it – thank you. We will devise policy for you. It is the Liberal Party who proposed extra resources to IBAC to follow the money. You are now agreeing to that too. There is nothing original about Backflip Ben. He is just totally adopting our very worthwhile policies. They are fabulous, and good on him for agreeing to them – that is all good. We know that Backflip Ben's royal commission will be nothing better than the Coate inquiry: 'I do not recall,' 'I don't do emails' –

Melina Bath interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: 'Nothing to see here.' That is what Backflip Ben's royal commission will be like. Are they all prepared to face the music at Backflip Ben's royal commission? I wonder.

Mr McIntosh just said the problem underpinning the Liberals and Nationals is that we have no values. There is absolutely no value-driven arrangement over there. All they want to do is kill the incentive of anybody that wants to get ahead in this state. There are 65 and counting new or increased taxes. This is the highest taxed state in the country, the state with the greatest debt in the country and the state with

the greatest unemployment figures in the country. We have run up about \$3 million in interest payments just while this debate has been going on, and they have the temerity to start criticising us. They have been in government for this entire period, and they have presided over total disaster. Now they have got rid of a woman. I do not know that even half of them know what a woman is; they can never define one. 'We got rid of a woman. We've replaced her with the Deputy Premier who stood at her side.' 'I will not challenge you,' he said, looking her in the eye, and he did, totally. He forced her to resign. Good on you, Backflip Ben. But the Victorian –

Lee Tarlamis: On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs McArthur should know by now to refer to members by their appropriate titles, so I would ask her to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Mrs McArthur –

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Mr Tarlamis. I will make sure that Premier Carroll, Ben, does have a proper title. It will not be for long, though. After 28 November he will not have that title. The voter community will realise – they do already. They have had enough of you. That is why you have changed the leader all of a sudden, because you are hoping to change some of the deckchairs on the *Titanic*. You are going down with the ship. But look, we will do the right thing by the Victorian community. We have a plan, and there will be a fresh start for Victoria on 28 November.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (14): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (15): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Government performance

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:09): I move:

That this house does not possess confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria.

I have eagerly awaited this motion that this house does not possess confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria. What an absolutely shambolic week it has been. I look forward to yelling in this contribution as loudly as those opposite did upstairs yesterday, because we know the Victorian people have lost confidence in this government. The fact that they have lost confidence in this government is why the Labor Party went running scared, through delegations and briefings, to convince Ben Carroll to run for Premier – even though we know he had been planning it for some time, as mentioned by former Premier Steve Bracks today. It has been a shambolic week in state politics. I think we know that this government did not change leader because they wanted a new direction, they thought this government was too left wing or they had any sincere regrets about \$200 billion of debt accumulating under this government. They did not have any sincere regrets about ploughing on with an unaffordable Suburban Rail Loop that is not going to cost under \$34.5 billion, I hate to say. They did not change leaders because they genuinely believe there is criminal conduct on construction sites or they genuinely want to pursue the \$15 billion that has been fleeced by the criminal underworld. They did it because they want to save their own seats. That is the only reason they changed leader. So they had to pick a leader to make sure that they had the image of a new government while getting up and spruiking all the same policies of the old government. Let us not forget, the Deputy Premier under Jacinta Allan was Ben Carroll. It indeed was the Allan–Carroll government. Ben Carroll was Jacinta Allan's partner in crime, and if he had a different view, either he did not have the ticker to stand up to Jacinta Allan or he supported her positions 100 per cent all the way. Which one is it?

The new Premier, Ben Carroll, has also said integrity is not optional. What are we meant to believe after Ben Carroll's comments? We are meant to believe that integrity was optional for the previous decade in which this Premier served as a cabinet minister and Deputy Premier. A government, which was propped up by all of those opposite, had integrity as an optionality – something that was optional, something that they did not really need to tackle. I have stood here in this chamber when we had the entire chamber's support for IBAC follow-the-money bills, except those opposite, who argued against them. Mr Davis successfully moved a motion calling for a royal commission into Big Build corruption. Those opposite voted against it. They did. They all argued against it. Now, all of a sudden, not because of polling, we are meant to believe that this Premier is serious about tackling Big Build corruption – the same person that was spotted at and hosted a fundraiser with the CFMEU and Tim Pallas a week before the 2022 election. That same Premier, that same Ben Carroll, is all of a sudden serious about tackling union corruption. I mean, seriously!

This is a divided, dishonest and distracted government. Victorians do not want Jacinta Allan's partner in crime as their Premier. They want a fresh start, and they will get a fresh start on 28 November with Jess Wilson and the Liberals and Nationals team. Real change requires a plan, and only the Liberals and Nationals have the plan to turn our state around to make Victoria the place that it used to be, the place that attracts investment into the state, where we can lower payroll tax and land tax and where we can make disciplined decisions to turn our state around. We can have a 25 per cent regional infrastructure guarantee to make sure we are spending a minimum 25 per cent on infrastructure in our regions, which have been starved of infrastructure by a government that is spending one-fifth of the entire infrastructure budget, including schools and hospitals, over the next four years on the Suburban Rail Loop East, the Cheltenham-to-Box Hill line. I mean, seriously, almost \$16 billion over the next four years will be spent by this government on the Suburban Rail Loop East. It is an insane amount of money.

Maybe the new Premier will finally proceed with Labor preselections on that side. He might actually conclude the Southern Metro preselection. He might actually handball people to Mill Park. He might handball Mr Batchelor to Mill Park. He will have to get up Google Maps – 'Where is Mill Park? What are the stables called? Is that a regional area? I don't know.' And he might actually conclude the Northern Metro preselection, because I hear Mr Erdogan, having undermined Jacinta Allan for quite a while, is on his way to number one. He might have to conclude that preselection as well and apparently have two fresh candidates in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region on the Labor side too.

You can see that this is a divided, dishonest and distracted government. We only saw six weeks ago the then Deputy Premier look the Premier in the eye and rule out challenging her for the leadership. He said:

I've got a young daughter at home, and I couldn't be more proud to make sure she grows up knowing that I supported Jacinta Allan ...

Then he said the circumstances had changed. And then former Premier Steve Bracks belled the cat this morning on ABC News and said Ben Carroll has been preparing for this 'for some time'. So when he looked the Premier in the eye and when he looked down the barrel of the camera and made a promise to his daughter, he was lying. He was in fact preparing for it for some time. If you cannot trust this Premier to keep a promise to his own daughter, how on earth is he going to stand up for Victorians? How on earth is he going to solve the issues in terms of roads, in terms of land tax, in terms of ambulance ramping and in terms of our hospital failures, our elective surgery waitlist, infrastructure being starved in our growth areas of Melbourne, a cost-of-living crisis and a crime crisis when he cannot be trusted to look the former Premier in the eye, to keep that commitment, and keep a commitment he made to his daughter?

I mean, seriously, this is the guy that was the Deputy Premier to Jacinta Allan and over and over again refused to call a royal commission or even advocate for one. He said, in that chamber over there, it would take too much time and it would cost too much. That was his line over and over again. And

now we are suddenly meant to believe that he has always believed in a royal commission. He only believes in one because it is politically convenient. That is the only reason he has now got a sudden interest in integrity, because Labor members – the ones that were being called out doorknocking – were being called corrupt. Well, I think that is fair enough, because the punters know what we know, which is that in both chambers you have all voted against action on corruption on construction sites here in this state. I think that is a pretty reasonable comment by the punters answering doors to their Labor MPs, to be honest. And the evidence backs it up: you consistently had all of those members opposite refuse to call a royal commission. We had, on 17 June this year, Ms Ermacora get up and say:

Australia already had a royal commission – two years, \$46 million, one conviction. Ours is the approach that is actually working.

Does Ms Ermacora think that the approach is still working or that a royal commission is not needed? Is that still the view of Ms Ermacora? Would she still get up and repeat the same talking points from Jacinta Allan's office? That was her comment in *Hansard*. Mr Batchelor said a similar thing on 18 March this year:

The appropriate body to deal with allegations of criminal activity in the state of Victoria is Victoria Police.

He consistently argued against the need for a royal commission. And of course we had the absurd claim by Ms Symes today that this complements all the work they are doing, despite the fact that she consistently opposed one. Mr Welch would remember earlier this year in response to a question that he asked, she said:

Mr Welch, there are many reasons that you might want to have a royal commission, and this government have demonstrated our commitment into matters such as family violence, matters such as mental health. In relation to these matters, we take them very seriously, and that is why we have acted ...

and that we do not need one into union corruption. \$15 billion has been fleeced by criminals and the underworld via the CFMEU, but do not worry, Mr Welch, we do not need one. We do not need one, according to Ms Symes – the absurdity of the soon-to-be-former Treasurer to say that it complements the existing action that we are taking. We know from Labor government sources in the *Age* that every single step that she took was to avoid a royal commission, including a so-called police taskforce that had passed through cabinet that she released a statement about the other day because she did not want to actually hold a press conference, understandably. But we saw consistent government members, including Minister Stitt on 2 June this year, reject the need for a royal commission and say that the police were the appropriate authorities – all the action they were taking. The Wilson review, remember that, the wet lettuce review? They had to go back to the drawing board and ask John Merritt to do another review because the Wilson review was set up in a way by Jacinta Allan to not look into anything – to look completely into the future about what we might need to do, not at the reasons why \$15 billion has been fleeced from taxpayers.

Seriously, this state is in a state of absolute despair, and it is only Jess Wilson and the Liberals and Nationals that can turn this state around. I have no confidence in a Premier who as minister stuffed up VCE exams not once but twice. If he cannot get VCE exams right, there is no way he can run this state. We have those opposite talking about different parties, talking about One Nation, when it was actually one of their friend's polling companies, Redbridge, whose multilevel regression with poststratification that was commissioned by Trades Hall showed that Labor is projected to lose more seats to One Nation than the Liberal Party or the National Party will lose to One Nation. Isn't that funny? They yell across the chamber at us about how we are going to lose – Ms Terpstra in particular, oh my goodness – all these seats to One Nation when in fact the data shows it is the Labor Party that are going to lose more seats to One Nation than anyone else. I will tell you what, some of those members, like Minister Suleyman and others in the western suburbs that are under threat from One Nation, will not be missed. They will not be missed, because they have absolutely neglected their communities. Again, it is the Labor Party that are likely to lose the most seats.

What I am really looking forward to is Victorians telling this government that a new coat of paint is not going to fix the problems. What Victorians want is our plan to deliver for all Victorians. They want a fresh start. I was privileged, and so were all of my colleagues, to join the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson on a 36-day tour of all 88 electorates. I can tell you, you will not see Jacinta Allan or Ben Carroll walk down a main street of a local town. You will see Jess Wilson do it. Do you know why? Because she can do it. She had people running across the street, not waiting for pedestrian signals, to walk up to her, shake her hand, tell her what they thought and tell her their issues. Our plan to turn this state around is informed by each and every Victorian. They want a plan, a 10-year economic plan, to turn this state around, because whether it is \$200 billion of debt, which is more debt than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined; whether it is \$15 billion worth of corruption and all the corruption we have seen on the Big Build; whether it is elective surgery waitlists at record levels and people not being able to get the health care that they deserve; whether it is fixing our roads and the state of our roads, Victorians know they can only fix those issues with a fresh start, with Jess Wilson at the helm and Danny O'Brien at the helm to actually deliver for Victorians, because we know this government will not.

As much as this government are now trying to say they are not Jacinta Allan and they are not Daniel Andrews, who propped up Jacinta Allan and Daniel Andrews? All those opposite and all those opposite in the Legislative Assembly. They supported them. They were part of their governments. They were ministers in their governments. He was the Deputy Premier of the Allan government that supposedly caused all the issues, where supposedly integrity was optional. What the Premier is saying is that under their government, up until yesterday apparently, integrity was optional. You have got to be kidding me. And supposedly, according to the briefing in the paper, they say that Mr Carroll will save the furniture. Well, you might be seeing a lot of them down at the op shop after the election looking for new furniture, because this is not a change of government; a real change of government comes on 28 November. This is an opportunity to say – and I implore my crossbench colleagues to say, because it is a very simple motion:

That this house does not possess confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria.

I know Mr Ettershank and I have shared a lot of views about how neglectful the government is, particularly in the western suburbs of Melbourne. I think a lot of people in the western suburbs of Melbourne, from Sunbury to Kororoit to Mount Atkinson to Werribee, would agree that they have no confidence in this government. In fact I was out with Nathalie Moussi, our fantastic Liberal candidate for Sydenham, and speaking to local constituents, who also said they have no confidence in this government. Indeed we spoke to people that had voted for the Labor Party for 50 years who said they were going to vote for the Liberal Party because they needed to see the end of this government, because their land tax bills had increased or they spent so much time in traffic every day that it was becoming too hard and actually becoming a huge cost-of-living issue as well.

This is a motion that can be supported by, I think, all of my crossbench colleagues, because it really is a simple motion that we do have no confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria. They clearly cannot govern themselves. And the way we have seen them act in the past few days has been absolutely deplorable. Many of them should be ashamed of their actions, and none more ashamed than the new Premier Ben Carroll, who only six weeks ago looked the former Premier Jacinta Allan in the eye and ruled out challenging her for the leadership and then made a promise to his own daughter that he would not challenge, only for the circumstances to have changed and only for former Premier Steve Bracks to bell the cat this morning and say that he had been planning for this for some time. What an absolute disgrace, an absolute shame on this Premier to have lied and broken a promise, and so therefore he cannot stand up for Victorians.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:29): I feel that the Liberal Party is having a bad day today. They are having a bad day, because the contribution from Mr Mulholland just now reminded me – and I apologise if this shows my age – of watching Looney Tunes cartoons when I was a kid. You would see Foghorn Leghorn strolling through the farm, you know, very confident, chest

puffed up, and then he would walk across a rake – he would step on it – and it would whack him in the face. I felt that Mr Mulholland, time and time again in that contribution, just kept stepping on rakes, and they kept whacking him in the face and making him look a little silly. I will not go through all of them again now, because I think that is a little cruel, but I think it shows that the Liberal Party are concerned about what is going on, because they know that under Ben Carroll and Gabrielle Williams, the new Premier and Deputy Premier, Labor has set a new direction, and they are scared. They do not know what to do.

