



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Thursday 24 September 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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Thursday 24 September 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

*Announcements***Felicitations**

The PRESIDENT (09:34): I will be very brief, but given it is the last sitting day of our term I am sure you will all join me in our appreciation for all the Parliament staff, the good people at the Department of Parliamentary Services, our friends at the Legislative Assembly department and of course the Legislative Council department – our fantastic clerks, our fantastic attendants, our fantastic people in the papers office and so many others. They make us look good. I express my appreciation to the Deputy President Wendy and my appreciation to the Acting Presidents Gaele, Jacinta, Michael, John and of course Jeff: I really appreciate your assistance. I show my appreciation of the cooperation and patience towards me in here, and so I show my appreciation to the leaders of the parties – thank you. I show my appreciation to the whips: thank you. Thinking of the cooperation of everyone in here, I reflected on Joe's speech last night, and other than his amazing comedic timing – and seriously, Mr McCracken should think about going into television or something like that in the future – I think he expressed that there has to be a high level of cooperation right across this chamber, and that really reflects that everyone in here is dedicated to this institution and democracy. So I really want to show my appreciation. And that is it, so thanks very much.

*Petitions***Neighbourhood houses**

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 5658 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that Neighbourhood Houses funding has failed to keep pace with costs and in real terms is 20% lower than it was in 2010. Funding no longer meets employment costs, leaving Neighbourhood Houses with no funding to keep the lights on. For the past three years, half of all neighbourhood houses have recorded a loss.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council urgently meet the requests of Neighbourhood Houses Victoria's 2026 budget submission: Restore funding in real terms for Neighbourhood Houses through a 25% increase, fund the 25 Neighbourhood Houses that do not currently receive any ongoing funding, and develop a fund for the establishment of 20 additional Neighbourhood Houses in growth areas.

Melina BATH: As this is a petition qualifying for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on Wednesday of next sitting week.

Homelessness

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 131 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council to the increasing pressure on individuals and families across our State arising from housing stress, cost-of-living pressures and food insecurity. More Victorians are at risk of homelessness, with many already experiencing crisis due to rising rents, financial shocks and limited access to early support.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to commit to a long-term housing strategy with clear targets to increase the supply of social and affordable homes for those most at risk of homelessness; invest in early intervention and homelessness prevention, including tenancy sustainment, integrated support models and food security in order to reduce pressure on crisis services; partner with the St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria to help deliver these programs, and invest in local networks and volunteers as critical social infrastructure supports stability and prevents homelessness.

Balaclava planning

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 171 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the heart of Balaclava is facing a once-in-a-generation redevelopment. Coles has consolidated more than a hectare of land and is now seeking to purchase strategically important public land from the City of Port Phillip, paving the way for major redevelopment of the precinct.

Residents have participated extensively in Council consultations, lodged a petition and repeatedly called for a development that gives back to Balaclava, including affordable housing targets, meaningful public open space, protection for local traders and mature trees, sustainability best practice, and expert-reviewed quality design outcomes.

Yet despite years of consultation, the fundamental terms attached to the proposed land sale remain almost entirely unchanged from objectives developed a decade ago. Many claimed community benefits also largely reflect outcomes already required or expected through the planning system.

Once the land is sold, the local council loses the unique leverage that comes with public ownership.

The community is not asking to stop development. We are asking that development beyond the existing planning envelope deliver public benefit and design quality and that the value created through greater development capacity is shared with the community.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government and the Minister for Planning to intervene before the sale of public land within the Balaclava Coles precinct proceeds, and work with the City of Port Phillip to review and strengthen the Section 173 Agreement and terms of sale to secure substantial, additional and legally enforceable community benefits commensurate with the scale and development potential of the site, before this strategically important public land passes into private ownership.

Anderson Street, Yarraville, level crossing

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 630 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that under the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority's (VIDA) published design, Anderson Street would close permanently to traffic and the closed section would become a paved plaza. The pedestrian ramp would sit about 170 metres north of the crossing, requiring compulsory acquisition and demolition of a house including the stairs and lifts and beyond the signal box. It would demolish shops in the state-listed Yarraville Railway Station complex.

Yarraville Village has about 121 shopfronts on both sides of the railway, and Anderson Street is the only road connecting the two halves, carrying about 2,500 vehicles and more than 6,000 pedestrians a day.

On 19 June 2026 VIDA confirmed, under the Freedom of Information Act 1982, that no studies or economic impact reports regarding traders had informed the design.

The alternatives, and why they were rejected, have not been released.

The project was never declared in its own right, but added to the Hudsons Road, Spotswood project under section 15AB of the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009.

On 21 July 2026, Maribyrnong City Council unanimously resolved to ask VIDA Rail to pause works, subject to eight conditions. All concept designs, assessments and technical analysis should be released including an explanation of the basis for removing the at-grade pedestrian crossing. Updated design options should include stair and underpass access at Anderson Street. If an economic impact assessment has been undertaken for Yarraville Village this should be released. An explanation on why the project was not declared standalone under the Act is required. The community and local council need to be consulted before any notice of intention to acquire is served, any contract awarded, or any property compulsorily acquired or demolished, while the design can still be changed.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to pause the Andersen Street, Yarraville level crossing removal works until all assessments, and the rationale behind the design are released and community consultation has occurred.

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission – Chair of the Board of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission – Report, 2024–25.

Duties Act 2000 – Treasurer’s Reports, 2025–26 of –

Corporate Reconstruction and Consolidation Concessions and Exemptions, under section 250B(4) of the Act.

Foreign Purchaser Additional Duty Exemptions, under section 3E(2) of the Act.

Gambling Regulation Act 2003 – Report of Independent Review Panel: Monitoring Licensing Project, September 2026, under section 10.2A.11(3) of the Act.

Land Tax Act 2005 – Treasurer’s Report for 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2025 of Land Tax Absentee Owner Surcharge Exemptions, under section 3BB of the Act.

Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 – Report, 2025–26 by the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, under section 148R of the Act.

Ombudsman – *‘I just get dark, dark thoughts’*: How DJCS considers human rights when applying to transfer children to adult prisons, September 2026 (*Ordered to be published*).

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 – No. 130.

Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 – Criminal Procedure Act 2009 – No. 132.

Electricity Safety Act 1998 – No. 126.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – No. 127.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Nos. 125, 128 and 129.

Youth Justice Act 2024 – No. 131.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 126, 127, 128, 129, 130 and 131.

Legislative instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of Amendments to the Electricity Distribution Code of Practice, the Energy Retail Code of Practice, and the Gas Distribution Code of Practice under the Essential Services Commission Act 2001.

Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board – Report, 2025–26.

Witness Protection Act 1991 – Report, 2025–26, under section 20R of the Act, by Victoria Police.

*Petitions***Responses**

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Roads and Road Safety’s response to a petition titled ‘Provide funding to seal priority unsealed roads in Cardinia Shire’.

*Business of the house***Notices**

Notices of motion given.

Production of documents

Production of documents

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (09:47): I move:

That this house:

- (i) finds the Leader of the Government guilty of a contempt of the Council for failing, on behalf of the government, to comply with resolutions of the Council requiring the production of documents;
- (ii) suspends standing order 8.04(3) relating to statements by ministers for the remainder of the sitting day; and
- (iii) refers the Leader of the Government to the Privileges Committee to consider further sanctions.

The PRESIDENT: The resolution stipulates that this question will be put forthwith and decided without amendment, adjournment or debate.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (24): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, 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.

Members statements

Women's sexual and reproductive health

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (09:55): Labor has a strong track record when it comes to improving access to reproductive services across our state. On this side of the chamber we know that women's bodies should never be up for debate. It is very simple: abortion care is health care. In government we have not wasted the opportunity to continue to strengthen women's health care, and that is why I am proud to announce that we will be rolling out new ultrasound equipment to our 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs. Backed by a \$480,000 investment, new, portable point-of-care ultrasound equipment will enable hub clinicians to confirm early pregnancy, meaning more Victorian women can access care sooner at no cost and closer to home. Our party's policy on these matters is settled, and it is proudly pro choice. It was Labor who decriminalised abortion in Victoria, established safe access zones outside clinics and made sexual and reproductive health care more accessible across the public health system. This November, Victorians have a choice. Only a re-elected Carroll Labor government can be trusted to protect the dignity and rights of Victorian women.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:56): In my final members statement I want to mention a couple of achievements that I forgot to include in my valedictory speech. The first was how delighted I was to round out my career with a win for farmers in what was to be the Central North renewable energy zone. To be their voice and debate the matter in the second-last sitting week was a privilege. For the government to announce they would scrap the REZ during that debate was a win for people power and common sense.

The second was a win I had back in 2007. The Bracks government recalled Parliament before Christmas to introduce what they called the critical water infrastructure bill. This was at the height of

the millennium drought, and the bill sought to do two things: establish an authority to build water infrastructure and strip landowners of all rights under public acquisition. Labor said they needed this to acquire the land for the Colbinabbin pipeline. As a local member, I knew the Colbinabbin land had already been acquired and that the government were up to something, so I convinced shadow cabinet to amend the bill to remove the public acquisition section. I then convinced the crossbench to support my position. This house amended the bill and returned it to the Assembly, where they left it sitting on the paper for four years until it died. It turned out all Labor really wanted was to trash landowners' rights, but the questions asked in the committee stage of that bill in this house were used extensively in court cases between the government and landowners over the north-south pipeline. This is why, as Deputy President, I have been so determined not to allow Labor members or other members to verbal ministers on their answers.

Felicitations

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:57): I would like to thank the people of North-Eastern Metropolitan Region for putting me into this position for the last few years. It has felt like it has been 10 years; at times it has felt like it has been the blink of an eye. I want to thank all Parliament staff and committee staff right across this place, who literally keep democracy functioning here in Victoria. I would like to thank the President for keeping us all in line. It must have been a tough job, but we got there. It is up to the people whether I get to continue in this work beyond November. Just in case that does not happen, I want to thank my hardworking staff: Mary Musthofa, Amos Gibson and Jean Hinchliffe, who have been with me since basically the beginning; also AJ Harris-Peixoto, Natasha Muhriz, Fan Ouyang, Sophia Sun, Dada Li, Amy Jenkin, Natalie Feliks, Ruiqi Fu, James Temple and Colin Lees, as well as all the interns and volunteers who have helped us over the last few years. I would like to thank my colleagues from the Greens, particularly those in this chamber: Dr Sarah Mansfield, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Katherine Copsey and our former colleague Samantha Ratnam, future Greens MP for Wills. As to whether I am still here after November, that is up to the people; it is democracy, and the voters are never wrong. It has been a privilege.

South West Tech School

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (09:59): I rise to celebrate two wonderful reasons to be proud of Western Victoria. The new South West Tech School is now open at South West TAFE's Warrnambool CBD campus, giving thousands of students from 26 secondary schools the chance to learn with technology many of us could only have dreamed about at school. Students will explore drones, virtual reality, robotics, sustainable farming, recycling and manufacturing and even use AI to develop new food ideas. The programs are free, with transport provided so young people from right across the region can take part. A very special shout-out goes to the school's inaugural director Rohan Keert. Rohan, former principal of Cobden Technical School, has brought enormous energy, experience and heart to this new school. He understands regional students and the opportunities they deserve, and we are very lucky to have him leading the way.

Discovering the Impressionists: Paul Durand-Ruel, Art Dealer Among the Artists

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (10:00): On another note, there is still time to see *Discovering the Impressionists: Paul Durand-Ruel, Art Dealer Among the Artists* at Geelong Gallery. A genuine international showstopper exhibition in the country, we are so proud to be hosting it in Geelong. Thousands of people have already seen these extraordinary works, many from private French collections and never before shown in Australia. The exhibition is on until 11 October, so do not make the mistake of leaving it too late. Book your tickets now and spend some time in the region.

Government performance

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:00): Dumped cars on the sides of roads, graffiti, rubbish and potholes galore. The decline in Victoria's roads is symbolic of the degradation of the state – a state where crime is out of control, where corruption has seen \$15 billion of taxpayers money

line the pockets of bikies and criminals and where doing business and being able to get ahead is becoming more difficult due to the increasing tax burden placed on Victorians as a result of Labor's out-of-control debt. It is a government where they seem to think accountability and transparency mean nothing. Let us not forget that in 2009, when Daniel Andrews was health minister, health data was manipulated. Now we cannot even get the health data – or will they drop it on grand final weekend after Parliament rises, or will they just continue to hide the true state of the mess our health system is in? It is a government where they con Victorians for their vote and then turn their backs on them – remember the Commonwealth Games debacle? They are a government so desperate to cling to power that they will do anything to hold onto power – lie, run pathetic scare campaigns, block elected representatives from being able to do their job and allow corruption and rorts to thrive with their mates.

They are not only a deceitful government but a government bereft of ideas and without a plan to get Victoria out of the mess they have put us all in. The Premier is so weak he has not even got an original policy idea. He was there as the chief head-nodder to Daniel Andrews and deputy to Jacinta Allan. He is a follower, not a leader. He takes all the Liberals and Nationals ideas, announces a weak royal commission into corruption and says he will fix a few potholes and recruit a few police, pretending to be tough on crime. But he has no plan to reduce debt, to fix a broken health system or to ensure our communities are safer. Victoria needs a fresh start, a government that works and a government that has a plan. Only the Liberal and Nationals will do exactly that.

Felicitations

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): I would like to take the opportunity to thank my amazing team in my final statement to the 60th Parliament. Politics is a realm like no other. We MPs rely heavily on the people around us for support, encouragement and collaboration, and I can confidently say that I would not have been able to do what I do without my incredible, hardworking team around me. To Hannah Anyoso, thank you for being warm, kind and so organised and being the glue of our little team. We really appreciate you. Karen Carmichael, thank you for your energy and generosity and for bringing that South American sass. Nick Cowan, your conscientious and considered approach brings the right balance to the team, and I am lucky to have you. Millie Howard, it has been a pleasure to see your confidence bloom. You bring good energy and enthusiasm to the team. Paul O'Donoghue, thank you for stepping up when I needed the support. Your brilliance and charisma are exactly what we needed. Nelly Thomas, thank you for believing in me, investing in me and building me up. You have been a great confidante and unwavering in cheering me on. Bee Mohamed, your warm, calm presence is commendable, as is your ability to take on any battle. Your energy and laugh are infectious. I adore you all, and I cannot thank you enough for being on this journey with me. As we head into election time, I promise to be true to myself and continue to stand up for my community and elevate their voices.

Felicitations

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:03): I might start off by acknowledging everyone in the chamber. I hope everyone who is standing again makes it back who wants to be back, and for those who are leaving: it is great to have worked with you. I want to acknowledge everyone who is working hard in their communities in East Gippsland. Whilst the government has provided substantial support packages to families, businesses and communities, for some of our community funds the bureaucracy has been particularly challenging. But locals have stood up and stuck at it – people like Steve and Rob in Swifts Creek, Tristan and Bernie in Nowa Nowa and Gary and Liz in Orbost, with exciting businesses in agriculture, in tourism and in manufacturing. We have got Lachie and Luke at Built QA exporting truss and frame right across south-eastern Australia, Michelle at Snowy River Cycling bringing tourists from all over, Chris and Gab at Sailors Grave and Hannah at Little Drift. There are so many passionate people working so hard together to strengthen their local economy. The shire has a small revenue base and a massive geographic area, and I want to give a shout-out to Fiona as CEO, Jodie, John, Tom and Mark, who I have worked with as mayors, and Sam Forbes in my office, who has done an incredible job with the community.

Nick Daicos

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:05): Also, as secretary of the Parliamentary Friends of Collingwood, the biggest ‘friends of’ group in Parliament, I want to give a shout-out to Nick Daicos, an incredible footballer and an incredible person, who has won the Brownlow. I tell you what, I think I am going to start journalling too.

Felicitations

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:05): It has been a great privilege to be a member of this place. Unlike some other members here and in the other place, I have every intention of being back here in the next term, hopefully on the other side of the chamber. I would like to thank everyone who helped me get here. I would particularly like to thank my wife Bridget for all of her support – I could not do it without her – and my three children Teddy, Saoirse and Francesca. Two of the three were born during this term of Parliament. I would like to thank my staff and the Parliament staff. I would particularly like to thank multicultural and multifaith communities for their engagement. I have known Jess Wilson for almost half of my adult life – about 16 years – and she has the integrity, determination and will to make a great Premier of this state. She has a plan to deliver for all Victorians, and I know that she will.

State election

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:06): I would like to congratulate Eddie Dadisho on being preselected as the Liberal candidate for Kalkallo. Eddie is an Assyrian Australian who has shown himself to be a leader within his community, and I know he is ready to step up and deliver for the long-forgotten electorate of Kalkallo. This is a community who have longed for a major party candidate from their community. We on this side of the house do not just talk about diverse communities, they are part of our movement. I know it is only Eddie and the Liberal team that will deliver a \$524 million commitment to duplicating Donnybrook Road for good.

Moe Football Netball Club

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:07): Moe Football Netball Club ended a 59-year premiership drought – 59 years; that will be how long I have been alive on Saturday – with coach Leigh Pohlke’s side overcoming a valiant Leongatha to win the 2026 Gippsland football league premiership in an epic contest at Traralgon. This victory means more than just a football result. The club helps young men and women grow on and off the field and court. It works with charities to support young people at risk, leads conversations about mental health and youth suicide and promotes respect and inclusion. Through its close association with the late Neale Daniher and his family, the club also championed FightMND across Gippsland. Moe has changed enormously since its last premiership in 1967. The town has faced the loss of major industries, including textiles, and a profound change in the power sector. Its strengths have not always received the recognition they deserve. Through it all, the club has remained a place where generations have found connection and shared local pride. To every player that has worn the maroon and blue over those 59 years and to the supporters who stayed loyal through some very lean seasons, congratulations. It takes a village to run a club like Moe. President Mat Howlett leads an extraordinary group of volunteers; administrators; trainers; runners and timekeepers; people who work the gate, canteen and can bar; those who clean the rooms; and many, many more. The premiership belongs to them too. You have earned this premiership. You have built something that matters well beyond football.