They have just come from their fresh dawn, was it? ‘False dawn’, ‘fresh start’ – I do not know what the tour was called. They had Jess Wilson, the Leader of the Opposition, parading around the countryside, spending 10 minutes in an electorate grabbing a cup of coffee and saying that that is somehow evidence that she is on a grand coronation tour. What they have done, both in this motion and in the motion that precedes it, is demonstrate that they do not actually have any ideas and plans for Victoria’s future other than to sneak into government on the back of a deal with One Nation and have the Liberal and One Nation government cut services right across the state, because that is what is coming. We know that the Liberal Party’s primary vote has dropped by 12 points in six months and that the only hope that they have got of falling over the line to form government after 28 November is to say they are going to do it in partnership with One Nation.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Mr Mulholland mentions Newspoll. Mate, your numbers are down in Newspoll too. I am not going to listen to lectures from the opposition about a direction for this state, when the only direction they seem to be going in is down, and when they get there they are going to be trying to scramble back up again with the support of One Nation. We know that what that means for Victorians is cuts to health services, cuts to ambulances, cuts to the fire services – again – closing more schools and cuts to transport. That is the future that awaits under a Liberal–One Nation government.

Instead, what you are seeing from Labor, with the new direction from Labor under Ben Carroll and Gabrielle Williams, is a government that is absolutely focused on the needs of Victorians and making sure that the education and health services that they rely on are being delivered and that there is cost-of-living support where we can provide it – and that is very clear because it is cheaper to use the train this year than it was last year. And our 20 per cent off rego – get in before the end of the week. That is Labor providing cost-of-living support, and we are also doing what we need to do to tackle crime and ensure community safety. That is what you are seeing from Labor. And we have said, absolutely, that integrity is not optional. That is why the new Premier, in his first act, is going to set up a royal commission into the construction sector, appoint a special prosecutor and make sure that the legislation that is required to give IBAC follow-the-money powers is brought properly before the Parliament.

I just want to spend a couple of minutes – just in case. This motion talks about this house not possessing confidence in the government, and I think this has been deliberately worded because I think they thought that, if it passed here, they might be able to go out on social media – and I say ‘if it passed’, and I will come to the concerns we have got with that in a minute – and somehow misrepresent, claim, that the Parliament had suddenly passed a motion of no confidence in the government. It is disingenuous, misleading and wrong, because we know that upper houses cannot pass motions of no confidence in governments in the Westminster system. That is a matter that is solely reserved for lower houses, where confidence in governments is made and lost. They tried this stunt in the lower house – their one shot in the lower house, the house where confidence matters. The lower house showed it had confidence in the Victorian Labor government. That has been the tradition of the Westminster system since the House of Commons was created. If the Liberal Party are trying some kind of stunt here to undermine Westminster conventions and undermine our parliamentary democracy, then I think they should take a good, hard look at themselves, because we know that confidence motions in their proper sense, in their technical sense and where they matter solely reside in the lower house. This motion could say anything and it would have the same effect.

What we are seeing, I think, from the Liberal Party today is a real concern. They thought they were going to cruise from here. They thought that, having a Labor government that has won three terms, all they needed to do was turn up and print a glossy brochure and they would be home and hosed – wave it around a bit, even. They thought that was their solution – that that was all they needed to do.

Michael Galea interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: At least they have got a glossy brochure; that is right. They have got a glossy brochure. The sum total of their crowning achievement is that they have managed to find a printer with high-GSM paper stock and get it printed really well. Well, it needs a bit more than that to convince the Victorian people you are ready to govern and to convince the Victorian people that you have got the plan that they need for the future, because this election is about a choice. It is about a choice between a Labor government that is delivering and has been delivering the services that Victorians need and rely on – and it will continue to do so – or a Liberal and One Nation government that is going to cut those services right back, because that is at the core of the glossy brochure that they are floating around, the core of the glossy brochure that they like to cling to like a life raft from the *Titanic*. They are clinging to a glossy brochure that at its very core has a commitment to cut services in Victoria, because their economic plan is based on \$40 billion worth of cuts.

When they talk about getting the cash surplus that they are claiming they are aiming for, the only way to achieve that is with cuts to services – cuts to education services, cuts to health services, cuts to community safety programs. We know they are going to make them because they promised to make those cuts. They have promised to swing the axe. They have promised to take the knife. Victorians believe them because they have done it before. The Liberals are the party that closes schools. The Liberals are the party that closes hospitals. The Liberals are the party that shuts down rail lines. The Liberals are the party that cuts funding to the CFA again and again and again. That is exactly what they do. The glossy brochure they are waving around is the same playbook they used last time and the same playbook they used the time before that. Liberals and One Nation are going to cut services here in Victoria.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:40): It does not actually give me much pleasure to rise to speak on this motion today. Of all the issues we could be debating in this place, this is what we choose – not the issues that actually matter to everyday Victorians, just another day of politicians talking about themselves. We have had a whole week so far of navel-gazing and battles for internal power within the Labor Party, and the Liberals in their wisdom, instead of using this opportunity to propose an alternative positive vision, have just joined in the pile-on. No wonder people are losing faith in governments. They have had enough of this garbage. I have sat in here all day, and all there has been is yelling at each other, pot shots, polling this, polling that. Honestly, what have we been elected to do in this place? Get things done, not have petty political fights. People are out there working harder and harder, yet it is only getting harder for them to get by. People cannot afford a roof over their heads. They are struggling to pay rent, let alone buy a home. Thousands upon thousands of people are homeless, and the number of people experiencing homelessness is only growing. People cannot afford to put food on the table. They are choosing between paying for medication and paying their bills. Parents are going without dinner so their kids can eat. Public schools are being held together by gaffer tape and goodwill. Our climate and our ecosystems are collapsing.

Meanwhile the people elected to this place, who could actually be making changes to improve Victorians lives, are instead trading political blows to see who can get the best sound bite. This motion will not do anything for them. It will not fix the broken housing system. It will not make health care more affordable. It will not help people with their grocery bills. It will not address corruption or strengthen our integrity systems. It will not restore nature. It will not protect us from the worst of climate change. It will not change the government. This self-indulgent game is exactly why people have lost faith in the major parties and politics more broadly. It is the people who have lost confidence, because they have stopped believing it can deliver anything for them anymore. I can understand that. Every time Labor say they cannot afford something, look no further than their priorities. They are

more interested in protecting corporate and industry mates and their own power than the community. People see their taxpayer funds funnelled into propping up vested interests or allegedly going into organised crime without anyone raising an eyebrow but then are told there is not a cent to spare to make sure that they can take their kids to maternal and child health appointments and actually be seen, have air conditioning in their schools or have functioning bus and train services to get them to their jobs. It is a pretty hard pill for people to swallow.

The government's failure to deal with corruption allegations has rightly infuriated people, with allegedly \$15 billion of public money lost, while people cannot afford to put a roof over their heads and are languishing on public dental waiting lists for years and Labor deny, deny, deny, try to discredit anyone who questions them and lash out and blame everyone but themselves. People are actually very willing to forgive a mistake, but the failure to take responsibility for this for so long or countless other problems over the years has left a stench of corruption and incompetence on the government themselves. People expect more from a Labor government, one supposed to be on the side of workers and public services. Instead what do they see? Privatisation, corporate handouts, tax concessions for the wealthy, housing being made a commodity instead of a human right and public services framed as a cost rather than an investment. Whether it is Jacinta Allan or Ben Carroll makes very little difference. Let us not forget Mr Carroll has been right there by the former Premier's side for years. This is a mess of their collective making. People just see a tired Labor government that will do and say anything to stay in power. After being in government for 20 of the past 24 years, people have had enough. They are angry, and rightly so.

The Liberal Party are just as much to blame for this anger. They are part of the same system and would only double down on many of the things that have led people to be so disillusioned. A Liberal government – and based on current polling it would need to be a Liberal–One Nation government – would take this state even further down the path of ruin, with more cuts to public services, cuts to workers wages, more privatisation, more corporate handouts, more culture wars, more racism, worsening of the climate crisis, trashing of our environment and a further expansion of the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The problems that are crushing people right now would only get worse. The fact that they have decided to use one of their handful of remaining debate spots this year on this motion says it all really – no solutions, just pointless pot shots.

Why aren't you all in here asking what we can do to make people's lives better? Surely that is what our job is. As my colleague in the other place Ellen Sandell noted, the most disappointing thing about this whole situation is that this term this Labor government had so much political capital, so much potential to enact significant progressive reform. They had a huge majority in the Assembly and a progressive majority in this place. The Greens have stood ready and willing to make big changes, like making housing a human right and genuinely tackling the housing crisis with rent caps and a massive public housing program; like ending fossil fuel projects and radically reforming our protection of forests and nature; like making our public schools and teachers the best funded in the country; like tackling gambling harm – genuinely tackling gambling harm; like investing in young people and supporting families to prevent kids ending up in the justice system; like drug law reform that promotes harm reduction instead of punishment; like making sure the banks, the gambling industry, the fossil fuel corporations and the property developers pay their fair share.

They did not even use the opportunity they so clearly had to meaningfully respond to mounting corruption allegations by strengthening our integrity agencies, including IBAC. I sat last year in discussions with the government, who were unsuccessfully trying to talk us out of supporting a royal commission motion. We explained that their way out of this was to reform IBAC to give it the powers it needs to meaningfully investigate corruption immediately. That was the suggestion we made: do this. We would not need a royal commission if they went out and did that. But it was not just us; this whole Parliament stood ready to pass legislation to do that. This was a long time ago, not right now. It was a long time ago, but we stood ready to do that. I do not think there is a single issue that has unified us across party lines as much as this one. But they could not even do that. They were too

focused inwards, so focused on their personal power that they were not listening to the community. They were not prepared to take responsibility as Victorians rightly expected them to do. And the cost? The cost of this inaction, the cost of not listening, has not been just the taxpayer money – I know we have talked a lot about the \$15 billion – but it is something far more insidious. It is a further erosion of people's faith in government and democracy. What a legacy.

The historic treaty that passed this Parliament showed what is possible when we work together. But so much potential for transformational change for Victorians has been wasted this term. It is like Labor have spent so long trying to stay in power that they have forgotten what power is actually for. People deserve better. They deserve to have the things you need to live a decent life: safe and secure housing, food on the table, access to health and dental care, protection from discrimination, a proper public transport system, quality public schools, a job that pays a decent wage, clean air and water, a thriving natural environment, public funding going towards public goods and a future to look forward to. They deserve governments that can be trusted to put the interests of everyday people and the planet at the heart of their decisions. That is what the Greens are fighting for, and it is what the major parties should be fighting for too.

We will deliberately be sitting out this vote today, not because we have confidence – we do not. Like the people of Victoria, we have lost confidence, but we have lost confidence in both major parties to do anything to fix the problems that they are facing, and this motion does not do a thing to help them. Victorians expect better, and they deserve better.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:49): I also rise this afternoon to speak on my colleague Mr Mulholland's motion:

That this house does not possess confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria.

If we could go to the polls today, it would allow Victorians to make a change. I think it is incredibly important that Victorians remember that it does not matter whether they do a swap over in their leadership. We are not talking about a swap over of somebody in opposition, we are talking about the Premier – this is the third Premier that we have had in 3½ years of this government. This is a government that is in total chaos. It cannot govern Victoria. The reality is that they are all over the shop, because we all know there is at least \$15 billion of corruption that they do not want to have investigated, that they are not prepared to be transparent about. We constantly see that there are issues here.

We are talking about this new leader Ben Carroll. He was all about integrity and talked about integrity, but let us have a look at his record so far after just over 24 hours in office. I will just take 2 hours of his time and look at it. At 8 o'clock in the morning the Premier announced support for workplace protection orders, but by 10:11 am this same new Premier voted against laws to introduce workplace protection orders in Parliament. Within 2 hours and 11 minutes he had changed his position. This is not a person with integrity. This is not a person who is consistent. This is not a person who we can trust to govern Victoria.

Let us have a look at his most recent portfolio of education. We have had the biggest strike in Victorian history – 35,000 educational teachers through the union in Victoria. He has not been able to nail down a fair deal. We have the worst paid teachers in the nation. We have schools that have not received their funding – constantly promising and not delivering, pushing out the date when you are going to actually do something. All these big election promises, all this big talk in the budget, and yet you do not deliver. This is the guy who is now leading the state. He cannot even sort out a fair deal for the teachers, and he is now thinking he is going to lead the state.

Let us have a look at how he has spent the money. The Metro Tunnel – the original estimate was approximately \$11 billion, then it went to \$13.5 billion. That is an increase of \$2.5 billion. That is pathetic. West Gate Tunnel – \$5.5 billion original estimate. The current estimate turned out to be \$10 billion, an approximately \$4 billion to \$5 billion increase. Suburban Rail Loop – approximately

\$26 billion in the east, and it is now currently estimated at \$34.5 billion. That is an increase of \$8 billion. The list goes on and on and on. This is a government that is failing Victorians. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. You can change the face of your leader, but it does not change the type of government you are. This is a man that stood by the Premier as the deputy and did nothing, with \$15 billion of corruption from the CFMEU and the criminal money that they are not even prepared to have a royal commission on, because they do not want to see what will be uncovered with that.

Michael Galea interjected.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Well, it will be a controlled one. It will not be the sort of commission that the Liberal Party would have.

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs Hermans is perfectly entitled to read whatever drivel she wants into the chamber, but she is not entitled to misrepresent the facts and speak untruths.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Let us take state debt. Victoria's net debt has risen significantly over the past decade under this Labor government. We know that we have record borrowing, we have growing interest repayments and we have less money available for hospitals, for schools, for police. We know that in Victoria, in terms of our school funding, it promised a 75 per cent of school resource standard funding and it has delayed reaching that. It delays billions of dollars in government funding for government schools, and it is affecting how teachers teach in the classroom and how learning support supports students. It is affecting the ability of students to learn.