Felicitations

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:08): As it is the last day of the 60th Parliament, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who keep this place going and create a supportive environment each and every day. This covers so many, including the clerks, who are always there to provide valuable information and guidance to us – they are the holders of all knowledge when it comes to this place – Robert McDonald, Keir Delaney, Richard Willis and the always-

available, always-caring and tells-you-how-it-is Anne Sargent; their dedicated team Linda, Brittany and Chrissy; the super smart and witty Usher of the Black Rod Sally West and her team Michael, Chris, Philip, Theo, Kidist, Greg and Peter; the team in the papers office Annemarie, Vivienne, Juliana, Tom, Savannah, Tash and Kirra; the community engagement team, who connect the Parliament with the wider community; all the committee staff, who have worked tirelessly over the many inquiries this term; the catering staff, who keep us fed and energised; the building and cleaning staff and grounds team, who keep this place looking so wonderful; the Department of Parliamentary Services, who assist us on a daily basis; the always-helpful library and all their staff, led by Carolyn Macvean; the security team and PSOs, who keep us safe; the IT staff, including Chris, who put up with a lot from us but who are always there to assist us to keep our technology working; Hansard and broadcasting, who always do their best to make us sound and look good, which can be quite a challenge at times; also Bridget Noonan and all her team in the Assembly; the amazing team in my office; the many advisers; and anyone else I have missed who plays their part in making this place fire on all cylinders and who do very important work to help us as members of Parliament be the best representatives for the people that we represent. To all of you, I say a huge thankyou. Enjoy this brief respite from members before the whirlwind of the 61st Parliament begins. It will arrive sooner than you think. And to colleagues and friends from all sides in both this chamber and the other place, whether returning, departing or facing an uncertain future, my best wishes to you all. Whilst we have not always agreed on everything and sometimes on anything, I have always enjoyed working collaboratively and productively with you all.

State election

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:10): Rural and regional Victorians are palpably angry. They know that they need a fresh start and that that fresh start will come with a plan from the Wilson and O'Brien led government after 28 November. They know that this government is old and tired, has mired our state in debt and has burdened us with taxes borne by rural and regional Victorians and businesses. They know that our rural hospitals are under stress, they know that many of them are decaying and they know that they have been neglected. Our roads are in a decrepit state; they are like goat tracks. Rural and regional Victorians know that crime in our streets is far too high. Carjacking is high, youth crime is high and this government has failed to address the fundamentals of protecting our communities. They also know that the CFA has been neglected, underfunded and disrespected, and our volunteers understand this. Our position is that we are going to stop the waste, end the corruption, build safer roads and build stronger and safer, vibrant communities. I would like to be part of that team, and I thank all of my electorate of Eastern Victoria for the opportunity to go again and cross the benches.

Felicitations

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (10:12): I would also like to join my colleagues here in giving thanks to all of the parliamentary staff, the clerks and Hansard for everything that they have done to make all of our experiences here so much easier. It is just such an honour and a privilege and a huge responsibility to be part of making the laws that other people have to live under. When you are back out in your communities, you see the consequences can be so grave or so exciting or so uplifting on little people's lives that do not get into the news – coming from someone who has been in the news far too much and more than I have enjoyed. It is just a really important job, and it has been an honour to be here to do it. Again, we do not know who is going to get elected and who is not, but I have been here fighting for families – for my family and for everybody else's families – and I know that that is really why anybody does anything. I love it, and I look forward to fighting for families again next time.

State election

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:13): The south-east of Melbourne is a terrific place to live, work and play, and when you look around and see the new and upgraded schools, level crossing removals, the Metro Tunnel, new train services, road upgrades, new and upgraded bus routes, upgraded hospitals, the new Cranbourne Community Hospital, new and upgraded police stations, new ambulance branches and all the other signs of Labor's continued strong investment into the south-east,

you can see the legacy of that work. But there is more to do, and that work is also at risk. That is why this election is so important and why it is so important to re-elect a strong and united Labor government, led very ably by Premier Ben Carroll and Deputy Premier Gabrielle Williams. I am looking forward to having more time to spend in my community once we are risen from this place in a matter of days.

Felicitations

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:14): I also want to acknowledge everyone in this chamber. It has been a tremendous honour in this first parliamentary term of mine to be able to work with people within my party and across the aisle in many different ways. It has been a wonderful privilege to be able to share some lighter moments and laugh together as well. It would be remiss of me to not mention the many enjoyable times we have had yelling at each other too, and I look forward to hopefully doing that with most of you in the next Parliament. I do want to acknowledge the incredible support that we receive from the parliamentary clerks, the staff here and my electorate office staff as well. President, I finish by thanking you for the way that you have mentored me and many other people in this chamber. It has been a true honour. We will miss you greatly.

Bangkok train collision

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:15): I would like to offer my condolences and thoughts to the people of Thailand, where on 16 May, in an incident in Makkasan, which is in Bangkok, a freight train collided with a bus and, very sadly, injured 30 people and resulted in eight deaths at that time.

Nonthaburi school attack

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:15): Unfortunately for the people of Thailand, that incident was followed some months after, on 7 August, by a massacre at a school. A young 14-year-old, very sadly, in Debsirin Nonthaburi School took a gun into that school. We hear about this very often in America, but not as much, thankfully, in Thailand or countries close to us. Unfortunately, three teachers perished as well as two school staff and two grandparents, and after the event a 12-year-old girl also lost her life. So to those constituents of mine of Thai heritage, but to any Thai person, our condolences on those losses. They are simply tragic in both incidents.

Nepal and Tibet floods

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:16): Last but not least, I also offer my condolences to the people of both Nepal and China and all of those citizens here who have heritage of those countries. The mudslide that occurred on 26 August was absolutely devastating. To contemplate for a moment that we lost 1300 lives in that singular incident is breathtaking and tragic at the same time, to say nothing of the people who remain lost to this day and the lives that will be forever changed. We offer our deepest thoughts to those two countries, both China and Nepal.

Felicitations

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:16): Firstly, I would like to thank my wonderful family for all of their support over the last few years: my wife Etsuko and my three sons Sen, Kai and Nao. Politics is very hard on families, as everyone here would know. I am sorry I have not been there as much as I wanted to be, and it is probably only going to get worse over the next few months, so I apologise in advance. But without your support and caring, I could not do anything in here, so thank you very much. I would also like to thank my wonderful staff, who for many years have been a great support: Gavin, Ash, James, Beth, Ryan and Chloe. I could not ask to work with a more loyal, dedicated, smart and funny team. In fact one of the greatest things about working here is having such a great team. I am very blessed to be able to work with these people. I hope to be re-elected, but if I am not, actually my biggest regret or my biggest fear is not being able to work with these great

people. So I hope that, whatever happens, we will be able to work together in the future. Thank you to my staff for everything that you do.

Felicitations

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (10:17): This might be my last opportunity to say something in this place today, so I want to say thank you to all those that have supported me and assisted me in being here: my friends, including my late friend Ramon Frederico; my family Chi, Kimberly, Josephine, Stephanie, Genevieve and Michael; all my friends in the Liberal Party; my staff for their support over the past four years – Rosemary, Lucy, Gavin, Nathan, Robert, Robbie, Sanya, Stephen, Francis and Chloe; and my parliamentary colleagues for their great support and courage through the last four years. It has been an honour and a great opportunity for a person of my background as a little boat refugee to come to this land and serve at an ADF placement and local council and to stand here in this greatest place, greatest office in the state. Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you are going to get, but every door will lead to a new adventure, and it is up to you how you chart your path and your destiny. I hope my time here in serving the community and the Vietnamese community has captured that expectation.

State election

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (10:19): In politics it is important to highlight what you stand for, not just what you stand against. The state election is just around the corner, and the Liberals and Nationals have a plan to fix Victoria. We have a plan to give Victoria a fresh start. Our plan will reduce crime, lower costs and deliver a government that works. Our plan for regional Victoria is already published on the Nationals for Victoria website, and today I thought I would highlight seven of my favourite policies: (1) the fair share guarantee that a minimum of 25 per cent of all new government infrastructure investment will be spent in regional Victoria to invest in better public transport, in hospitals and in our schools; (2) our plan to build better, safer roads, investing \$5 billion to repair and rebuild Victoria's roads and establish Better Roads Victoria to rebuild technical expertise in our road building and maintenance; (3) our plan to put 3000 more police on the streets and introduce stronger laws that deliver real consequences for criminals, to keep our community safe; (4) lowering taxes by scrapping Labor's emergency services tax, the schools tax, the holiday tax and the GP tax and reducing the burden of land tax; (5) in housing, our plan to abolish stamp duty for first home buyers for all properties up to \$1 million, making it more affordable to own your own home; (6) in health, our plan to invest in the regional workforce and upgrade regional hospitals; and (7), most importantly, to stop the waste, end the corruption, restore honesty and accountability in government and be transparent in managing taxpayer funds.

Felicitations

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:20): Today I would like to say a special thankyou to my dear friend and colleague who is retiring, Joe McCracken. Joe and I have been around the political Liberal scene for quite some time. We served on councils together – different councils, but prior to entering Parliament we were in local government. Joe has served the people of Western Victoria Region with distinction, and I am incredibly grateful for his support across the region and for his service to the Liberal Party and the people of Western Victoria Region.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my long-suffering family, who assist me wherever they can. Stewart mostly spends his time running and has no idea what is happening, but anyway. He is happy to be a star on TikTok, I think, more than anything else. Thank you to my amazing staff, who put up with an awful lot, my colleagues in the leadership and especially Jess Wilson – who will be an outstanding Premier after 28 November – all my shadow cabinet colleagues and every Liberal and National MP in this place, but also my colleagues across the chamber, on the crossbench and in the Labor Party. I am sure we do work very well together as best we can, although we highlight our differences at every opportunity. Also, thank you to the amazing staff of Parliament. And for the

leadership that you have given us, President, thank you so much. Victoria is a great place, and democracy is a great thing, and we should cherish it as best we can.

Felicitations

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:22): I too want to place on record my thanks to the parliamentary staff and all of the clerks and others in this chamber that we have worked with through the last four years.

Jewish International Film Festival

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:23): I also want to draw the chamber's attention to the world premiere that I attended of *Cancelled*, a movie, part of the Jewish International Film Festival. Director Danny Ben-Moshe has put together what is a remarkable movie. It looks at the experience of Jewish creatives following 7 October, and it follows not just Deborah Conway, who so many are aware of as a remarkable musician and singer in our country, but also visual artist Nina Sanadze, writer Joshua Dabelstein and circus artist Talia Sofizade. They face incredible opposition – racist activity, frankly antisemitic activity, to prevent them performing and prevent them undertaking their artistic activities. This, I think, is disgraceful in modern Australia. People's backgrounds should not become a feature that prevents them from being able to perform and being able to undertake their artistic activity. *Cancelled* is a remarkable feature film that documents this subject in Australia, and I was honoured to attend the premiere at the Classic Cinemas in Elsternwick. We need to be very careful. We need to make sure that our system in Australia prevents this antisemitic and racist activity. Our creatives should be able to get on and do their jobs and not be faced with antisemitic and frankly outright racist attacks on them.

Felicitations

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:24): President, I too rise to say what a great honour it has been to be a member of the 60th Parliament. I thank you, and I thank all my colleagues from across the chamber for everything that they have contributed to try to make a difference. It has been an absolute privilege and honour to represent the Liberal Party in the south-east and a privilege to fight for the people of the south-east and to give them a voice – those who are so often neglected or forgotten and who feel that this government has not listened to their concerns. I want to thank my husband, my four children, my family, my extended family and my staff. You have been amazing; I have had many of you over the years. I especially want to thank Amy, Amber, Maja and also some past ones that have been with me for quite a while over the years: Josiah, Talitha, Neil and Anne. I cannot do what I do without the support of people. When I came in, I came in as a person who loved God and loved people, and regardless of what happens in the next few months and the next few years, I will continue to live that way. It is always a privilege to represent a party that stands for something, and it is my great privilege to stand here and represent the Liberal Party. I believe in Liberal Party values. I will always believe in those values of freedom and of being able to stand up for people and give them the opportunity to have their businesses, to raise their families the way they want to, to get the government out of their lives and to let them get on with their lives. I thank Jess Wilson for her leadership. I know that we will make a great team going forward.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:26): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1652, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:27): I am pleased to stand and make a contribution to this bill, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. I should begin by saying that this bill should have come to the Parliament a lot earlier. This government has botched the process very badly, and it has done so because it has wanted to cover up and prevent scrutiny. Let us not mince words here about what has gone on. Daniel Andrews, Jacinta Allan and indeed Ben, our new Premier, and others within Labor did not want a full royal commission. They did not want IBAC strengthened, and they did not want proper scrutiny on the outright corruption that has developed in Victoria.

There are some amendments here, some I think that will be agreed across the Parliament. I might ask that the amendments of my colleague be circulated so that people can see those amendments. They fall into four groups. They make the bill fully retrospective – removing the limitations in Labor’s bill – as per the coalition’s private members bill moved in March and opposed by Labor. They insert a timely reporting requirement for reports to stop the Operation Richmond–style delay, as per the coalition’s private members bill moved in June and opposed by Labor and, I might add, carried to the lower house and opposed immediately there twice. Twice it went to the lower house, and on each occasion the government refused to even entertain discussion of the bill, defeating it on the introduction. The third point is the repeal of the examinations generally being held in private provision, section 117(1)(a), as per the coalition’s private members bill moved in March and also opposed by Labor. Fourthly, the amendments repeal the public interest immunity which enables cabinet ministers to refuse sharing certain cabinet material with IBAC.

I am just going to put on record here that there is a significant concern developing with the lengthy delay that is occurring with these amendments. These amendments could have been dealt with over the last 24 or 36 hours. They should have been dealt with through that period. They should have been prepared. But it does appear that a dirty deal is in the offing here, and that a dirty deal may have been done. I am hoping it is not with the Greens, but that is the strong rumour – that there has been a deal done to weaken the opposition’s proposals for clear lines on public interest immunity and for clear outcomes there. We would be very concerned if that is the case, and I would not want the Parliament to end on the note of a grubby outcome designed to protect Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan. The fact is these people are crooks. Daniel Andrews is shocking, and he should not be protected. They knew. They clearly knew, and anyone who doubts this should just hear what the new royal commissioner had to say yesterday. He has those briefings that were put to then transport infrastructure minister Jacinta Allan, and those briefings can really only lead to one conclusion: that she knew or should have known that the corruption was occurring.

I might say, a range of FOIs have been put in regarding Ms Allan, the Premier’s office and the transport infrastructure minister’s office, and those FOIs go back a number of years. A number of them are my FOIs. We are embroiled in controversy in VCAT because the government refuses to provide clear documentation and argues that there are public interest immunities to prevent the release of some of the information. These are briefings that are provided to ministers. These are correspondence to ministers. These are matters directly concerning corruption, the CFMEU and the construction industry.

It is very clear that this government is rotten to the core. It is corrupt to its centre. Many of its ministers are corrupt. Many of its ministers should be, frankly, in jail. It is the task of the royal commission to expose and shine light on these matters, and it will indeed be potentially the task of the special prosecutor, as per another bill, which is running in parallel with this. I note that Ben Carroll is bringing

this to the chamber and bringing this to the Parliament in the last sitting week of this Parliament, having been part of the cover-up week after week, month after month and year after year as the evidence mounted again and again of the direct corrupt activity of this government and its allowance of frank and outright corruption on Big Build building sites. These Big Build building sites had tens of millions of dollars of government money flowing through them – hundreds of millions of dollars in some cases and billions of dollars in many. Those billions have been siphoned off through corrupt arrangements with the CFMEU and others, corrupt arrangements that have seen the payment of bikies, the payment of criminals, the payment of strippers and the payment of other corrupt people in and around the building industry.

Let us be clear about what is occurring here: this is a last-minute baulking by the government and potentially others. I am deeply hopeful that none of the crossbench would involve themselves in trying to weaken this bill at this sensitive and final time, because it is important that the bill is made strong enough to do the work that is required and to enable IBAC to do the work that is required. It is not good enough to allow cover-up at this stage and to allow IBAC to be nobbled, and that is the truth of what is this government is seeking to do. They are seeking to allow Daniel Andrews, Jacinta Allan and potentially other ministers and other officials within this government to get out of jail free through the use of a public interest immunity defence for failure to provide key documents to IBAC on key occasions. This is just extraordinary. \$15 billion is one reliable estimate. Others indicate that it could be as much as \$30 billion that has been siphoned off into these corrupt payments.

Lest anyone think that all this is over, in my own portfolio area of energy we have large construction proposed for a number of energy projects, and Jacinta Allan singled out the energy projects as the new Big Build. She said it repeatedly: ‘The new Big Build is renewable energy projects.’ I say these large energy projects, many of them very important, should not be an opportunity to siphon off money into corrupt payments. Although these projects are generally not funded directly by taxpayers; they are funded by the Australian Energy Regulator, allowing the placement of charges on the electricity bills of families and businesses in this state. That is how they are paid. They are paid for by the diversion of money from the bills of consumers – households, families and businesses – and if those projects blow out in cost massively, then those blowout costs have routinely in the past been sheeted home to families and sheeted home to small businesses across the land. It is actually appalling.

If you look at a project like VNI West, that started at \$2.4 billion in estimate, and the latest Australian Energy Market Operator estimate has it at \$7.6 billion, with a 50 per cent upward bound. So that estimate contains a bound saying that it is \$7.6 billion, but they accept that there could be movement upwards of up to 50 per cent. If you do the arithmetic on that, that means the project is deep over \$11 billion. There are some examples in this circumstance where we know that some of the costs have already not been accounted for by AEMO. For example, the cost of interest during construction is not accounted for in the AEMO cost, so it could easily be that the VNI West project blows out to more than \$12 billion. If that includes any component of money being siphoned off corruptly, that is something that should be opposed. Even those proponents who think that that project is a good project should not want money siphoned off corruptly into payments to criminals, bikies and others. People should not be forced through their electricity bills on the new Big Build, as Jacinta Allan called it, to have money siphoned off to pay for corrupt payments. So it is actually very important not only that the proper controls are put in through IBAC in this bill but also, as the opposition has outlined it will do, that a code of conduct for the construction industry is reintroduced.

Let us go back to 2014. I was part of that government between 2010 and 2014. I built hospitals. They came in on time and on budget.

Ryan Batchelor: Name them.

David DAVIS: Well, the Bendigo Hospital would be a good one to start with. We got \$1 billion worth of value. I would love to go through the list of hospitals. We opened Box Hill. My name is on

the plaque out there. I could go on. The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre has got my signature on it. The VCCC has been a very good outcome.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, I will tell you what happened at the eye and ear hospital. The corrupt payments got in there under your government, and do you know when that happened? We lost government in December 2014, and in January 2015 what did Daniel Andrews do? He abolished the code compliance unit and abolished the construction code. That is when everything started to go astray, including at the eye and ear hospital, and there are documents that show the corruption spiralling out of control at the eye and ear hospital. So, mate, I have got to say, the eye and ear is one of those points.

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, Acting President Broad, Mr Davis seems to have his finger in a position that it probably should not be in under the standing orders.

David DAVIS: I apologise for pointing. I was provoked. The eye and ear hospital is a very important hospital, a hospital that we stand by, a hospital where costs blew out because the government allowed corrupt payments to occur. That will be a matter for investigation, I hope, by the royal commission. I hope they go through it with a fine toothcomb. I hope they go through the corrupt payments there, and I hope that they go very, very carefully through the fact that the construction code was stripped out by the government as one of its first acts in January 2015. Why would they do that? Because Daniel Andrews and his mates in government were up to their necks in this corruption. They knew what was going on, and they knew they were clearing the way for corrupt payments to the CFMEU and its crooked mates. That is what happened, and that is part of what the royal commission will hopefully see.