Let us take health. Emergency department waiting times are ridiculously off the charts. Ms Crozier, my colleague, was only just today in question time asking about why it is happening, with no response, no integrity from this government, no transparency and no answers, with an elderly lady lying on a concrete floor for 2½ hours waiting for an ambulance. What is wrong with this state? We still have ambulance ramping, and they have known about it for a long time. We still have elective surgery delays. We still have workforce shortages. We still have in fact an increasing cost-of-living crisis, higher taxes under a Labor government, more taxes under a Labor government. It is all about taxing people. They cannot help but want to grab hold of every Victorian's money and make every Victorian poorer by the minute. It needs to stop – rising electricity prices, increasing insurance costs, payroll tax increases, property tax increases, crime soaring through the roof, repeat offending. I thought 52 was a lot of times to be on bail and go out and keep doing criminal activity, but I now have heard of over 400 times of being on bail and going out and reoffending – over 400 times from one offender. That is outrageous. This government is out of control, and it does not matter who leads it. They just need to go, and Victorians need to not vote for them in November, because I can say that we have a plan and we know how to get Victorians back on track. Let me just give some –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, I am going to assume from the fact that she glanced across at me that Mrs Hermans knows full well that she is using a prop, and I would ask her to desist.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Mr Galea, I will make a ruling on the point of order. There is no point of order, and I ask Mrs Hermans to continue on but not to wave that document around any further.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I am using it for notes. We have a plan to keep Victorians safe, to reduce the crime. We will deliver and pursue that \$15 billion without keeping tight regulations on it or having people watch over it to make sure the truth is not completely transparent with the public. We will make sure that we stop that \$1 billion that is going into a divisive treaty. We will end wasteful spending, like the \$13 million that you spent on machete bins that did not do a single thing or \$600 million to not host a Commonwealth Games. We will make sure that we save \$22 billion by stopping the hiring of

more and more back-office bureaucrats, and we will identify and fix infrastructure cost blowouts. These are just some of the things that we are going to do, because we have a plan and we want a fresh start, and we know every Victorian out there does too.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:58): I am not sure if we can be filled with much great confidence following that incoherent ramble. I am not quite sure what the phrase ‘truth is not completely transparent with the public’ means, but I am sure we can clarify further in debate. I do not agree with everything Dr Mansfield said, but I do agree with the first thing that she said. This is a ridiculous use of the Parliament’s time. Earlier today, in the first version of the two volumes of these silly motions that we have been debating, Mrs McArthur commented on Labor MPs spending – not the parliamentary time, to be fair; caucus time, separate time – 2 hours with each other, talking to each other, negotiating, resolving and coming to finally unanimously endorse the new leader and the new Premier.

Lee Tarlamis interjected.

Michael GALEA: That is probably every caucus meeting for them, I am sure, Mr Tarlamis, every week. Two hours – we have now spent more than 2 hours on these motions brought by the Liberal Party that achieve absolutely nothing for the Victorian people. They are not coming in here talking about hospitals or about schools.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: Well, it is not in your motion, so I do not know if you are reading the right motion, Mrs Hermans. But they have come in here talking about themselves and the Labor Party. They are blatantly political motions, which they are entitled to do, but they are taking up 3 hours of this chamber’s time, of this Parliament’s time, talking not about cost-of-living relief or what the Labor government has done and maybe coming up with their own ideas or solutions or challenging us on what we can do better, not about schools, not about education, not about transport, not about any of the things that matter to Victorians. That is 3-plus hours of navel-gazing and talking about politics, and that is exactly what Victorians have come to expect from the Victorian Liberal Party.

They also quite clearly, from their own chaotic past few years – six leaders in seven years, and they are probably a few months overdue now for their next leadership spill over there – cannot comprehend 69 members of our party walking into a party room, having a conversation, a robust conversation, and 69 party members walking out united, having unanimously backed our new leader, being united and returning to focus on what truly matters, and that is the Victorian people. They could not even achieve that themselves yesterday. On a day when all the attention was on our side, they could not even go through their own partyroom meeting without losing one of their own members. You are missing a member from this place. You have 13 members here today; you had 14 last sitting week – how many more are left to go?

Mrs Hermans, I know you are very excited about the prospect of joining a Liberal–One Nation coalition government. I am not quite sure if you intend to join that on the side of the Liberal Party or on the One Nation side, but maybe we will see. Maybe you wish to –

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, Acting President, I take great offence at the member having a personal attack on me. I did not deserve any of that, and it certainly is not appropriate for him to be speculating or to be putting words into my situation. It is completely inappropriate and offensive, and I would actually ask for an apology.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order.

Michael GALEA: I appreciate your ruling, but in the spirit of goodwill, I do apologise to Mrs Hermans. This should not be personal, because this should not be about us. This should not be about us in this place – about us, about you guys; it should be about the Victorian people, and that is exactly the point. Mrs McArthur complaining about 2 hours that Labor MPs spent of their own time

in a Labor caucus meeting, when we have spent already that much time in this chamber talking about these ridiculous motions, is underscoring why Victorians see the Liberal Party as completely irrelevant. Yes, you can try and go for the coronation tour. You can take your leader on His Majesty's most loyal opposition's coronation tour, handing out doilies and teaspoons to all Victorians in all corners of the state. With previous speakers – I do not typically talk about polls in this place, but members opposite have been gloating about polling results. Well, they have suffered a 12-point primary drop in the last six months. You are completely tone deaf.

We will contest this election. We will have many of these debates out on the hustings. But when you have had the opportunity to come into this place to seek to make change, you have just come in with the same old motions that you have been doing for years. Clearly you are deflated as anything, because it seems from half of your speeches that you wrote them several weeks ago, because you have not even factored in – someone even said before, 'We're not in support of a royal commission.' I refer them to the announcement made by Premier Ben Carroll just yesterday that we will be bringing in a royal commission. They have gone on now to change their tune. They have gone on to attack the royal commission that we have announced, because they said, 'Oh, it's not good. It's not going to be good enough.' You have not even read the terms of reference. You have given the game away now, so no-one can take your word on this seriously, but had you actually waited to see the terms of reference come into this place and said, 'This is a problem because you're not addressing this, this and this,' that would be fair enough. That is a legitimate point. But you have said, 'This is not good enough,' without even seeing it. It is blatantly cheap politics, and you know it. You know it, but you have jumped the gun. You are discombobulated. You thought you had a clear campaign strategy; that has been taken away from you, and you are deflated as anything. You are deflated as anything, and you come into this place and now, having called for a royal commission for months, say, 'Oh no, no, no, no, not like this.' It goes to, again, unprepared, unprofessional and not ready for government. I am sorry to say that no number of glossy brochures you bring into this place is going to change that.

John Berger interjected.

Michael GALEA: No amount of comics, no glossy brochures. We could have been talking about education. We could have been talking indeed about how Victoria now has the strongest NAPLAN results both in our state's history and anywhere across the nation. We could be talking about the hundreds of new schools that we are building and upgrading across Victoria, with more than 100 new schools already built. We could be talking about the teachers' pay deal. We could be talking about how we are trying to offer our teachers in this state the best pay and conditions in the country, which they rightly deserve. Or we could be talking about health. We could be talking about ambulances. We could be talking about the virtual ED or about new hospitals and upgraded hospitals. We could be talking about upgraded bus services such as the ones recently announced by the now Deputy Premier Minister Williams in the south-east suburbs, including around Casey, around Dandenong, around Kingston and around Carrum Downs. We could be talking about the issue that we know is troubling Victorians the most, and that is the cost of living. That includes initiatives that we have already done, such as the period of free public transport and half-price fares till the end of the year, 20 per cent off regos for all Victorian households and all the other measures that we are doing, including the midday power saver. These are the things that we could be talking about; instead we have a motion, a one-line motion that this house does not possess confidence. Again, to Mr Batchelor's points, this is not the Legislative Assembly. I would expect those who proclaim to hold Westminster traditions so dear to know that the upper house is not the place where you debate motions of confidence. I am sure they do, and I am sure that if by some miracle for them they do happen to succeed in this motion they will go out and say, 'The Parliament has passed a no-confidence motion,' and then they may even get some members of the public to think, 'Oh, okay. What does that mean?' And then what will they say? Nothing? Clearly nothing. They are not interested.

John Berger interjected.

Michael GALEA: Where is everyone? Because this is a motion that achieves nothing. It is a motion that even if it is successful will achieve nothing and is frankly irrelevant. That is sadly the state of the Victorian Liberal Party today. But at least they have got a glossy brochure.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:08): I do not want my comments on this motion to be seen as in any way endorsing the Liberal Party – the opposition – or as having confidence in them to govern. Nonetheless, and I will get to why in a moment, I am very concerned about the Labor Party also. Victorians have been presented with a choice: we have the fresh start and the new direction. I mean, it sounds like a choice between a produce section in a supermarket and a 1980s T and A film. But anyway, let me get started on why I do not have confidence in Labor. I will start by talking about something that no-one is talking about, and that is: why aren't we watching the Commonwealth Games at the moment? Why doesn't Federation Square celebrate our athletes that are competing at the moment? Sam Williamson from Mount Waverley just won three gold medals in the men's 100-metre breaststroke, the men's 50-metre breaststroke and the mixed four-by-100-metres relay. In athletics, Eleanor Patterson from Leongatha won the women's high jump – a gold. In gymnastics, Breanna Scott won two golds in the women's artistic gymnastics and women's balance beam finals and silver in the women's all-around final. In my own electorate of South-East Metro – actually, this man's family contacted my office – Danny Vojnikovic, and I apologise if I mispronounced that, is going to compete this Saturday in the men's under 90-kilogram division of judo. I have got a picture of him here. I am not allowed to show it because it would be a prop, but he is a big guy, and I am really hoping that he does well on Saturday. I will be barracking for him, and I hope he gets a gold for South-East Metro.

Labor, the government, are not talking about the Commonwealth Games at all because they are ashamed of what they did. They set up a scam at the last election. They went into the last election promising that we would have a Commonwealth Games all over regional Victoria – that they would do this thing that has never been done before and will probably never actually happen, where we would need five times the amount of logistics, five times the amount of security, five times the amount of everything in order to host it, which of course meant it was never going to happen. They based the business case on the Gold Coast games, which was set in a single location – a totally inappropriate base for the business case. The consultants that did it were smart enough to mention that in their business case, which took us a long time to get our hands on, but we did eventually. The business case was never actually appropriate, but they went to the election with that. Then after the election, it was like, 'Oops, sorry, that was never going to actually happen. Sorry guys.' They knocked it on the head. I supported knocking it on the head because it was going to be an enormous cost in the end. They wasted \$589 million of Victorians' money. A few hundred million of that ended up going to Glasgow through a roundabout route and is funding the Glasgow games at the moment. I do not think Victorian taxpayers even got a free ticket, did they? I do not know. They could have given us a few free tickets at least, but we did not even get that. We did not get any free tickets, and so we had this situation where Victorians got scammed – the absolute shame of doing that. This is why no-one is celebrating what is happening in the Commonwealth Games at the moment, even though Victoria is doing very well. I really hope that Danny from South-East Metro wins the judo on Saturday. I wish him well.

But they are doing it again. This is the reason why we should not trust the Liberal Party either, because they are doing it again with working from home. This is a scam – this is Commonwealth Games 2.0. What they are doing with working from home is proposing something that is only going to come into effect just before the election, because they know that it is susceptible to a High Court challenge. There have been articles in the newspaper by experts, and I have spoken to experts about this. They all think it will not stand a chance of withstanding a High Court challenge. The government has form on this sort of stuff. The EV tax, which I did not vote for, got shot down in the High Court. The Electoral Act 2002 got shot down in the High Court. This will probably get shot down in the High Court as well. But the way that the government has structured it, it comes in in September. The small business component will not come in until the next year – after the election, of course. They know that the small business component is going to be an absolute shemuzzle and that it will never actually happen

because it will just be such a mess. But there is such a short time period between the introduction of working from home, the time it comes into effect and the election, that there will not be time for a High Court challenge. And they know it. The opposition has been scared once again – I have seen this so many times in this place. The previous Premier, Dan, used to do it. They would threaten to call the Liberal Party names, and then the Liberal Party would just fold. They have done it again on the Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026, even though I think they know it is a mess. They know it is wrong. So many times they have been threatened.

I am reluctant to bring this up, but earlier in their contributions one of the Labor Party members brought up how the Liberal Party is down a member at the moment, Mrs Deeming. What happened in 2023 – I was there on that day actually – was another case of the government threatening to call the opposition names, and they folded on that as well, like they fold on everything. They are folding on this working from home stuff. How can Victorians trust the opposition either, when they just fold like this? They know it is wrong. The entire business community knows what is wrong with this working from home stuff. Look, we will be debating that soon enough, but I think that it is just wrong. I do not know. I am willing to give the new Premier a chance and to listen. I want to wait and see what the terms of reference are, to Mr Galea's point. I am not going to bag it just yet; I want to see where it goes. I hope it is expansive, and I hope it does incorporate many of the things that people have been concerned about. I hope it goes back in time as well, because a lot of this started, as was mentioned earlier today, with the desalination plant. We know that a lot of this stuff started back then, and I think we need to look at the roots of this current corruption.

I take issue with something Mr Galea said. He said that cost of living is the biggest problem at the moment. It is a big problem, but one problem that people are bringing up with me and I think is a huge issue is that organised crime has taken over this state. They have taken over entire industries for goodness sake. The tobacco industry – estimates are about 80 per cent of the market is controlled by organised crime at the moment. Within two years it will be 100 per cent of the market. In the vaping market, due to this government's and the federal government's stupid policies on vaping, organised crime controls 100 per cent of the market. We have spoken about cannabis. It is already controlled, except for the medical market – that is 100 per cent of the market. Only today I brought up, and you will be seeing more about this on the television soon enough, waste disposal and waste management. There is so much organised crime taking over and illegally dumping waste. A lot of that is again incentivised by government policy. It is incentivised by the waste levy, by the landfill levy. It is incentivised by government policy. They do not ever acknowledge the incentives that their own policies set up. It is wrong, it needs to be called out, and people are worried about it.

I hope that the royal commission does what people hope it does. I hope that the new Premier is serious about undermining organised crime in this state because, especially with what we have seen on these government projects, we cannot go into this Suburban Rail Loop project, which is one of the biggest projects in our state's history, without getting organised crime under control. We simply cannot go ahead with it. We know it will cost money to break contracts, but I do not think that anyone in any responsible manner can go forward with any major projects at the moment without organised crime being under control. I hope that the royal commission does what it is meant to do, but we will have to wait and see. I do not have much faith in anyone in Victoria at the moment, either the government or the opposition, and I hope that there are better days ahead for Victoria.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:18): I rise to speak on motion 1529 brought forward by Mr Mulholland. For months, if not years, Ben Carroll looked the Victorian community in the eye and said that a royal commission was not necessary. He has never truly acknowledged organised crime, at least he never did until it gave him the opportunity to become Premier. Last year he looked parents and students in the eye and said we could not possibly get VCE exams wrong a second year in a row because he was all over it, but they did. This year he has stood up more than once and said what a good pay offer he had made to Victorian teachers and that the teachers dispute would be settled shortly. But he has left that job and left the work undone because there was something better

going. This is a Premier who just a few weeks ago looked in the eyes of the public and said he would not betray Jacinta Allan. He even invoked his family to add emotional weight to that statement. This is a former Deputy Premier who said, 'I only stepped in because my colleagues said the position was vacant.' But according to Steve Bracks, he has been preparing for months. What do all these things have in common? With Labor, the pretence is always first, the reality is always hidden. And not just hidden, in many cases the reality is the exact opposite of what they say. Ben Carroll has proven that he is that culture personified.

We were asked 'What does this debate achieve?' I think what it has achieved today is to show that there is no new direction. The level of cognitive dissonance, denial, minimisation and deflection that we have heard today tells you that it is business as usual in Victoria. There is no introspection. There is no reflection. It is aggressive assertion, deflection and attack. It says that this government's motives are always themselves, not the work that needs to be done for Victorians. Under Labor, government is not here to help; it has become something that is done to you. The window-dressing is to tell Victorians to not just accept the unacceptable but be grateful for it. There can be no confidence in a government that does not mean what it says and does not say what it means – none – a government that has been found to be a serial liar to the Victorian people, not just in leadership but across the whole ministry. The government has a debt stabilisation plan that continues to see Victorian debt rise by tens of billions of dollars across the years. It acts as if an artificially engineered operating surplus is the same as a cash surplus, while in the background borrowing a further \$7 billion and while the single fastest growing line item on our budgets is interest on our debt, which is growing faster than revenue and growing to the point where we will pay \$10 billion in interest alone every year, which is more than we spend on police, ambulances and kindergartens combined – and there is still another billion dollars of interest to pay on top of that.

It claims that it has moved quickly, swiftly, on CFMEU corruption, when leaked reports show that the government was repeatedly advised and knew as far back as 2023 and not only did nothing but actually, there is evidence, actively intervened to ensure the CFMEU controlled state worksites. No-one in Victoria trusts this government on corruption, and the government knows it, so much so that it sacked its leader over it. Of course there is no confidence in the Victorian community about Labor and corruption – none – because it is one and the same thing. If the community have no confidence in the government on corruption, why should this Parliament?

The hospital system is in crisis, with record waiting lists for people needing urgent, life-changing surgery, and ambulance services are not meeting anything close to their response targets. Those who work in and rely on the Victorian health system, those who put their blood, sweat and expertise into the health of their fellow Victorians, have no confidence in this government or its leadership – none – so how can this Parliament?

In the extraordinary situation where a modern First World country has closed police stations and we have less police than we did three years ago, we have a Minister for Police who has not just sat on his hands but been completely absent from the debate. Victims of crime have no champion to fight for them. Every day we see unspeakably horrible machete and knife crime, firebombings, home invasions, out-of-control youth crime, with a significant proportion committed by criminals out on bail under Labor's laws, adding further trauma and tragedy to our streets and the wider community becoming resigned that this lower standard of life is now normalised. Victims of crime have no confidence in this government or its leadership. People living in fear in their own homes have no confidence in this government or its leadership – none – so how can this Parliament?

While we have the highest tax in the nation, paradoxically we have the highest debt in the nation and the nation's worst roads, worst health system, worst crime crisis and cuts to essential services. Anyone with eyes to see will see that this is unsustainable, that this is catastrophic for Victoria. It is driving people to leave, driving businesses and capital across borders to anywhere but Victoria, anywhere but Melbourne. I have met with countless business owners, business leaders, investors and developers,

and they have no confidence in this government and its leadership – none. If they do not have confidence, how can this Parliament?

I have met with researchers, innovators, scientists, entrepreneurs – those attempting to build the world of tomorrow, with a vision that Victoria can be a place of technological leadership and research excellence, even while their funding is slashed, programs are not renewed and promises are not kept. They have no confidence in the government and its leadership – none. If they do not have confidence, then how can this Parliament? I have met with schools, principals, teachers and parents of students who have seen the hollowing out of their infrastructure budgets, the debasement of curriculum with total nonsense that prepares no-one for the future that their children will walk into on leaving school, and teachers and support staff who have to fight and fight to be respected for what they do, the lowest paid teachers in Australia under this government. They have no confidence in this government and its leadership, none, so how can this Parliament?

It is a conveyor belt of failure that rolls on every day, and yesterday the last Premier stepped down. Listening to her incredibly ungracious resignation speech, you would have thought it was an exit of triumph. It was completely absent of any apology to the Victorian people for what she oversaw and what she did to this state, talking about the Big Build but not the corruption, about health but not the waiting lists – no mention of \$15 billion. Can the new leadership deny it? If the last Premier was so good, why did you force her out? Why did they have no confidence in her leadership of their government, which is to say your government? There has been no change of personnel: it is the same people. Is this a new direction? No. The roads in Victoria are embarrassing, incredibly bad. But it is classic Labor, gaslighting us about storms. There are press release solutions: on day one of the new start we are told by those opposite that not everyone is into the pothole thing. No user of roads in Victoria has confidence in your desire to fix the roads, none, so how can this Parliament?

The Premier was the minister for transport, was personally at the cabinet table that oversaw \$15 billion of corruption and has at length repudiated the need for a royal commission and voted against a royal commission, but now, because the polls suddenly are going to present themselves as different, he says, ‘Don’t blame me, blame Jacinta.’ He is suddenly saying that he was there at the table but somehow he was not there in the room. He is saying it is everyone else’s fault, or perhaps he is saying he was too timid to speak up. We have a velvet blancmange in the erstwhile Premier, the leader of last resort for Labor. Even he has no confidence in his own leadership or the government. If he had, he would have challenged when it would have made a difference, but he is happy to do it four months out from an election, when he can push the hardest decisions down the road.

For the sake of Victoria, we need a change of government even more than we needed a change of their leader, because Labor will not stop being Labor just because Jacinta Allan’s deputy became the Premier in her stead. We should have had an early election. But if we cannot have that, let this chamber make clear we have no confidence in Ben Carroll, the leader of last resort. We have no confidence in the worst, most corrupt government in Australia, and I call on the government to resign, stand down and call an early election.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:28): What we have heard in here today from the Liberals is true to form. They believe in nothing. They have no shared values that enable them to be able to come together and offer something to the Victorian people. I spoke in my earlier contribution about the rotating door of leadership the Liberals have had in the last decade, and they sit here and they talk about Labor, but they do not bring forward what they would deliver for Victorians.

I am incredibly proud to be a member of the Labor Party. I am incredibly proud to be a representative of the Labor Party. We have a 125-year history as the Labor Party, and while conservative parties have come and gone throughout Australian history, the constant has been the Australian Labor Party, and we have tens of thousands of members across the country that turn up day in and day out to make this country a better place. Born from the union movement to improve the lot of workers, with fair pay and good conditions, year after year in that 125-year history local volunteers, local members have turned

up to their local branches, to policy committees and put in hours and hours – hundreds of hours, thousands of hours – of unpaid time to work up the policies that will improve people's quality of life.

We had the Labor national conference in Adelaide last weekend, and it was a great example of openness and transparency. Media are welcome, rank-and-file union members are welcome on the floor. This motion just shows the lack of any shared values, imagination or offerings for the Victorian public the opposition have.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:30): I think this motion speaks for itself:

That this house does not possess confidence in the Victorian Labor Party to govern Victoria.

We have seen pretty laughable contributions from people like Mr McIntosh, people like Mr Batchelor and people like Mr Galea, all of whom – what was it, six weeks ago or five weeks ago? – got up on a similar motion and defended how good the Allan government was.

Members interjecting.

Evan MULHOLLAND: They got up and defended how good the Allan government was. Even people like Mr Berger were reading Premier's private office talking points about how good the Allan Labor government was, only to have this new Premier come out and say that under his government integrity is not optional, admitting that under the Allan Labor government – those opposite so keenly boasted about how good it was – integrity was optional. Corruption was running rife. They did not do anything about it. Now that they have changed leader, they want to pretend like they are a new government. Well, they are not a new government, because under Jacinta Allan's government, who was the Deputy Premier? It was Ben Carroll, because it was the Allan–Carroll government. New leader, same corrupt government. The punters have worked these people out, and the voters on 28 November will work those opposite out as well. They should be absolutely ashamed.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues for their contributions to this debate. This is a shameful government. It is a divided, dishonest and distracted government that people have worked out, and what they have worked out is that they want a real fresh start, and that fresh start begins with Jess Wilson and the Liberals and Nationals this November, not faceless men in the Labor Party who brief to the papers and run campaigns against their sitting premiers. This is the second unelected Premier in three years.

Members interjecting.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Minister Erdogan laughs. I guess he is going to be rewarded with the number one spot in the northern suburbs, pushing an Indigenous MP to the second position. But at the end of the day, it is the voters, the people of Victoria, not the Labor Party yelling in the caucus room, who will decide who the next Premier will be, and that will be Jess Wilson.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (17): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (15): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion and orders of the day**

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:40): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Petitions***Victorian Health Promotion Foundation**

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:40): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

At the outset I want to acknowledge my colleague Dr Tim Read. It is fitting that this debate is occurring tonight when he will be giving his valedictory speech shortly in the other place, and I hope the house will forgive me for departing prior to the end of this debate, if it has not concluded, so I can be there. Tim has spent his life championing health promotion and prevention, including on VicHealth's board. It is the mark of his character that upon learning of his diagnosis of metastatic melanoma last year he made it his mission in his remaining time in Parliament to save VicHealth. His passion for this cause is echoed by the thousands of petitioners who are calling on Labor to reverse their decision to abolish this critical public health entity.

The foundational story of VicHealth is ultimately the story of a brave and visionary government and bipartisanship. Inspired by the personal tragedy of his father's death to emphysema and the work of many passionate public health advocates like Dr Nigel Grey, Victorian Minister for Health in the Cain government David White introduced a landmark piece of legislation on the final sitting day of 1987. Tobacco was and still is the single biggest cause of preventable deaths in Victoria, but White and others decided it was time to take on this predatory industry and invest in health prevention and promotion, which at the time had virtually no funding. This was no small task. The tobacco industry had deeply embedded itself within Australian society through political donations, aggressive and widespread sponsorship of the arts and sports and prolific advertising. White's historic Tobacco Act 1987 increased the tax on tobacco and placed advertising bans on cigarette advertising. Incredibly, it also created the world's first health promotion agency, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, or VicHealth. The legislation ensured that funding from the tobacco tax went to support VicHealth and buy out tobacco sports and arts sponsorships.

Since that time the work of VicHealth has been extraordinary. Guided by research, much of which they fund, their work has broadened into food, economic and environmental systems that make us sick and how best to protect us from them. They embolden Victorians to take charge of their health through evidence-based health promotion, narrowing inequity in vulnerable communities. They initiated the SunSmart skin cancer program and early breast screening promotion and run numerous initiatives to support food security and nutrition, including Food for All. They do family- and gender-based violence prevention, anti-racism and youth mental health. They have become key partners for local governments across the state. Thirty per cent of VicHealth's funding is hypothecated for community sports, in particular supporting inclusion of women and girls, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people with disabilities. These are people who would otherwise face barriers to participation and would miss out on the health and social benefits of exercise. Furthermore, many of Australia's most prolific researchers got their start at VicHealth.

Victoria spends billions of dollars treating preventable diseases. VicHealth's budget is just 0.15 per cent of our state's health budget, but their work has spared Victorians from the pain and cost of preventable diseases and keeps them out of hospital. Every dollar spent on health promotion and prevention delivers a return on investment of up to \$14.30. VicHealth saves us a lot of money. The

legislative framework has been critical to VicHealth's evolution and undeniable success as a health promotion entity. Having legislated ongoing funding and multiparty representation on the board has protected it from the whims of the government of the day until now.

Last year the Allan Labor government, at the time, announced plans to absorb VicHealth into the Department of Health – no more guaranteed funding for health promotion, and it spells the death of its independence. VicHealth has always been willing to take on the big corporate interests that harm Victoria's health like the junk food industry, big tobacco, alcohol and gambling – something governments are often too afraid to do. This Labor government's decision to abolish VicHealth stands in stark contrast to the Labor government in 1987 that established VicHealth as an act that was bold and visionary. It showed real leadership – the sort of bold and visionary leadership we have perhaps been too short of in recent times. There is still time for this government to show some humility and sense, and perhaps the change of leadership in recent days provides the perfect cover to change course and reverse the appalling decision to abolish VicHealth. I commend this petition to the house.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:45): I want to begin my remarks this afternoon by acknowledging Dr Tim Read for his incredible advocacy that has brought this before us. I stand before you as somebody acknowledging the thousands of Victorians who also put their names, their voices and their fierce advocacy to this petition. It is an extraordinary level of community engagement, grassroots support and shared concern that we are seeing right across the state and even more so, I must say, in Melbourne's northern suburbs. It is a profound testament to what matters most to everyday people, because the Victorians that I know are deeply, passionately and unshakeably committed to health promotion, community wellbeing and keeping people well before they ever need to step foot inside a hospital emergency department. And people care, they really do care, about preventative health care. They care about tackling the crushing generational burden of chronic illness and about ensuring that every single member of our community can live a healthy, active and vibrant life. I empathise with that passion, and I validate it entirely. It is not just a community goal, it is a shared vision. You see, keeping people healthy, resilient and out of our acute hospital settings is a goal that this Labor government shares just as deeply, just as fiercely and just as uncompromisingly.