I thought the royal commissioner spoke well yesterday. I thought he spoke clearly, and I thought he made it clear that Jacinta Allan will need to answer as to when she knew the corruption was occurring and what she knew. It is clear that briefings were provided to her. Many of us have had a red-hot go at getting some of those briefings through FOI. We know they exist. We have parts of them. We have significant documents, but we do not have all of the documents. One set of documents that I went after under FOI, which is briefings and correspondence on these matters of corruption and the CFMEU and the departmental briefings that were provided to the minister, has been heavily resisted. As recently as last week there was a compulsory conference to deal with these sorts of matters. We will pursue our amendments. I hope that no dirty deals have been done.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:42): I rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026, but of course we have been here before, haven't we? I have lost count of how many times in this term I have risen to introduce legislation – private members bills and amendments – to expand IBAC's jurisdiction to fight the unprecedented volume and scope of corruption in Victoria only to be voted down each and every time by both the Liberal and Labor parties. I was tempted to simply incorporate one of the half-dozen or more second-reading or committee speeches I have already given in this place to save time, and I confess it has been a little galling to have to sit here and listen to government members and opposition members discussing how important these reforms are and how strongly they now support fighting corruption through an empowered IBAC. Where have you been for the last 12 years? Where were you just a few months ago when I moved amendments to expand IBAC's jurisdiction? The cognitive dissonance of Liberal and Labor members here is truly astounding.

Here we are debating an 'urgent' bill to expand IBAC's definition of 'corrupt conduct' beyond conduct that constitutes a criminal offence, an urgent bill because the government and opposition spent a decade blocking Greens legislation to do the same thing. Just a few months ago, when I moved amendments to expand IBAC's definition of 'corrupt conduct', the government said this was far too complex a thing to do in this term, and the Liberals weakly conceded that they were absolutely no better than Labor when it came to corruption by voting with them. I think the term they used was 'not

in a position to support at this time' – not in a position to give IBAC the powers to effectively investigate Big Build corruption this year – weak, weak, weak.

To me there is no better illustration of why the two-party system is in terminal decline than the failure over the last 15 years to give IBAC real teeth to investigate all forms of corruption in Victoria. People are rightly fed up with the two parties working together to block anti-corruption reform, because make no mistake about it, Victoria became the corruption capital of Australia not through bad luck but through the deliberate design of our anti-corruption commission by both the Labor and Liberal parties. You were told in the strongest terms from the very outset by the Honourable Stephen Charles, who chaired the committee to establish IBAC, that your weak definition of 'corrupt conduct' would lead to endemic levels of public corruption in this state. But this advice was ignored, and you will never guess what ended up happening. In fact the Liberals proudly boasted back in 2011 about the comprehensive limitations that IBAC would have in investigating MPs and governments, especially the executive, in terms of oversight, and Labor was only too glad to support the Liberals.

Inevitably, within months of opening its doors, IBAC had the first uniquely Victorian phenomenon of what I like to call the 'fake IBAC referral'. The fake IBAC referral is where Victorian politicians refer their own conduct to IBAC because they know full well that IBAC does not have the jurisdiction to investigate. For a politician, the fake referral has three functions, each effectively amounting to a disinformation campaign to get themselves off the hook for dodgy behaviour. Firstly, the fake referral allowed a Victorian politician to assure the public they were taking strong action on the dodgy conduct by referring it to IBAC, even though they knew their referral was completely worthless. Secondly, the politician sought to imply to the public that IBAC would launch an investigation into the dodgy conduct, even though they knew that IBAC would summarily dismiss the referral because it was powerless to act. Finally, the politician would imply to the public that their dodgy conduct had been investigated and they had been exonerated by IBAC because no action had been taken by the anti-corruption commission, even though the reason no action had been taken was because there could be no investigation started in the first place. By enabling fake referrals – disgracefully – in many respects IBAC was designed as a tool used to shield politicians from scrutiny rather than investigate corruption.

Premier Baillieu had the distinction of being the first Premier to write a fake referral letter. Within weeks of IBAC opening its door he publicly referred shenanigans in his Deputy Premier's office involving his own chief of staff to IBAC. Of course this referral went nowhere. But there were far more famous fake IBAC referrals to come. Remember lobster with a mobster, an all-time classic fake referral from the then opposition leader Matthew Guy? He may as well have referred his conduct to the International Criminal Court in the Hague for all the good it would have done. But the gold standard was earlier this year when Jacinta Allan waved around a referral to the media to try and claim IBAC was investigating Big Build corruption, and she would have got away with it too if not for the fact IBAC, who it appears finally got sick of politicians using its lack of teeth as a get-out-of-jail card, decided to call her bluff.

Of course blame for Big Build corruption, perhaps costing taxpayers \$15 billion or more, ultimately lies with the relevant Labor ministers and the state Labor government. They are the ones that should overwhelmingly be held accountable for it. But I hope that the royal commission also looks more broadly at the systemic failures within our anti-corruption framework, especially IBAC, which long should have been empowered to be a standing royal commission, and that it looks at the evil deal between the Liberal and Labor parties, who ignored all the expert advice and blocked all the Greens legislation to strengthen IBAC's jurisdiction over the years, because this is ultimately what created the conditions where \$15 billion worth of corruption could continue unchecked for over a decade. Time and time again the Greens gave the Liberals the opportunity to step up and show that they would be better than Labor on integrity by supporting our legislation to expand IBAC's definition of 'corrupt conduct', but time and time again they said, 'No, thanks,' and voted with the Labor government they called corrupt, so corruption was allowed to continue. While we cannot be sure that a properly empowered IBAC would have prevented the corruption from occurring in the first place, there is no

doubt in my mind that it would not have allowed it to be so corrupt and so costly for so long. The Greens have amendments; I now ask if they could please be circulated.

Our first amendment is one of the amendments that was previously moved by the Greens but blocked by the Liberals and Labor. The amendment repeals the exceptional circumstances threshold for holding public hearings, which has effectively prevented the public from seeing IBAC's work in progress. You only have to look at New South Wales's anti-corruption commission public hearings going on right now with Operation Rosny to see how instructive public hearings can be in giving the public a real insight into the grubby world of Labor and Liberal internal politics. Importantly, the Greens amendment will also insert a further requirement in the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 that the decision to hold public hearings must be approved by two IBAC commissioners. This is consistent with New South Wales's Independent Commission Against Corruption, is supported by the Centre for Public Integrity and will provide less opportunity for those embroiled in an IBAC public hearing to claim that they are the victim of some personal vendetta by the IBAC Commissioner.

The second amendment will require that the government of the day must publish on a website the codes of conduct for ministers and parliamentary secretaries. This is a small but important fail-safe to support the expanded definition of 'corrupt conduct', which includes breaches of ministerial codes of conduct. It is also in line with IBAC's recommendations and investigations, including Operation Richmond and Operation Watts.

My third amendment is to promote budget and funding transparency for IBAC. If IBAC is provided with expanded jurisdictional powers under this bill, then it can still be inhibited by a determined government in terms of not providing it with sufficient funding. In fact I can almost guarantee that this will be the case regardless of who forms government. Currently IBAC shares with the Integrity and Oversight Committee a draft of its annual plan laying out its operational strategy for the next 12 months, but it does not share with the committee budget submissions, which are considered cabinet in confidence. It is important that Parliament has some oversight of the integrity agency's funding and whether it is sufficient to meet the agency's strategic goals. The Greens amendment provides this parliamentary oversight and public transparency in terms of IBAC's funding.

The final amendment adds some strength to the process for appointing IBAC commissioners and deputy commissioners to ensure that this process is rigorous. The amendment requires that vacancies of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner positions are open and publicly advertised – something that I believe this government has done in practice but a future government may not. It also provides that with the appointment of a Commissioner the minister must establish a selection committee to consider the suitability of the appointment. Given the extraordinary powers that the IBAC Commissioner will have, including over a government and executive that may have appointed them, we believe that the process for appointing the Commissioner needs to be strengthened. These amendments are in line with the Commonwealth Administrative Review Tribunal appointments and are, once again, strongly supported by the Centre for Public Integrity.

Finally, we have amendments to clarify the transitional arrangements to ensure there is no doubt that IBAC can retrospectively investigate anything it wants to with these new powers. We are glad to have worked with the government and opposition, which has resulted in the government adopting some of what the Greens have proposed as house amendments. We will have more to say about these amendments during the committee stage of the bill, but my appeal to everyone in this place is to recognise the importance of these reforms not just for Victorians but for themselves.

My colleague Dr Tim Read understood the critical importance of having robust integrity agencies, which is why he fought so hard for IBAC reform. He believed that people in positions of power need proper oversight and should be held accountable for their actions, because the public deserve transparency and honesty from those who serve them. When this is not the case, corruption and poor governance go unchecked, bad decisions get made, taxpayer money is squandered, governments

cannot deliver on their promise and the public lose out on vital services and infrastructure, and ultimately people's faith in democracy is eroded. We have seen all of this play out in Victoria, and the fallout is likely to shape Victoria for a very long time to come. We have an opportunity right now, in this last week of Parliament, to put politics aside, to put the interests of the public front and centre and to show Victorians that they matter by working together to deliver the integrity agency we need and they deserve.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:53): I also rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. If there is one thing that I find people hate, it is when there is 'one rule for me and one rule for thee'. In conversations that I have had, whether it is in relation to the management of government projects, to budgets blowing out or to timelines blowing out and seeing the effect that has had on everyday Victorians, often people say that if this had happened in a business or if this had happened in a regular organisation, that person would be fired. Yet there has just been this ongoing pattern of people escaping accountability for decisions and for actions that are making a massive impact on the lives of Victorian people. I think that it is often in discussions like this that people reflect back on bad behaviour from the opposite side of the chamber and try to sometimes cast things in a certain light. The fact is it is us here now, and it is our responsibility to make sure that government has integrity. It is one of the most important jobs, in my opinion, that you can ever have. The fact is that we represent millions of Victorians, as do those on the Treasury benches. That money is not our money, it is their money, and it has to be handled with the utmost respect.