I know the incredible life-changing value of our public health interventions intimately, because I have lived it and I have worked within it. Before coming to this place I was a member of the board of VicHealth, elected to represent the Victorian community in driving forward the future of an organisation so beloved in our community. In that time I had the good fortune to understand just how deeply their impact is felt right across the state. This Girl Can is a campaign that will always sit deeply in my heart, because it is a campaign that was lifted up from the voices of women – women that had been excluded from physical activity, excluded from community sport and excluded from thinking that they were worthy enough to take a little bit of time out for their own health and their own wellbeing. It is a campaign that I proudly supported here in this Parliament. In fact it was, I will be honest, one of only two times that I had been in this place before I got elected. What I saw with that role there at VicHealth and what I witnessed was the work that they did to tackle the systemic barriers that far too many vulnerable people face every single day. I saw how our health system can frequently fail marginalised people when services are fragmented, when they are disconnected and when they are frustratingly hard to navigate. That experience was not just professional, it was deeply formative, and it reinforced my absolute, unwavering belief that a strong public health system cannot operate in isolated silos. It must be accountable, it must be integrated and above all it must be there for people exactly when and where they need it most.

I understand that change can inevitably bring uncertainty. I hear the genuine, heartfelt concern raised by the community in this petition about what the future holds for preventative health in Victoria. I want to stand here today and offer my absolute assurance: health promotion is not being abandoned, sidelined or forgotten. The vital life-saving work of preventing chronic disease, tackling the root causes of illness and addressing the symptoms of health conditions is continuing with absolute vigour, absolute focus and absolute government backing, and our government is taking a bold, purposeful step

forward by accepting the recommendations of the review. I could talk a little bit about it, but I really do not want to talk about the review. I want to talk about the people that make VicHealth so very special and to say to each of you again that I stand here to offer you my assurances that health promotion is at the very heart of what we are to do as a government. It is not being forgotten, it is not being sidelined, and there is absolutely a champion for preventative health right here on this side. It is not being abolished, it will still exist and thrive, and I say that in honour of Dorothy Reading.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:50): I rise to speak to Dr Mansfield's petition in relation to VicHealth. Can I also echo the sentiments in the opening remarks that you made around Dr Tim Read. I want to acknowledge Tim as well and the discussions that we have had over a number of years in this place around health. I have valued those very much, and in particular our discussions around VicHealth.

As has been said, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation was established in 1987 under the Tobacco Act 1987, making it the world's first health promotion foundation funded through a dedicated tax on tobacco products. And it was formed with bipartisan support. The Honourable Mark Birrell was very much in favour of that and worked with the government of the day to see this, and we have seen VicHealth representation from members of Parliament sitting on the board over many decades. If you look at the work that VicHealth has been responsible for and those major achievements that it has seen, it has been very much around prevention, education, awareness and research. When I first came into this place I spoke about my previous roles working in the area of diabetes and my concern around the rates of diabetes rising within the community and what we needed to do further to abate the rates in those very significant areas, and it is one area that VicHealth has looked at. But before I get to that I just want to look at those other major achievements. Tobacco control – it contributed to Victoria becoming a global leader in tobacco control. Physical activity – it invested heavily in community sport and active recreation. I think it is tremendous to know of the efforts there, with engagement and prevention working. Mental health and wellbeing, research and innovation, health equity and healthy eating – it led the campaigns promoting healthier food choices.

I did discuss this with former CEO Sandro Demaio when he was there before he went off to South Korea; I think he went to another lead role. The Healthy Together Victoria campaign that we did when we were in government, under the leadership of David Davis when he was Minister for Health, was really partly a lot of the model that VicHealth undertook to understand that and work with communities. They were tremendous partnerships that we had under Healthy Together Victoria. Unfortunately, the Labor government scrapped that initiative and took us back, and there is more work to be done.

In the last few minutes that I have got to talk about this, I want to say that the only reason we are having this debate tonight is because the government is scrapping VicHealth. The only reason we are having this debate is because of the dire situation of the budget. When they have got \$200 billion of debt and they are paying \$24 million of interest payments each day, the government have made the decision that they are scrapping this agency. That is what they are doing. They have to do it through the legislation, through the Tobacco Act. But the only reason we are having this debate is because of the dire state of Victoria's budget. When you mismanage the budget, it has consequences. And the consequences include things like this agency, which is set for the chop under the government. That is what they have said, so I was a bit perplexed when the member was talking about it being still there. No, it is going to be swamped and swallowed up into the department.

These are decisions government has to make, and I think we can look at all of this. But I do want to make the point that VicHealth has had those achievements over many years. And being a world leader, it has been a pioneer of health promotion. It has been a very, very significant agency in that regard and has been well regarded right around the world. It is important that we continue to put those initiatives into the community, because without preventative health, you are going to have greater strains on the acute health system. You can argue that there are too many agencies or the like. But I say again: the only reason we are having this debate is because of the dire situation of the Victorian budget, under

the direction of the Carroll government now, but previously the Andrews government and Allan governments, which have set this state up with this extraordinary debt.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:55): Every morning I read the newspaper, and every morning there is another firebombing and every morning there is more evidence of organised crime and the way that organised crime has overrun this state. If we look at the industry of tobacco, for example, it is estimated that about 80 per cent of the market now is controlled by organised crime – very soon 100 per cent will be controlled by organised crime. Other nicotine harm reduction products, like vaping, are already 100 per cent controlled by organised crime. Organised crime has corrupted this state to a level that we have never seen. I do not know what planet people are living on to think Victoria is a world leader on tobacco policy; we are a global laughing-stock. The world looks at us, literally, in case studies of what not to do, and a large part of that – the people that were cheering on this policy, that promoted this policy for years, for decades – is VicHealth. They have not been held responsible for the harm that they have caused this state. If you want to talk about evidence-based policy, you only need to look at the firebombing attacks every morning. The government has made the right decision to shut down VicHealth. They should have shut it down earlier, and they should be holding responsible those who have held up and promoted the disastrous policies that have led to an explosion of organised crime in this state. I hope that the government is not cowed by this and proceeds with shutting down VicHealth as it intended to do.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:56): I rise as a former board member of VicHealth to talk about the important work that is done in health prevention by VicHealth. We cannot just treat chronic health illnesses; we have to educate the community on how we can prevent illnesses developing and how they can better equip themselves to be healthy in this state. VicHealth carries out really important work, and it carries it out independently of government for a reason. VicHealth was set up by Mark Birrell back in the Kennett government era to be an independent body that does look at the need for education on health issues in the community but also to administer grants to communities for sporting groups et cetera that encourage young people particularly, but also older people, to be more active and to look after their health. I would hate to think of those grants being administered by a government department, where there can be influence on where those grants go. They must go to the best applicants, and they must go right across our state to ensure that all communities benefit from those grants.

But I can speak from experience of this government's history in wanting to shut down VicHealth. When I was on the board, there was a real push by the then health minister to grab the money that was going to VicHealth to use it to fund their domestic violence programs. The domestic violence programs needed to be funded, but they needed to be funded in addition to health prevention funding that was going to VicHealth. The chair of the board at that time was actually a former CEO of Domestic Violence Victoria, and Fiona was against that proposal by the government. She wanted domestic violence services to be funded adequately but she also wanted to see investment in preventative health measures in this state, and VicHealth is an important body that does contribute towards the education of people and to the prevention of illnesses actually becoming chronic in Victoria. This government have had a long-term agenda to shut down VicHealth, and this latest move is just extending that agenda.

Everyone is against this – everyone. Doctors are against the closure of VicHealth and it being consumed into the department, where the funding will just disappear on other things. The community is against this. The opposition is against this. The Greens are against this. Most of the crossbenchers are against this. It is only the government that want to close down VicHealth, that want to close down programs that prevent chronic illnesses in this state. This government should take a good hard look at themselves. They are just desperate to find funds from anywhere. They will take funds away from little kids and their sporting organisations. They will take funds away from people who are developing illnesses just to prop up their bottom line because they have mismanaged the finances in this state, because they have allowed all of their major projects to have massive blowouts in their budgets and because they have allowed \$15 billion of taxpayers funds to be rorted through the Big Build and

diverted to unions and to strippers et cetera on the Big Build sites. This government do not know how to manage money, they do not know how to manage the health system in this state and they do not know how to manage the education system in this state. Everything has decayed under the 12 years of Labor, and this government will find that the people of Victoria will pass their judgement in November when they finally get the opportunity to vote them out. The government denied them the opportunity of voting Jacinta Allan out, but believe me, the people do not forget. They know that this is the same old Labor. They know that Ben Carroll was her deputy. They know that he voted for all of the corruption, and they will vote you out.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:02): I am delighted to be able to join this debate to give my full support to the petition before us to save VicHealth. When the government first announced that they would be dissolving VicHealth, the response from the community was an emphatic no. We saw the Community and Public Sector Union, health and medical organisations, local councils from across the state, former state government ministers from both political parties, five former VicHealth chairs and some of Australia's most eminent healthcare professionals all say exactly the same thing: that abolishing VicHealth would severely reduce the effectiveness of public health in this state. In fact I should congratulate this government. They have managed to do the seemingly impossible task of uniting the entire rest of the Parliament on something. Truly everyone except for this government seems to understand just how reckless and just how misguided this decision is.

The reason behind this dangerous move? So-called budget savings. This too is misguided. Across public policy spheres it is well understood that investment in prevention, in the fence at the top of the hill, saves both lives and money in the long term. Chronic disease costs Australia around \$140 billion each year, and it is estimated that every dollar spent on health prevention results in \$14.30 in future health cost savings.

Through VicHealth Victoria has been so fortunate to not only have the world's first-ever health promotion agency but one that is now seen as the ideal model for health promotion across the world. Across its 40-year history VicHealth has run successful initiatives to reduce the rates of drinking and smoking, encourage active and socially connected lifestyles and encourage the living of healthier lives overall. VicHealth were one of the first to correctly identify gambling harm as a significant public health issue, recognising just how detrimental it is to lives and wellbeing. Many of you will have heard me raise in this place the importance of improving women's participation in sport. On this, VicHealth's work was also groundbreaking through their incredibly successful This Girl Can campaign, which encouraged women to get involved and to get active in sport. Their work recognised systemic barriers to good health and was firmly grounded in the understanding that health promotion works best when it is led by the community itself. VicHealth is truly a rare thing in our divided modern political world, and this debate is evidence of that. It is a Victorian government agency with bipartisan backing, global renown and strong public support. The government must reverse their decision and they must save VicHealth.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:05): I think, from Ms Watt's speech, that maybe they have responded to this and restored the funding. That is what it seems like from their funding, but in fact they have not. I will say this: when I first started, my first real job, if you like, was in health promotion of projects funded by VicHealth. I still remember so well the analogy that they would use, and that was essentially of a river that is flowing downstream that has a strong current, and they said that there are essentially two options. They painted the picture of people getting caught in this stream, and they would have to be rescued downstream. They would send an ambulance out, they would pull them out of the water and resuscitate them; they would do all of these things. Or what you could do is you could go upstream and you could build guardrails. That was the analogy. I will tell you what: in Victoria, where it is almost impossible to get an ambulance on time and where some people wait hours to days, where there are more than 68,000 people on the public elective surgery waitlist, where chronic health, as Ms Purcell said, is costing billions of dollars, do you know what you need to do? You need to go upstream, and you have to make sure that people have the education and it is prevented.

I think it is absolutely shameful and short-sighted that the reason the government is doing it is as a cost-saving measure. In reality what they are doing is they are taking the guardrails off and they are allowing vulnerable people to get caught in this stream, which will cost a lot more later on. Heart disease, diabetes and a lot of lifestyle illnesses can be helped and can be prevented with the right information. Cutting the body that provides that information, which has bipartisan support, seems extremely short-sighted. It just seems like something that could cause and probably will cause a lot more congestion in our hospitals, a lot more need for people to get an ambulance and a lot more money being spent treating this. So I commend this motion to the house. I hope that Ms Watt's speech is a prophecy. I hope that they are going to put their money where their mouth is, because the action of cutting VicHealth and the speech given by a member of the government quite frankly do not add up. I commend this motion to the house.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:08): What a remarkable display we have seen on full view here today. We have had the government's lead speaker –

Renee Heath interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: and only speaker lament the garrotting of VicHealth. It is absolutely breathtaking. Yet we have in the chamber the Treasurer, who is instrumental in making the decision to garrotte VicHealth. VicHealth, which was established by the Labor Party –

Wendy Lovell interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: albeit with bipartisan support – spectacularly lost its way from the former health minister in the 1980s. For this government to now somehow today present itself with some sort of crocodile tears and with a single speaker somehow telling this place and the people of Victoria that it will go on to live a new life in a department – what absolute hypocrisy. What an absolutely shameless exhibition of an absolutely faux attempt to show that they somehow care – to year after year lecture the people of Victoria and lecture other political parties about preventative health and then to cut the single agency whose job it is to perform a function outside of government and outside of politics to tackle those issues without fear or favour, all in the name of toe-cutting and of cost-saving. This corrupt, morally moribund, without-a-moral-compass government of Allan, of Andrews and now of Carroll is proceeding to do it regardless of knowing the full cost on the health of every Victorian: every Victorian child, every Victorian girl, every Victorian boy, every Victorian male and female – you name it. And where are they? Where are those opposite? We have a sprinkling of representation here tonight at the death knell of this organisation of the once Labor Party who championed, so they said, both the worker and the downtrodden. And yet here it is, the Labor Party. Where is David White? What would he think of this? He would think it is a disgrace. They should be ashamed, those opposite, and they are, by their absence. They do not even want to front up to what it is they are about to perform. Their actions consistently, in this government, abandon workers and abandon the people of Victoria – *(Time expired)*

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Delivering School Upgrade Projects

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:11): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report, which is an independent assurance report to the Parliament focusing on delivering school upgrades. This report was published in June of this year and tabled in this house. The report seeks to provide insight into how the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) is delivering school upgrade projects and whether projects are meeting the school community needs. In Victoria there are over 1580 public schools, including over 36,000 school building classrooms and other facilities. It is understandable that as time goes by

facilities are subject to wear and tear or otherwise become outdated. This is why the Carroll Labor government remains committed to supporting the Victorian School Building Authority to continuously deliver upgrades to our public schools and therefore ensure that Victorian students have access to modern facilities to assist and support their education.