Today I am speaking on this bill, and we are supporting this bill because the reality is that the anti-corruption watchdog needs stronger powers. IBAC have been asking for it for years. The crossbench has been asking for it for years. We have been asking for it for years. It is just time that it happens. I want to just give a shout-out to our team in the Assembly, which is so ably led by James Newbury. He pointed out the central flaw in this legislation, which is that it is not retrospective, and we want to take that further. We believe – and of course nothing is final, because there have been changes in the schedule once again – that it will be retrospective. That is an important move. Because it has been brought out into the light, the government cannot just continue to obfuscate that responsibility. I want to thank James for doing that, and also I want to put on record why we are moving some of these amendments. I really hope that, finally, it is supported, that we actually have an IBAC organisation that has some teeth and that it has the ability to actually clean up corruption, because that has, quite frankly, not happened.

Mr Davis mentioned how twice there have been amendments passed in this house to strengthen IBAC and give IBAC some teeth, but then when they have gone down to the lower house, because Labor have an absolute majority, they have not even been considered. This has been hugely frustrating, and I have mentioned it before in this place. Of course in any position of leadership you are going to get your odd dodgy person that is in there for the wrong reasons. That is the truth. Bad people will exploit either vulnerable people or places of power. That happens. But I believe that, mostly, people come in here with the right intentions. I believe something changed on that side the day that that \$15 billion was reported. It was like it was so bad, it was so huge, that they could not face up to the reality of that. It was too hard. That is why we need these protections.

In December last year Parliament's own Integrity and Oversight Committee handed down its report. It drew on submissions from IBAC itself, from integrity experts, from the Ombudsman and from Victorians that have just watched a decade of this happening – of rules for me and rules for thee. It has been so difficult for me, particularly that time when it came out that on government worksites there were strippers, there were drugs and there was all of this behaviour that was just so egregious. That was really a rorting of state finances, while the people that paid those taxes were struggling to put food on the table.

I will often come back to this story; it is one that means something to me because it was around the same time. The week that that story came out and we were hearing about how horrific that was, I was meeting with those businesses in Bald Hill who because of the Big Build had had so much access to

their businesses restricted. I remember talking to one of the business owners, saying, 'How are you going?' She had just pulled her kids out of sport because they could not afford it anymore. It was like they were scaling back on their lives. It was one of those moments that will stick with me forever. This is why integrity in government is so important, because those are the people that we are meant to serve. Every one of the taxpayer dollars that they contribute to this amazing state has to mean something, and it has to be handled with proper respect and integrity.

The inquiry made some serious recommendations. These amendments are still not final, obviously, because it has been pushed down the road again. But we have to make sure that we are adopting, particularly from the inquiry's work, the recommendations that are going to make this work. That is the truth. The amendments that we think are coming through are genuine and will strengthen IBAC, and we will certainly support them. I hope that the crossbench and also members of the government, because we all come in here to serve the Victorian people, see that this is what builds trust and brings things into the light, so people can know that their taxpayer dollars are being used responsibly.

There is a well-documented history in recent years of the type of behaviour that this bill is meant to expose. That is the reality, and we have to make sure that this happens. Last month the Auditor-General's report showed that there had been a secret tax on public transport. This was another one of those moments where I felt – particularly when you have got Victorians coming in – like, 'How is this happening?' These are people who are there to serve us. They seem to be on more money than us and have more security than us, yet we are not being treated with the respect and the openness that we should be. This secret tax was quietly implemented without Victorians knowing about it, and it was to bail out the government, who have been mismanaging the budget since 2014. This is what was said on *ABC News* on 26 August – that this secret tax was 'a scandal of the highest order'. That is true. It is a scandal of the highest order.

Many have spoken about the mess around the CFMEU. Geoffrey Watson SC, who led the inquiry into criminal infiltration of the union's Victorian branch, told a parliamentary committee this year that corrupt practices on Big Build projects inflated costs by an estimated \$15 billion. That is a huge number in itself, and we could go through what that money could buy. But put that in the context of business owners that are struggling to pay their tax, pulling their kids out of different sports because they can no longer afford it, winding back on holidays or maybe meat for meals or whatever it is or trying to make their balance sheet work where the government seems to be doing the opposite. There is the money side of it, but a cost that might even be bigger is the trust side of it and the transparency side of it. It matters. That has been a figure, \$15 billion – some say \$30 billion – and the government have said, 'Oh, that's ridiculous. That's not true.' But they have not given a credible rebuttal of what that is.

Geoffrey Watson also told the committee that the flow-on effects reach ordinary Victorians renovating their homes because tradies cannot compete with wages inflated by union standover tactics on government projects. Isn't that so sad? They cannot renovate their homes. That is the family that wants to have another child and wants to build on another room and cannot do that. That is the young person that wants to get into a house and cannot do that. These are the effects of integrity in politics. That is \$15 billion that Labor let bleed out of the Big Build and into bkie gangs and into some of the things that happened. We have gone over it a lot in this place. It is just so egregious. \$15 billion is a staggering betrayal of trust. It could have bought so many things. Just imagine if we had had none of this grave corruption in the last decade. I think we could have built the hospitals that this government promised and did not deliver. We could have upgraded the roads. We could have upgraded the schools, we could have had more teachers, better paid teachers – all of the things that this could have funded. We could have had additional police on our streets at a time when, as we saw in the youth justice report that was handed down yesterday, 3.3 per cent of Victorians are victims of crime. If that money had gone to police – because as we know, every day we are 1500 short – I think that number would have been a lot smaller.

We have got to begin with every single decision we make by looking at it right next to the reality and the situation of the people that we are here protecting and that we are meant to represent. You cannot siphon off \$15 billion and then genuinely say to the business that is closing its doors – there are 350 per day in Victoria, by the way – ‘We stand for you.’ It is disingenuous if you are saying that. You cannot go to the family that is pulling their kids out of sport and say, ‘We stand for you,’ if you are not willing to clean this up. Plus, you have to realise that every Victorian, just about, sees the news when they flick through Instagram or Facebook or they read the paper. They are not going to trust a government that says ‘There won’t be blowouts anymore, we’re turning over a new leaf’ if they have seen the reality of what is going on. What we have seen in the last few years has been the Spring Street bubble at its best. It has been a shocking disconnect between the people in here and the people out there. That is why this matters.

What about the time when the previous Premier said that the IBAC findings were ‘educational’? If they were educational – and that was in 2018 – it has been a very long time to learn the lesson, because we are here on the last day of Parliament filling in time while the government tries to get amendments through. Maybe the lesson should have been learned when this ‘educational’ report was handed down in 2018.

This is why I think our amendment about timely reporting is so important, because it took eight years for IBAC to finally table the Operation Richmond report, which was the investigation into the secret 2016 pay negotiations between Andrews and the United Firefighters Union. IBAC found that the government breached its own policies, procedures, codes of conduct and conventions by negotiating directly and in secret without the knowledge of the responsible minister or the cabinet. That was a result of – as reported on 5 August – no-one being in the position to properly hold the government to account. If we want to be in a position where the government, whoever it is, is properly held to account, there has to be an IBAC with teeth, there has to be a government that is willing to provide documents and there has to be the convention that when ministers or responsible members of the party go to inquiries they actually have to front up with the evidence. This is extremely important. Victoria Elliott said this of the government’s failing:

Operation Richmond highlights how government leaders, including ministers and the Premier, can undermine established checks and balances when they fail to model high integrity standards and act as stewards of good governance.

(Time expired)

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:09): I rise to make a contribution to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. Established in 2011, IBAC was created to strengthen Victoria’s integrity framework by preventing, exposing and addressing public sector corruption and police misconduct. Victorians rightly expect every dollar of public money to be spent responsibly and for their state to be governed with transparency and integrity. Corruption must never be allowed to slip through the cracks, and those entrusted with public power must be held accountable. Victoria has spent billions of dollars of public money on the Big Build projects that will affect every Victorian, reshaping our roads, our railways and our communities in the future. But the Big Build exposed a serious flaw in Victoria’s integrity system.

When billions of dollars of taxpayers money moves through government agencies, private companies, contractors and subcontractors, the question is not simply where the money goes; it is who receives it, who benefits from it and who is held accountable for deliberate misuse of these funds. The Premier committed to stronger government integrity and accountability, including giving IBAC the ability to follow the money through private contractors and to broaden the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’. That commitment is extremely welcomed, but stronger promises must be matched by stronger laws, because public money does not stop being public money when it leaves the government and enters a private contract, and accountability cannot stop either. The question is: who is accountable when

something goes wrong? For too long IBAC has faced too many obstructions to following public money once it moves beyond the boundaries of government and into the accounts of private companies delivering major public projects. The government itself has acknowledged that these gaps have limited IBAC's ability to investigate allegations of corruption connected to the major projects. That should concern every Victorian because it is not just about the construction industry and it is not just about one project, one contractor or one set of allegations; it is about whether our integrity system can actually follow the money – taxpayers money. Victorians should not have to trust that billions of dollars are being protected. They should have an integrity system powerful enough to prove it.