In the report the Victorian Auditor-General's Office proposed six recommendations to the VSBA, all of which have been accepted. In the report VAGO further identified key areas in which the VSBA has been successful. Among these was the ability for the VSBA to properly understand school conditions. Over a five-year cycle the VSBA engages an external assessor to visit schools in Victoria and to rate the condition of every asset at every school. Using the information gathered, schools are then given an overall condition score, which is then used to prioritise the funding of repairs or maintenance for particular schools and then to make recommendations to the department and then government. Furthermore, the VSBA was found to consult well with schools regarding project designs and also with their school communities, resulting in those school communities and principals really loving the new designs for their new schools. They did find also that the VSBA was conducting extensive and thorough consultation with schools and communities, as well as regularly reviewing guidance for architects on quality standards for school facilities. Reports such as these are designed to highlight where improvements can be made, and the VSBA has shown its commitment to continuous improvement by accepting all six recommendations in the report.

What is clear is that the Victorian School Building Authority is working hard to ensure Victorian children get the best schools that support their learning. Schools are essential to the development of our children, and that means they must be able to flourish in modern, safe, comfortable environments. Of course it is not just the classrooms, the pens or the paper that shape education but the full range of facilities that make up a school that supports a child's learning – they are just as important. It is clear, however, that without continued government funding for our state schools they would quickly fall into disrepair. In Victoria we pride ourselves on state-funded schooling which ensures that every Victorian student, no matter how young or old, gains access to a world-class education, regardless of their postcode or financial situation. Gone are the days in which the best levels of education could only be accessed by those with financial means to pay private school fees. After all, education should not be a privilege for a select few but a fundamental right for all. As the report mentioned:

... one of the government's key priorities is to provide 'welcoming, world-class and modern schools, which meet the needs of local communities – because every child should have access to a great local school'.

This can only be achieved by a Labor government, and we have a strong track record in ensuring proper funding for our schools but also proper funding of facilities. Whilst others would seek to undo the progress that consecutive Labor governments have made over many years and many terms of being in government, what we know is that the opposition's proposed budget cuts must come from somewhere. We all know for sure it is with cuts that Victorians will have to go without, and that includes our littlest learners as well. Victorians deserve the very best they can get in terms of education, including the highest quality education and modern facilities required to achieve it. I commend the report to the house.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires across Victoria

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:15): I am pleased to speak on the *2026 Summer Fires across Victoria* report that was tabled; I am a member of the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee. These fires had a significant impact on Victoria – there was the loss of the life of Maxwell Hobson in the Longwood fires, 451 homes and over 1000 outbuildings destroyed, approximately 440,000 hectares of land burnt, more than 45,000 livestock deaths, over 9600 kilometres of fencing lost and over 40,000 tonnes of hay or silage destroyed – and a massive impact on businesses, on tourism and on wildlife. The impacts go on.

Was Victoria prepared for these bushfires? We heard so much evidence: ageing CFA fleets, underinvestment over the long term and newly installed radios that worked in Burwood when they were tested but failed to work out in the field. We have seen over the last decade declining CFA volunteers; senior operational leadership positions vacant at the time of the bushfires, which left communities exposed; frustration over roadside vegetation and the lack of clearance around and maintenance of critical infrastructure; increased fuel loads and reductions in planned burns. We knew that the Unimogs and the G-Wagons, hundreds of them, were offline during the season. What happened on the firegrounds reflected a decade of policy, governance and preparedness decisions. The government had been warned time and again and failed to respond accordingly.

We received over 480 submissions. We held hearings across the state, and the stories were concerning. We heard of 35-year-old fire trucks where the burnover protection failed. We had brigades that pleaded for backup and none came. We had some volunteers working over 30 days straight, communities cut off with telecommunication and power failures, 000 stopped taking calls, farmers struggling to find feed for their livestock impacted by fences that were lost in a moment, teenagers left to euthanise hundreds of injured livestock and local councils expected to step up and support communities. Some of them are still waiting for funding.

Over six months later and here we are. The recovery process is well behind. The clean-up program has been delayed. We have had elderly residents cleaning up asbestos waste on sites. We have had home sites destroyed by the fires that are still waiting to be cleared, and any further tip waiver extensions have taken extensive follow-up to get. Victoria is one of the most fire-prone parts of the world. There should be a playbook with minimum standards and a best practice framework. This was a big inquiry in a short timeframe, and for many the stories were raw. Emergency services in this state are crucial, especially in rural and regional areas. Equipment matters; volunteers matter. There have been numerous inquiries, and we know what needs to happen.

We have got the main report and also a minority report put forward by the Liberals and Nationals, which focuses on the preventative aspects, the response and the recovery. We have got to improve emergency response capability, invest in equipment with our CFA and FRV, make changes to ensure our volunteers get the training and support that they need, recognise the important role of private vehicles, build strategic water supplies and ensure that there is maintenance around critical infrastructure. Telecommunications is essential, so is power, and we need resilient networks. We have got to have enhanced prevention and response messaging and fast-track improvements to the VicEmergency app. We have got to ensure that planned burns, prevention and maintenance are undertaken and, following on from the bushfires, we need to support communities with fast access to the roads required, support our neighbourhood houses and local councils and ensure that permits are fast-tracked to rebuild and that mental health services are provided over the long term. We need a universal clean-up program, better access to temporary housing and a focus on tourism. But to all those who helped in the response and continue to do so, we say thank you.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires across Victoria

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:20): I also rise to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria. I want to start by acknowledging the communities that were affected by these fires. There are a number of communities affected throughout the state, but in my electorate particularly Longwood, Harcourt, Walwa and Yarraweeyah. Also I want to mention Markwood and Goomalibee, which suffered bushfires this summer as well but were not necessarily elevated to the level of government response as the other firegrounds were.

I want to express my gratitude to all community members, organisations, local governments and other authorities who took the time to prepare submissions and to appear as witnesses at hearings, and I want to acknowledge the significant difficulty that they did that under. Many of the individuals were still

trying to put their own lives back together, as Mrs Broad has so adequately laid out, but they took the time to make important contributions to this inquiry so that people in the future should not go through the same experience they have.

The fires this summer took the life of one of my constituents, and I extend my condolences to the family of Maxwell Hobson, who lost his life on the Longwood fireground. They destroyed 451 homes, damaged a further 29 and destroyed 1110 outbuildings. Approximately 440,000 hectares of land burnt. They impacted on 150,000 hectares of agricultural land. More than 45,000 livestock died in the fires. There was approximately 9625 kilometres of fencing lost. More than 40,000 tonnes of hay or silage was destroyed. Commercial properties were destroyed, tourism and community infrastructure was damaged or destroyed, and there was significant disruption to farming enterprises and other local businesses as well as significant loss of wildlife. So you can see that there was enormous impact by these fires.

The majority report makes 93 findings and 80 recommendations. What we heard was that, despite numerous warnings and multiple reviews, audits and inquiries, Victoria entered the 2025–26 fire season unprepared. We heard that both our major fire services, CFA and FRV, have ageing firefighting fleets that are no longer fit for purpose. We heard that volunteer numbers in the CFA have declined over the past decade. We heard of communication failures and command shortcomings, infrastructure vulnerabilities and emergency management weaknesses. We heard that all of these things affected the response operations, and it is communities that have borne the consequences. Those consequences have been adequately outlined by Mrs Broad.

I commend the majority report, which largely outlines the problems that my communities faced and that fire services were presented with as the fires engulfed much of Victoria. But most of all, I would encourage Victorians to read the minority report which includes much of the information that the government and Greens members voted to exclude from the majority report. The minority report includes 19 findings and 30 recommendations that were missing from the majority report. These focus on prevention, response and recovery. It also includes information the government tried to hide from Victorians. The time allocated to asking questions of government agencies and the department was inadequate to fully question the ministers, so a number of questions that were asked were taken on notice and I submitted an additional 34 questions. The answers to those questions were provided to the committee on 4 June, then on 5 June the CFA followed up to say that they were recalling those answers. The reason for this was they had been told they needed to be reviewed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office and the cabinet committee. This is direct government interference with evidence given to the committee, and the responses that were received afterwards were significantly edited. I would encourage everyone to read those two documents, which are also included in the minority report.

Pound Road, Narre Warren South, pedestrian safety

Petition

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:25): I rise to speak today to the petition that I tabled earlier this morning regarding the death of 16-year-old Chris Rua Antony. His life was lost tragically when he was walking home from his school, Mazenod College, on Friday 13 February at about 4:30. He was hit by a car that left Pound Road and collided with the young man and then crashed into a tree. The words he was saying to his parents on the phone just prior to the collision were, 'I'm close to home.' I believe he was speaking to his father Antony at the time, who then realised that something had happened. They turned their car around, and the parents were some of the first on the scene with the people that had actually hit him as a result of the accident.

The petition is really important. It is important that the government pays attention to this, because I went to the wake for this young man and then actually attended the funeral as well, but in the funeral I was outside. It was so well attended by the community, students and schoolmates, people from sporting clubs, people that knew the family and people from the faith community to which the family

belongs. It was spilling out into an annexe, and it was also spilling out from the annexe into the outdoors without any protection from the weather. I think that goes to show not only the tragic loss and grief that the family were feeling and the need to support them in this time but also the tremendous respect and love for this student, Chris Rua Antony. He survived for about a week in hospital before he passed away. It was so tragic to be at the wake, to see the photos of this young man at his birth and the beaming face of his parents as they held him up, particularly his father, and to see that tragic loss and be there afterwards.

His father begged me – I was the only member of Parliament that attended, the only local member, and I am an upper house member that represents 11 electorates, of which Narre South is only one – and said, ‘Please do something so that this doesn’t have to happen to any other family ever again.’ So I made an appeal, and I have had a petition that could be signed online and in paper and today presented the online petition, which has nearly 900 signatures. There have been a lot more that have signed up on a Change.org one. I think it is nearly at 8000 signatures. There are so many people that feel so strongly about the government providing proper safety for pedestrians when they are walking home. When we have busy roads that have high speed limits and a number of cars that have been stuck in traffic because of congestion, they get frustrated and then come tearing along when the speed limit is a little bit higher. In areas where visibility can be poor the government needs to make sure that it takes on board the requests from the petition so that we can in fact prevent another death. That is the greatest desire of Chris’s parents and his sister, who he has left behind.

The parents stayed in the hospital, sleeping beside him and waking with him. He was always accompanied by his family, but he remained in a comatose state the whole time after the accident. They knew their son was a fighter, and he did fight, but they then saw his body start to give out. So it was a really tragic ending for a 16-year-old who was sporty, who was bright, who had a strong faith and who had his whole life ahead of him.

The petition calls for greater security measures on the busy road. Close to 2000 signatures came on the change.org petition within the first 24 hours. It asks for VicRoads to install safety barriers between Pound Road and the footpath and demands the relocation of the footpath away from the traffic.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the 2026 Summer Fires across Victoria

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:31): In the Environment and Planning Committee we have completed and tabled this week our report into the 2026 Victorian bushfires. As we all know, in the cut and thrust of a committee there is evidence presented, submissions are held and had and there is negotiation and sometimes confrontation in terms of the final contents of the report. That was the case in this report on the bushfires. Now, as diligent committees do, we took submissions, but we also went out into rural and regional Victoria.

We started our hearings in Colac. We went on site out to Tomahawk Creek, and it was very clear. We stood on a gravel track, and there was a farmer who stayed during the Otway fires in January. We were in situ, and on one side there was a forest that had had a preparatory burn, a preventative, prescribed burn conducted by Forest Fire Management Victoria some 12 months before, and on the other side there was not – there was a normal forest with heavy fuel load on the floor. And what we saw there – and this was testimony from the farmer that stayed – is where there had been preparatory burns, prescribed burns that took the heavy fuel load off the forest floor, the fire came up the ridge, came through that heavy thicketed forest and actually went into the preparatory burn forest but then petered out. It then got to a stage where our dedicated fire services, the volunteers – and there might have been Forest Fire Management there as well – were able to diminish and contain that fire, because of a prescribed burn.

This government in the last decade has burnt on average around 1.4 per cent of the public forest estate. And we heard in Ruffey, when we went and sat with people in the Ruffey community hall, that across

the road a house was burnt out and around the corner farms and farm buildings were burnt out. We heard from those fantastic, incredible people that there is not enough fuel reduction being done. We heard that the roadside vegetation acted like a wick, and we heard that there were not enough firebreaks. We heard in Ruffy, when people came and spoke to us, that the CFA volunteers rang incident control and said, 'Send more strike teams,' and do you know what the incident control centre said? They said, 'We can't. Ultimately, you're on your own.'