The proposed reforms are intended to capture a wider range of serious misconduct and the government's commitment to integrity and accountability. These are significant reforms. But they raise an important question: why has it taken so long for IBAC to be given expanded powers to properly investigate corruption and misconduct? That is why these reforms must go further. IBAC needs a broader jurisdiction, meaningful investigative powers and greater transparency so that Victorians have confidence allegations of wrongdoing will be properly examined regardless of who is involved or where public money ends up.

In December last year the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC), of which I am a member, handed down its report examining whether IBAC has the powers and legislative framework it needs to do its job properly. The answer was clear: there are significant gaps that need to be addressed. I would like to take this moment to acknowledge the chair of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, the late Dr Tim Read. Dr Read brought a deep commitment to integrity, transparency and accountability to the work of the committee. Tim was a true gentleman. He always made you feel heard, took on board what you were saying and engaged in a way, even when disagreeing, that was respectful and productive, qualities that saw him perform his role as chair incredibly well. He was an absolute pleasure to work alongside, and I will miss him. Tim led this inquiry with passion, diligence and genuine leadership and understood the importance of ensuring Victoria's integrity system is strong enough to command public confidence.

The committee made 31 recommendations to strengthen Victoria's integrity system and give IBAC the tools it needs to investigate corruption effectively. These recommendations include broadening the definition of 'corrupt conduct', clarifying key provisions in the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and strengthening IBAC's investigative powers. Dr Read and I specifically supported the change for IBAC to have greater powers to hear evidence from witnesses in public, but the government and the opposition did not, at that time, support this change. The recommendations go to a fundamental question: when there are serious allegations of corruption or misconduct involving public money and public institutions, does Victoria's anti-corruption agency have the power to follow the evidence wherever it leads?

For a long time, Victoria's IBAC has had fewer powers than most other integrity bodies in Australia. The message from the IOC report was pretty clear: Victoria's anti-corruption framework could be strengthened by expanding the powers of IBAC. When our integrity watchdog does not have the powers it needs to properly investigate corruption and its work is hidden from public view, it does little to restore public trust in democracy. If the Carroll government is not serious about transparency, it is up to crossbenchers to scrutinise its actions and to hold it to account. Victorians should be able to trust that allegations of corruption will be taken seriously, investigated independently and dealt with appropriately.

IBAC is not just Victoria's watchdog, it is also Victoria's independent police oversight body. That responsibility demands independence, focus and the resources to properly investigate police corruption and misconduct. That is why the committee recommended that IBAC formally establish a dedicated police corruption and misconduct division, putting police accountability at the heart of Victoria's integrity system, and I echo those initiatives. In July I introduced a private members bill to restore IBAC's ability to independently investigate police misconduct. Current legislation has limited IBAC's power to investigate police misconduct. IBAC investigates only 1 per cent of police

misconduct cases, including brutality. The rest are either dismissed or sent back to the police. It is also an unfathomable truth that First Peoples continue to face systemic racism, from racial profiling and overpolicing to greater use of force, searches, arrests and remand. This is not equal justice; it is a failure of accountability. I will be moving an amendment to repeal section 15(1A) of the IBAC act, and I ask that this amendment be circulated.

Section 15(1A) was intended to guide IBAC's priorities. Instead, it has had serious unintended consequences. It unduly restricts the IBAC Commissioner's discretion to allocate resources while pushing serious police misconduct complaints and police oversight matters down the priority list. The consequences have been significant, harming individuals and undermining the community's ability to seek independent accountability. These outcomes do not appear to have been foreseen by Parliament when the provision was introduced.

We all know that police misconduct is not an internal police matter. It is a dangerous conflict of interest, it can pose a threat to community safety and it destroys public trust in our institutions and those who are given powers. Victorians have seen it play out again and again in the media and in inquiries, in stories of victim-survivors whose lives have been affected and in the repeat calls from stakeholders for stronger independent police oversight. When allegations of serious misconduct arise, Victorians should not have to wonder who is investigating the police, whether conflicts of interest exist or whether misconduct is being properly examined, exposed and addressed. If police misconduct remains an internal police matter and the watchdog cannot properly scrutinise those investigations, accountability has a serious blind spot. Victorians deserve better. When allegations of misconduct are investigated by the system being scrutinised, Victorians can reasonably question whether that process is truly independent.

The Integrity and Oversight Committee recommended establishing a dedicated police corruption and misconduct division within IBAC, strengthening independent oversight by requiring reasons for referral, preventing conflicts of interest and allowing IBAC to review police investigations. It is concerning that Victoria Police provided only limited responses to questions on notice and declined to attend a hearing or make a submission to that inquiry. These reforms are about one basic principle: when police are accused of misconduct, the public must be able to trust that those allegations are investigated independently, properly and transparently. The need for stronger police oversight is not something that is new. Back in 2018 the police oversight inquiry was established after concerns were raised about the way complaints against police were being investigated, including calls for a genuinely independent complaints handling system. The royal commission recommended that the Victorian government review the laws and institutions responsible for overseeing Victoria Police to ensure our oversight system is consistent, coordinated and capable of delivering meaningful police accountability. That recommendation matters because public confidence depends on people knowing that when allegations of police misconduct are made, they are taken seriously and investigated independently.

My amendment, which is also recommendation 18 in the IOC's report, is to repeal section 15(1A). Section 15(1A) was intended to guide IBAC's priorities, but in practice it has serious unintended consequences. The committee supported amending section 15(1A) to make it unequivocally clear that serious police misconduct must be a priority for IBAC and that, except in exceptional circumstances, IBAC – not Victoria Police – must investigate it. This is about putting independence at the heart of police oversight. It constrained the Commissioner's discretion to allocate IBAC's resources where they were most needed and it contributed to serious police misconduct and police oversight matters being given less priority. The consequences were not just administrative. Real people were affected, causing real and lasting harm. Serious complaints were deprioritised and public confidence in our integrity system was undermined.

Nearly a decade on from the police oversight inquiry, we should be asking whether Victoria has done enough to deliver that independent and effective oversight. Police independence is a fundamental principle of our democracy. It ensures that police can investigate crime, enforce the law and make operational decisions without improper political interference or pressure from those in positions of

power. Better police oversight is not just about holding officers accountable when things go wrong. More importantly, it is about creating a police culture where misconduct is challenged and speaking up is seen as a responsibility, not as a risk. Stronger and independent oversight empowers police officers to speak up and build a healthier police culture. It also protects the many officers who do the right thing, ensuring they are not left isolated or undermined.

With the recent announcement of Jack's law and the further expansion of police powers in Victoria, the need for stronger police oversight and accountability has never been more important. When we give police greater powers, we must also strengthen the safeguards around how they use those powers. Victorians deserve to know that police powers are exercised lawfully, proportionately and without discrimination and that when misconduct occurs, there is a genuinely independent body capable of investigating it. More police powers must come with more accountability, not less.

These IBAC reforms are a start, but they are not enough. Victorians deserve more than promises of integrity and accountability. They deserve meaningful action and transparency and an integrity system that works in the public interest. Accountability must never be optional. Transparency must never be an afterthought and integrity must always be at the forefront of democracy. On behalf of the Legalise Cannabis Party, we support this bill.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:24): I too rise to speak on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. I want to start by saying, 'Shame, shame, shame.' Shame on this government that we are even in this situation, that we even have to have a debate in order to hold this government to account and to make sure that IBAC has the powers that it needs to be able to look into what has really been going on on things like the Big Build – where the money has really gone, who it has gone to and who is responsible. The public feel very, very strongly about this. I can tell you that in the south-east region which I represent the people are hurting. I have been there and seen the lines at places like Transit, who are trying to feed people, three times a week providing groceries and twice a week providing a three-course meal. There are many places like that. Families who have never had to access services are finding themselves having to access services because they are having to pay so much money in tax to this government. And what is it doing with it? That is what we want to know because we do know that there is corruption. We do know that there is a large volume of money – billions and billions and billions of dollars – that has been wasted. It has been wasted and has not gone where it was supposed to go. It has gone into overinflated costs and overinflated hours. We do not even exactly know everything about what has been going on. I can tell you the stories that circulate throughout the south-east, throughout the whole of my region, because so many people work in the building industry or have friends that do. It does not matter how much people try to keep this quiet; I can tell you people know, and they want heads to roll. They want people to be held accountable.

I could never understand why people would constantly come to me at the beginning, when I got elected to the 60th Parliament, and say to me, 'What's your agenda? What are you here for?' I just found that question really surprising. I can say with all clarity, here on the last day of the 60th Parliament, that I had two objectives. The first one: to me, the face of Daniel Andrews was the face of everything that was going wrong in terms of oppression and corruption. I thought, 'If he's gone, maybe it will change.' But he did leave in that first year, 2023, and it did not change everything. In fact I think that corruption had become so embedded in the concrete and fabric of this state that things only continued to roll out and expand. Like a cancer, it continued to spread.

My second great mission here is, was and continues to be to get rid of this tired government, this government that has failed Victorians. It has failed Victorians with things like the Big Build and the money that goes into the Big Build. The cost blowouts for the Big Build are phenomenal, and the powers that IBAC requires must be retrospective. There are no ifs or buts about that. We must make sure that people can be named. We need justice, and the people want justice. They are paying such significant amounts of money. Businesses have closed. People have retired early from their businesses. They have not given them to their children; they have had to just disband their businesses in many

cases. In many cases people are struggling just to keep the lights on, the air conditioning on or the heater on. Whatever the time of year, it has been tough for people. Do not tell us that the money has gone to where it was supposed to go, because every time a tyre blows out or we lose a life on our roads due to potholes or roads that have not been maintained properly, we all know in Victoria that the money has not gone where it was supposed to go.