Those incident control centres were under pressure because of this government's so-called reform – I call it a restructure. There were not enough commanders and assistant fire chief officers in those incident control centres at the time, and that was evident from the two reports that we received on questions on notice from the CFA. To this committee, and it is published in our minority report, the CFA presented one report on 4 June, and that was a fulsome 33-page document that showed how, because of this new arrangement presented and passed by this chamber and the government – not by us; we opposed it – there were insufficient people with that content knowledge, that experience at the top, directing these fires. So when those firefighters, people who work on the farms, people who live on farms, had to make a choice between defending their farm or getting in an aged truck – 27 years old those trucks are, with one capacity front cabin and one where they sit in the back in the open air, other than a shield – they made that decision to go and fight, and they were told, 'Go it on your own because a strike team just might not come.'

This is what was made evident in this inquiry. I invite people to have a look. There were some great things that were able to be put into the majority report, but we ultimately could not support it because there was a whole lot of evidence from eyewitnesses. What did Labor and the Greens do and what about the casting vote – it is in the transcript there – by the chair? Often it was sanitised, with the government submission coming through and through, and some of this very important information was left. I invite everyone to read the minority report. There are some compelling recommendations. I want to thank from the bottom of my heart all of those Victorians who again and again and again go into the heart and soul of a fire to save their communities.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (18:36): I have a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Education and Training Reform Act 2006** to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the early childhood education, school education, vocational education and training and adult, community and further education system, to require schools to develop policies to restrict student use of personal electronic devices during school hours and to improve the operation of that Act and to amend the **Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010** to make a technical amendment in relation to the publication of information and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Adjournment

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:37): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Infection prevention and control

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:37): (2631) As we all know, this time of year marks flu season, and viruses such as influenza, RSV, COVID and the common cold are all in circulation at this time of year. Whilst transmission is difficult to avoid sometimes, there are things that can be done to mitigate the risks of transmission. On the forefront, however, is vaccination, which

is a tried and proven method to prevent serious illness. Of critical importance is the childhood vaccination program for our littlest Victorians, which is made possible under the national immunisation program, making children's routine scheduled vaccines free. Despite this, we must acknowledge that whilst vaccination helps to prevent serious illness, infection can and still does occur. There are also viruses in the community that are circulating right now that cannot be vaccinated against. Therefore the action that I seek from the Minister for Health is for her to provide me with insight into what is being done to promote the importance of hygiene measures and isolation in order to mitigate the risks of spreading germs and viruses during times of increased illness.

Food relief

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:38): (2632) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Minister, demand for food relief has more than doubled in the past year in some areas of the City of Casey. Meanwhile this Labor government is wasting taxpayer money: \$15 billion on corruption; \$589 million on Commonwealth Games in Glasgow that Victoria is not even hosting; \$13 million on machete bins, which, to no-one's surprise, did nothing to curb the escalating crime in this state; and \$1.2 million every hour on interest thanks to Labor's almost \$200 billion debt.

Let me make this crystal clear: the money of hardworking families who are doing arithmetic gymnastics trying to make ends meet is being poured down the drain by this Carroll Labor government. Think about what the struggling families could do if they had even a portion of the money that this government has handed over to criminals. Instead families are standing in line, out in the winter cold, hoping to get enough free groceries to get them through the week. Thanks to the Carroll Labor government Victoria now leads the nation in food insecurity. Eighty per cent of charities are overwhelmed by demand. Nearly six in 10 charities are running out of food. A third of Victorians are now accessing help for the first time. Food relief organisations in the south-east report that they are now seeing new bunches of people every week and that their biggest worry is whether they have enough food to meet this growing demand.

I personally visited the OzHarvest hub in Hallam not long after it opened and was there during a food distribution time. The hub delivers 6000 extra meals each week across Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Greater Dandenong, Knox, Monash and Mornington Peninsula, yet this is not enough. More recently I visited Transit Soup Kitchen & Food Support – in fact I was there with Jess Wilson, our leader – which feeds around 1700 people per week with free three-course meals twice a week and fresh groceries three times a week. These organisations are reporting that nowadays it is not only low-income families who are seeking their support as higher income families are also being pushed into financial pressure.

Families who just a couple of years ago would have had no trouble paying their bills and buying their groceries are experiencing financial challenges; money which the Labor government is costing them is blowing out, and they are struggling. Finances in this state have been mismanaged for far too long, so the action I seek, Minister, is for you to clearly demonstrate the steps that this government is going to take to stop the financial mismanagement in this state, get this money back where it belongs – to Victorians – including how it will support food relief organisations such as those in the south-east which are meeting rising demands.

Medicinal cannabis

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:41): (2633) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Medical Research, and the action I seek is for the minister to consider supporting a government-funded evaluation of medicinal cannabis as a treatment option for first responders who have sustained workplace injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain.

First responders are regularly exposed to traumatic and violent incidents as part of their job; this puts them at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders. Post-traumatic stress disorder can develop

after a person experiences or witnesses a traumatic event that threatens their own life or safety or the life and safety of others. Research from the Black Dog Institute found that one in seven first responders are likely to have PTSD because of their routine duties. Many also experience chronic pain, disrupted sleep, anxiety and other complex conditions that can significantly affect their work, relationships and quality of life.

Established psychological therapies and medications remain central to treatment. Pharmaceuticals such as antidepressants and benzodiazepines are currently the first line of treatment for PTSD. However, a proportion of first responders continue to experience persistent symptoms despite conventional treatments. I have spoken to first responders who are very concerned about the addictive nature and side-effects of these medications. An Australian feasibility study involving 36 participants in a first responder program conducted by OnTracka examined whether they could be safely supported through a structured cannabinoid medicinal program. Over 12 months the study retained more than 85 per cent of participants and generated 3800 mental health, sleep and medication adherence entries. What they found was that first responders have reduced nightmares, improved sleep and decreased anxiety.

Given the elevated rates of PTSD and suicide amongst first responders, we must support access to all clinically appropriate treatments. For some this will mean the medications that we are aware of – benzos, SSRIs – for others, these simply do not work. What OnTracka's feasibility study confirms is that when taken every single day medicinal cannabis can provide a better quality of life. First responders are workers: if they are injured at work, they should be compensated for the treatment they need, including, where appropriate, medicinal cannabis. Therefore the action I seek is for the minister to consider supporting a government-funded evaluation of medicinal cannabis as a treatment option for first responders.

Southern Metropolitan Region small businesses

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:43): (2634) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small and Family Business in the other place. We now know that in the last financial year Victoria saw 123,000 new small businesses opening, giving us a net growth in the number of small businesses in Victoria of 2.3 per cent. This has been facilitated by the decisions we have made to promote business growth in this state; for example, raising the payroll tax free threshold over time to now sit at \$1 million. We are also making it easier to do business in this state with what we are delivering, including halving the number of business regulators and cutting \$500 million in compliance costs by 2030. To support our hospitality sector, we are making it easy to get a liquor licence and easier to get approval for outdoor dining. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how many new small businesses opened in the financial year in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

Community safety

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:44): (2635) My matter is for the Attorney-General, regarding community expectations of our criminal system in this state. In relation to the handling of our crime crisis, experts in the field have highlighted a need for greater clarity and certainty in sentencing for serious offences in Victoria. The action I seek from the Attorney-General is to implement a reform including the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences for serious repeat offenders. The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police Mr Mike Bush has recently called for a system of graduated mandatory sentencing to address serious crime, particularly among repeat offenders and young offenders. Under this proposal, offenders would face a clear minimum sentence for the first offence – and I say again: a clear minimum sentence for the first serious offence – and then progress to stronger sentences for subsequent or repeat offending. This is about clarity. It is about ensuring the offenders understand the consequences of their actions, and the victims and the broader community can regain the confidence in our justice system.

The community are experiencing a high level of offending, particularly in serious categories, such as robbery and aggravated burglary, where offenders are significantly over-represented. A small cohort of repeat offenders continues to drive a large proportion of serious harm in this state. The chief commissioner has made it clear that many of these young offenders do not fully appreciate the consequences of their behaviours. In many ways the current sentencing system has contributed to the lack of awareness. There is a growing concern that the current system lacks the clarity required to deter repeat offending and protect our community. At the same time, concerns have been raised about the delayed justice process and complex administrative requirements, which are insufficient and prevent timely outcomes. As has been highlighted, a justice system that is slow and overly bureaucratic is one that allows reoffending to occur before accountability is enforced. Victorians deserve a justice system that is both fair and effective – one that balances judicial discretion with clear and concise consequences for serious criminal behaviour. I urge the Attorney-General to take decisive steps to address this issue by strengthening the sentencing system. This should include providing clear and certain consequences for serious and repeat offences to help in restoring our community confidence, improving outcomes for victims and enhancing overall public safety.

Firewood collection

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:47): (2636) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to finally make the announcement surrounding the spring firewood collection season, which he promised back in May. On 13 May, in questions without notice, I asked the minister to allow my constituents to collect deadfall firewood from state parks and forests. The minister responded with:

We cannot open it all up. I know that some may feel that that is logical; that is actually risky. It puts the community at risk as well. We are going to do that response in a balanced way. Just look out for further announcements before winter.

Now, to me, the contempt for my constituents in northern Victoria held by this minister is palpable. People in the regions are not stupid. They know how to safely retrieve firewood from firewood collection areas; they just need areas to collect it from. As to the mentioned announcements, we have heard nothing – crickets. There is no word on where northern Victorians can collect firewood over the spring season to keep themselves warm. In the winter season there are very few places in my region for free firewood collection. Every winter I have raised the issue of the lack of firewood collection points in my region. Every winter my constituents watch the deadfall stack up on forest floors, potentially causing access issues and the risk of fires. Minister, the action I seek is for you to finally make the announcement surrounding the spring firewood collection season, which you promised back in May.

Twelve Apostles precinct redevelopment

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (18:49): (2637) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Regional Development, and the action I seek is for the latest update on the progress of the new Twelve Apostles visitor experience centre. The Twelve Apostles is one of Victoria's most recognised destinations, attracting visitors from across Australia and of course right across the world. The new visitor experience will enhance access to this extraordinary part of our coastline, better protect the natural environment and provide a world-class experience for generations to come. A little while ago I did join the Minister for Regional Development, as well as my colleague from Western Victoria Jacinta Ermacora and Labor's candidate for Polwarth Hutch Hussein, and we had a really good look through the construction site. We saw firsthand this impressive project. Already the project has created more than 750 jobs, supported over 100 local businesses and provided opportunities for more than 50 apprentices, and that is something that our whole region can be very proud of. Proudly funded by the state and the federal Labor governments through the *Geelong City Deal*, this investment is backing local communities today while helping more visitors discover everything that our beautiful Shipwreck Coast has to offer. More visitors staying longer in our region means greater opportunities for the incredible hospitality businesses that we have, our retailers and tourism operators right along the Great

Ocean Road and beyond. It is an investment that supports jobs now and will drive economic activity, ensuring our region continues to thrive. I look forward to the minister's update on this significant project, including how it will particularly benefit our region in Western Victoria.

Donnybrook Road upgrade

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:51): (2638) I rise to raise a very important matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the urgent need to duplicate Donnybrook Road and finally deliver the infrastructure in one of Victoria's fastest growing communities that they have been waiting way too long to receive. Residents in Donnybrook and Kalkallo and surrounding suburbs are paying the price for this Andrews–Allan–Carroll government's over a decade of failure. They have failed to keep pace with growth. Every day around 35,000 vehicles use Donnybrook Road despite the road being designed to safely carry only around 20,000 vehicles. The result of this is a daily traffic nightmare for many, many families, particularly those where it takes over 40 minutes just to get out of their own housing estate. That is a story I hear every day from local residents. This is time taken away from families, work and everyday life because the government has failed to provide the infrastructure for growing communities.

As I have mentioned in this place before, it was the previous Liberal and Nationals government that duplicated the Mickleham side of Donnybrook Road via a developer contribution plan. Instead of taking all the developer taxes and sending them into Spring Street where they sit in a bank account for over two years collecting interest while construction costs rise by about 20 per cent, we did a developer contribution plan with the developer to write off that contribution so they could build the infrastructure straightaway, which is usually value for money because you do not get the wedding cake tax of dealing with government directly. That is acknowledgement of the Liberal government's ability to work with the private sector, whereas the Kalkallo and Donnybrook side of Donnybrook Road is kind of the Labor side.

I was pleased, as I have stated, to be out at Donnybrook station with the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson, the Leader of the Nationals Danny O'Brien, the candidate for Northern Victoria Steve Brooks, my colleague Wendy Lovell and our fantastic candidate for Yan Yean Amanda Dow to announce that the Liberals and Nationals will commit \$524 million to duplicate the entirety of Donnybrook Road from Epping Road in Woodstock to Dwyer Street in Kalkallo, including building a second bridge over the Hume. The action I seek from the minister is to match that commitment, because I could not believe the member for Yan Yean refused to match that commitment, which is a great disappointment for those communities. They need a fresh start, and the only way they will get that is to vote for Amanda Dow.

Government expenditure

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:54): (2639) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is for the Treasurer to cut excessive spending on overpaid fat cat bureaucrats and instead fund frontline services, such as properly paying teachers, giving firefighters proper equipment and all kinds of other very important things like that. We know that the Silver review found that the Victorian public service has become top heavy and that between 2019 and 2024, while the VPS grew by 16 per cent, executives and senior technical specialists grew by 82 per cent. Over 55 per cent of the ordinary VPS-grade workforce is now senior classifications – the most expensive kinds. This is billions and billions of dollars that we could make in savings to improve services and get rid of useless bureaucrats. Victorians deserve that, and they need that.

Racing industry

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:55): (2640) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Racing Anthony Carbines. Victoria's racing industry is contributing \$5.54 billion to the economy and more than 33,000 jobs. The action I seek is an update on how the government will continue growing this vital regional industry.

Watsonia station car park

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:56): (2641) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. It concerns a very large, monolithic car park that is being built adjacent to the North East Link project in Watsonia. I was in Watsonia the other day with Jess Wilson and our fantastic candidate for Bundoorra Chris Parr. Chris has actually been advocating very, very hard on behalf of the community about this particular car park, because its design is brutalist and it is going to obscure a view from the shopping strip and from the cafes of the Dandenongs. It is simply going to be this monolith put up in front of them. Jess and Chris have spoken extensively with the local business owners in the area. Their concerns are that this will hurt trade, this will hurt the amenity of the area, it will affect the quality of life and it will cast shadows. It is a completely inappropriate design. Of course, in typical style, it has been done with no consultation with the locals at all and no care for how this will integrate into their community. We know that Watsonia, over the last seven or eight years, has been a continual site of disruption to those businesses because of the North East Link. We call it, locally, the war on Watsonia, and with this car park it seems the war on Watsonia is going to continue – but not if Chris Parr has anything to do with it. As a strong local advocate, he is keen to see a sensible redesign and some other mitigations.

I will mention too that this is being built at a time when the station itself immediately adjacent to it is noncompliant and has been noncompliant for 10 years in terms of disabled access. It has a single high-incline ramp, which is literally dangerous. If you are in a wheelchair or other mechanisms, you cannot get onto the platform. It is physically impossible and physically impossible to get off. Whilst we are neglecting that and not putting any capital into that and we are building this monolithic, ugly, brutalist car park adjacent to it, the money is not going into the community to serve the community the way it should. The action I seek from the minister is to agree to do a sit-down with the community and do a thorough redesign or a review of the design of this car park so that it is actually something that works with the community and is not imposed upon the community, so that we can stop this trend of government being something that happens to you.

Gendered violence

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:58): (2642) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for you to invest in sustainable, long-term funding for family violence organisations focused on prevention initiatives and programs to address the crisis of gender-based violence in Victoria. This month of July we remember Layla Jeffery, a bright 13-year-old with her whole life ahead of her; Lavanya Chappa, a loving mother of two whose family described her as a devoted daughter, valued colleague and dear friend; and Brooke Timmins, a dedicated mother, passionate basketball coach, beloved daughter, sister and aunty whose children were her whole world. We honour their lives, mourn alongside their families and communities and think of their children, parents, siblings and friends, whose lives have been forever changed by their loss.

In 2015–16 family violence in Victoria cost an estimated \$5.3 billion, of which \$2.6 billion was borne by victim-survivors and their families, \$1.8 billion by the state government and \$918 million by the community and broader economy. Despite this enormous cost, only an estimated \$4.3 million is invested yearly in prevention by the Victorian government, not even 1 per cent of that cost. Economic modelling by Deloitte estimates that shifting harmful gender norms – one of the goals of prevention work and a precursor to seeing the rates of perpetuation fall – will grow the national economy by \$128 billion per annum on average.

Family violence specialists are doing incredible work and hard yards to protect women and children, support change men's behaviour programs and implement community-led solutions. Organisations such as Djirra, inTouch, Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, Respect Victoria and many more are delivering life-saving services on reduced funding. If 41 people were killed at the MCG, government action would be immediate, and rightly so, but because 41 women have been killed

behind closed doors, the response is a business-as-usual attitude, a media release here and there by this Victorian Labor government. Violence against women is evolving and intensifying, including the rise of technology-facilitated abuse. As this crisis worsens, the government response must be comprehensive and holistic. Specialist family violence organisations need sustained, adequate resourcing to meet the growing and shifting demand. This means fully funding frontline services, investing in early intervention and prevention and backing the many recommendations and expert evidence already available with the funding required to implement them.

Rochester mental health services

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:01): (2643) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health. The action I seek is for the minister to establish a Headspace youth mental health service in Rochester. During the winter break I had the pleasure of hearing a wonderful presentation from a group of Rochester Secondary College students, who had carried out a youth takeover research project in collaboration with Rochester and Elmore District Health Service and the Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning and Employment Network. Rochester students used their initiative to conduct a community survey asking local residents about their experiences with health services in the town. They collected real data on the quality and availability of services and gained insight into what services locals expect and require for their medical needs. They found that a quarter of respondents used a health service weekly or monthly and around half used a health service just a few times a year. Just over a quarter said that someone in their household needed emergency and urgent care in the last 12 months.

The students discovered that many struggled to get to their appointments, with 32 per cent saying that they knew someone who needed support with transport to access health care. GP services had the highest level of engagement, with 86 per cent of respondents using a GP. Seventy-five per cent of respondents expected their need for medical services to increase over the next decade, and 42 per cent identified mental health treatment as the service that will be most needed in the future. When asked about the challenges facing health care in the Rochester community, respondents listed a number of issues facing the community, including the small number of GPs and the long wait times to be seen by a doctor. Respondents also noted that specialist services are far away, and there is a lack of transport options to connect Rochester residents with the services they need in regional cities or Melbourne.

Young people in particular said that their number one and most important priority is better mental health services. Rochester was hit hard by the 2022 floods, and the damage to homes, sports clubs and the town pool significantly disrupted the social connections that the young people depend on in those gathering places. It was made more difficult because of the lack of them. The students told me that what they identified young people liked and valued most in the town was the Rochester Football Netball Club – go Tigers. However, the Rochester college students said that their study revealed young people’s greatest need was a Headspace clinic to provide accessible mental health services. It is now four years since the floods, and many assume that the recovery is finished. It is not. Many houses are still waiting to be rebuilt, and young people are still working through the after-effects of seeing their homes and lives drowned in the deluge. I urge the minister to invest in a Headspace to improve mental health services for young people in Rochester.

Construction industry

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:04): (2644) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the new Premier. It is good that the Premier announced a royal commission into corruption in the construction sector. During question time in the Legislative Assembly the Premier made clear that it would have ‘exhaustive terms of reference’. These are encouraging words, but let us see if the actions match the rhetoric. Problems with bikies and criminals infiltrating government infrastructure programs did not start with the North East Link and did not start recently. Through 2012 and 2014 there was widespread reporting on problems with the desalination plant in east Victoria. Some of the claims produced from whistleblowers included shop stewards

witnessing drug deals on site; a bikie employed with the support of management who was sacked after he was caught sleeping in his car when he was being paid to work; drug testing being used rarely due to pressure from unions; bikies that were working on the project encouraging midweek parties where drugs and strippers were abundant; and a former supervisor who was charged with drug trafficking telling a jury that he snorted cocaine before work and during onsite smokes and that it was common for others in the workforce to use amphetamines, which all sounds quite familiar. If there is going to be a true accounting of what has gone wrong with corruption and organised crime infiltration of large-scale government projects, it absolutely must be broad enough to examine what has happened at the desalination plant construction site. It is not just some story about the distant past either. The *Sentinel-Times* reported in December last year about the ongoing impact of locals who became addicted when exposed to the drug-riddled desal plant build. My request to the Premier is to ensure that the scope of the royal commission allows an examination of what happened at the desal plant construction site and that any corruption and criminal activity is appropriately examined.

Small business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:06): (2645) My adjournment is for the Minister for Small and Family Business, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in meeting with many representative bodies advocating for small businesses across Victoria. Under Jess Wilson, Victoria will be number one for starting, growing and investing in a small business, but under Ben Carroll it is the worst. Backflip Ben has sat in Parliament for the entirety of this government. Under Labor, Victoria is dead last for business conditions and confidence. The only thing we take out of the gold medal for his cancelling the Commonwealth Games is imposing the most amount of taxes and giving \$15 billion to criminals.

We are the only state where the number of employing businesses has not recovered to prepandemic levels. One in four businesses considered shutting shop in the past year, while actual business closures rose by 48 per cent – the worst increase of any major Australian state. Labor has imposed nearly 70 new or increased taxes and charges since coming to office. The recent Council of Small Business Organisations Australia *Small Business Perspectives Report* reveals some truly shocking testimonies. Just take Michael, the owner of a regional golf club. He says costs have risen so dramatically he can no longer afford to cut the grass.

Then there is Labor's failure to keep community safe. More than 94,000 retail crime offences were recorded in the 12 months leading to the end of the March quarter. But just this morning Ben Carroll voted against our strong workplace protection bill. Regional businesses are also treated contemptuously. They cannot find workers because families cannot find housing or hospitals. A Swan Hill business owner reported that young people are leaving because of the severe lack of housing in the area. What a surprise, when Labor is hopelessly addicted to property taxes and refuses to release its own Crown land in these towns.

Labor hates small businesses; I love them. They want to control it, regulate it and tax it; I do not. Small business owners take risks. They create jobs and wealth, and they support family, sporting groups and entire towns. They never complain nor ask for a handout. They reject Labor's pre-election pork-barrelling and fearmongering. They want bureaucracy to get out of their way. A Wilson Liberal government will do just that. A payroll tax cut for 23,000 businesses will be delivered, Labor's land tax hikes reversed, simplified approvals – (*Time expired*)

Greyhound Racing Victoria

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:09): (2646) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Racing, and the action I seek is for him to implement gendered violence prevention training for greyhound racing participants. Over the past few years I have reported dozens of sexist, threatening, demeaning and derogatory comments by greyhound racing industry participants to Greyhound Racing Victoria. Consistently, penalties laid by stewards have been minuscule. With each small fine or concurrent suspension which allows them to continue racing, Greyhound Racing Victoria

has sent a clear message that they do not just disregard animals, they disregard women too. But for the first time ever, recently a trainer did not accept his pathetic so-called penalty and appealed it to the Victorian Racing Tribunal. He had written me two comments in quick succession, one stating that I 'need a good root' and one stating that I would 'soon be taking my clothes off for old men for cash again'. When questioned about these comments by stewards, he accepted responsibility for one but claimed the more severe one was the outcome of his account being hacked. Without even bothering to come to me for further substantiation, GRV accepted his reasoning. The penalty he appealed was for the comment he took responsibility for, and the Victorian Racing Tribunal – the racing industry's so-called independent tribunal – chose to further reduce the steward's penalty, with the panel even saying in their decision:

He is a person of good character and is entitled to rely on his good character in regards penalty. He is entitled to a discount in penalty by his plea.

According to the greyhound racing industry, if you are a good bloke, you should be let off for sexist abuse, and even what you do admit to will not be taken seriously.

I understand that public debate is an important part of our democracy, but this is something else entirely. Targeted gendered abuse is not political disagreement, it is harassment designed purely to intimidate, silence and harm women. Research consistently shows that women in public life are more likely to experience gendered abuse compared to their male counterparts. For someone in a less privileged position than me, the risks of speaking out can be far greater. The Minister for Racing would be aware that the racing industry has a well-documented cultural problem. In 2022 the Victorian racing industry was subject to an independent review into victim support and complaint processes in matters of sexual abuse. The minister himself stated that it was time for enduring change. Greyhound Racing Victoria committed to learning from the findings. It is clear that they have not. I urge the Minister for Racing to implement gendered violence prevention training for greyhound racing participants to ensure that their culture of sexist abuse does not become as normalised as their culture of animal abuse.

Health infrastructure

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:12): (2647) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Whilst there is a lot of discussion around a royal commission and the new Premier saying that he intends to hold a royal commission, I think it is fair to say that it will not have the teeth that it needs. Even in question time today he would not rule out that the shredders were going and that documents were being shredded. It will be a sham royal commission; I think we all know that. Just look at the COVID Coate inquiry and how Labor and this government and the former government covered up actions that Victorians deserved to understand. I am seeking an independent audit of every major Victorian health infrastructure project delivered under this government to guarantee that no taxpayer money has been wasted, inflated or diverted through corrupt conduct, criminal influence or improper interference.

The allegations reported by the *Age* on 14 July concerning the redevelopment of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital are appalling, but sadly they are now commonplace. Former Victorian Health Building Authority executive director Stephen King says the authority was pressured by the CFMEU to remove subcontractors from the \$320 million project. This is not coming from a disgruntled bystander. This is the man who ran the authority responsible for delivering some of Victoria's largest health projects. According to the ABC, the minister herself called the allegations 'alarming' and 'extremely serious'.

If they are serious enough to seek assurances on one project, they are serious enough to examine every hospital project funded by Victorian taxpayers. Victorians have every right to ask one simple question: if this happened at one hospital, where else did it happen? I think Victorians know with the cover-ups and the faux outrage from everyone saying, 'Oh, this should not happen,' that nobody believes this government. They are just not credible given the extent of what has been uncovered. The scandal that

initially exposed corruption, intimidation and organised crime within Victoria's Big Build has spread like a cancer into the health infrastructure area.

We know that the \$15 billion that corruption-buster Geoffrey Watson found in February benefited drug running bikie gangs, underworld crims, thugs, serial sex offenders and even convicted murderers. This is extraordinary. The Premier, who sat beside the former Premier in cabinet and agreed with her that there was no need for a royal commission, is now saying there needs to be one. You cannot believe this man or this government because of their actions. They might say words, but they mean absolutely nothing. I am concerned that what has happened in the health infrastructure portfolio is symptomatic of what has happened in many other areas. A proper royal commission will only be done by a Wilson government. In the meantime I would like the health infrastructure minister to request this urgent audit.

WorkCover

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:15): (2648) My adjournment today is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the action I seek is that they ensure that the final draft of the Code of Claimants' Rights has meaningful and enforceable consequences for breaches. This process of the code is important, the code is important, but it must be written in a way which holds people to account. The code will set clear service standards for WorkSafe and its agents, including authorised agents, independent medical examiners, occupational rehabilitation providers and private investigators, but it cannot just be symbolic. There need to be tangible ways to hold people to account if and when there are breaches. My office hears from injured workers every single week, and I have to say, when you hear some of the stories, many of them are absolutely not being treated by WorkSafe and its agents with dignity or respect. This code must be enforceable. It must improve the way in which injured workers are treated as they seek support in their recovery and treatment. There need to be consequences for a failure to uphold this code, and I call on the minister to make sure that, once it is finalised, the code is strong and categorical in its expectations for the fair and empathetic treatment of injured workers.

Responses

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (19:17): There were 18 matters for ministers this evening. The one that was for me was from Mrs Deeming, and I would like to acquit that. She reflected on the Silver review and its findings in relation to recommendations of reductions of executive positions within the public sector, and I can confirm to Mrs Deeming that that process has commenced and is resulting in savings measures, as she asked me to respond to her. Other than that, 17 will go to ministers as required, and responses will be provided.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:18 pm.