Everybody in this state is paying the price, and it is time to remove this tired government. My greatest mission is to see it gone and to see the Liberals and Nationals in government, because unless we have that change, we are not going to see all the changes we need. But the very least that we can do is make sure that we have integrity and transparency, and this government has failed to provide both. It is not a secret. We all know it. We all feel it. Every time I drive past a single weed on a road, I look at it and think, 'There's a government that has failed us. Where has our taxpayer money gone?' When I go into a school and it has saucepans to catch the leaks from the roof – in a city like Melbourne, Victoria, it is appalling to think that we have children having to go to schools that are run down. Where has the money gone? We need to give the powers to IBAC. We need to have transparency. We must have the integrity that the people of Victoria deserve, and they deserve it in a government that is not going to fail them.

I am so glad that we have a Liberal and Nationals plan, a 10-year plan to make sure that there will be less crime in this community; to make sure that there will be lower costs, lower taxes and lower government fees and charges; to make sure that we will have a transparent and accountable government; to make sure that there will be more investment in health, education and local infrastructure; to make sure that there will be a 25 per cent fair share guarantee for regional Victoria; to make sure that we will end the corruption; to make sure that there will be adult time for adult crime; to make sure there will be a one-strike rule for bail; and to make sure that we abolish the emergency services tax, the schools tax, the GP tax and the holiday tax, which is a holiday rental tax. We will abolish stamp duty for first home buyers.

We need to see changes. We need to see where our tax money has gone. I can tell you that the Big Build has blown out by at least \$15 billion, which we know is corrupt money. It could be as much as \$30 billion. That is a lot of money. It is so much money that most of us cannot even get our heads around it, when schools might be crying out for a few hundred thousand or a couple of million to be able to expand something, to have enough classrooms to teach their kids. I mean, the government may have built some schools in areas where they desperately needed them, but they have not even built enough classrooms in those schools. Portables are going to have to be brought into these brand new schools because they did not think it through and did not do the job properly.

Why is it that in health and in education, where the money needs to go, it has not been there, but it has been there for the Big Build to build things that people did not even ask for? We still cannot get a train from the airport out to the suburbs. It is the most embarrassing thing to live in a cosmopolitan city like this, that boasts of being the most multicultural city in Australia, which means many people are coming in from all these different countries, and we have to say to every single visitor, 'I am so sorry, we don't have a train that you can catch from Melbourne Airport out to the suburbs to visit your family. You're going to have to catch a bus or an Uber or a taxi because we don't do that; we haven't got that here in Victoria.' We could have had it, but no, this government has failed Victorians. And now they want to build a Suburban Rail Loop that nobody asked for, drawn up on a serviette in a backroom, or some say in an aeroplane, some idea so that they can make sure that they have a train service that goes around and touches a whole lot of different electorates to make sure that those electorates end up having social housing and to ensure that they are never going to be seats that will be going to the Liberal Party or to the Nationals, making sure that they will always hold government and nobody else will be able to be elected. That is not democracy, that is not sensible and that is not a good use of taxpayers money when people are working hard.

We have in the balcony right now a whole bunch of students, and I can guarantee that a lot of their parents are doing it tough trying to pay those bills. The last thing they need is to know that their money

is being wasted on criminal cartels and going into the pockets of people who do not need it. I am not against unions when unions are doing their job to be fair, but it is not fair or reasonable when they are becoming wealthy off the taxpayer by being corrupt. That is not what the unions were built for. Shame on this government. Shame on you. Shame on you for taking the hard-earned wages of Victorians. Shame on you for turning this state into a corrupt state which has welcomed criminals into it, and now you do not even want to be transparent enough to be accountable and to give IBAC the powers. We have to have all this negotiation going on to try to shut it down so that the heads that need to roll and the people that need to be in prison will not be caught and will not be named and will not be made accountable. Shame on you. You do not deserve to be in government. You do not deserve to have these positions. It is not fair, it is not right and it is not just. This is not what Victorians signed up for when they voted you into office. I hope to God they do not vote for you again, because it is time for a change in this state. We must have a fresh start. We have to get rid of this government. We have to see people come in that are prepared to have integrity and to be transparent.

That is what this is all about. It is about giving IBAC the powers that it needs to be transparent. It is about allowing it to be retrospective so that we can see what was going on and who was involved and what they did. If they have been involved in criminal activity, if they have been wasting a single dollar of the taxpayer, they deserve to be held accountable, because right now somebody has had to make a decision on their family, as Dr Heath said, where they have had to pull their kid out of a school, had to stop them from doing a sport, not been able to give them the meal that they wanted to give them, had to cancel a holiday or had to make some tough decisions. Maybe they cannot get them the shoes they needed or maybe they cannot give them the opportunities that they want to afford them because they are paying their taxes. And for what? For corruption. For criminals to take that money. Shame on this government. It is absolutely time for a fresh start in this state.

I strongly support the amendments that we are supporting here as the Liberals and Nationals. We want to make sure that the people of Victoria get transparency in government and that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission has the powers that it needs to be able to do the investigations to name and shame those that this government is trying desperately to protect. If you have done the crime, you should do the time.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:37): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:37): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 to 4, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (11:38): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Dangerous Goods Transport Act 2026** in relation to reckless endangerment offences, the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013**, the **Accident Compensation Act 1985**, the **Transport Accident Act 1986** in relation to supported accommodation and certain benefits for children, the **Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004**, the **Limitation of Actions Act 1958** to remove a limitation

period for certain actions and to make consequential and related amendments to the **Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Act 2026** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Motions

Budget papers 2026–27

Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:

That the budget papers 2026–27 be taken into consideration.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (11:39): Thank you so very much for the opportunity to rise and make a contribution on the budget motion. I did not think I would in fact get an opportunity to speak to our marvellous 2026–27 budget here in the Parliament, but alas, the schedule of the day does afford me this opportunity to rise and speak. I really am proud to speak on a budget that delivers real, meaningful relief right to the front doors of families in the Northern Metropolitan Region. We know that global conflicts in the Middle East continue to push up prices at the petrol pump, and we know that the Reserve Bank has been hiking interest rates because of national inflationary pressures. For what it is worth, I too hope that the interest rates do not rise, knowing of course how many are desperately struggling with the cost of living. The message that I hear right across our community is consistent: things are tight, people are feeling the pinch and families are watching every single line item in the household budget. That is exactly why our government has made cost-of-living relief a central priority in this budget. We are delivering massive cost-of-living supports and housing initiatives to make life easier, fairer and more affordable for the Victorians who need it most.

It is fitting, actually, that the Minister for Government Services is here in the chamber as I speak to one of the most immediate, impactful measures in the budget, and that is the Labor government's 20 per cent off rego rebate, which I know was a huge success right across the north. I do not have the numbers on hand, but everyone I know, including many, many folks that came through my electorate office door, took advantage of this great initiative. Perhaps I will take this opportunity to thank the minister while he is here and, on the record, thank him for all his work in that initiative, because it truly did make a difference. It was direct money straight into the household budget for families with a single car, and it was double that support back for households that run two cars to get to work and get the kids to school.

Can I just say, along with that immediate relief, we are putting power back in the hands of consumers and have heavily invested into the fair fuel plan. The daily fuel price cap is now a legal requirement, meaning our anti-price-gouging laws force retailers to set the daily cap and publish it in advance. You can jump on the Servo Saver feature on the Service Victoria app, compare prices across more than 1500 registered fuel retailers, find the best deal today and know with certainty that the price will not jump the following morning before you fill up. That is a really, really good thing.

Our government also knows that the best way to save on petrol is to leave the car at home. I know this is being felt quite acutely at the moment with the cost of fuel rising, which is why we are transforming the way that Victorians get around. We provided instant relief earlier this year, making public transport free over April and May and then extending that to half-price fares across trains, trams and buses right through till the end of the year. This comes on top of our incredible initiative that began this year making public transport entirely free for anyone under the age of 18. To make those journeys better, we are investing significantly into the rolling stock and expanding services. For our local commuters in the north, this means brilliant new train carriages on the tracks. Our government is delivering state-of-the-art X'trapolis 2.0 trains for the metropolitan network, including on the Craigieburn and Upfield lines. These modern trains are going to redefine the passenger experience, making the daily commute smoother, quieter and more accessible.

We also know that a truly connected transport network relies on local links, which is why we are delivering more frequent buses where they are needed most, particularly across our fast-growing

northern suburbs. We are also upgrading our tram network with modern, accessible stops and delivering the biggest road blitz in our state's history, rebuilding key intersections, resurfacing local roads and, yes, fixing potholes.

When I talk to local parents, they tell me the mounting cost of raising kids can really get them down. Throughout the school year I am really proud to speak to some initiatives that absolutely make a difference. We are continuing strong funding for the affordable school uniforms program so that every child can feel proud and included in class. We are expanding the wonderful Glasses for Kids program, which provides free vision screenings and free glasses directly at school, saving parents valuable time and the high costs of these private optometry appointments. We are making sure our kids have full bellies and are ready to learn by investing deeply in school breakfast clubs. And for a great family day out that does not break the bank, we are providing free admission for kids under 16 to our zoos right now during school holidays, so if you have not taken advantage of that, get on board.

It is not just about the day-to-day costs of going to school, it is about investing in the schools themselves. Our government is incredibly proud to have delivered massive, sustained capital investment over the last 12 years to build, maintain and upgrade our public schools across Victoria. I am absolutely thrilled to see huge wins for the northern suburbs in our capital works program. We are investing in local communities with crucial modernisation funding for Spensley Street Primary, and we are getting on with the early planning stages of a brand new Arden Secondary School for this growing precinct and are backing our inner-city families by building a substantial new campus for Docklands Primary School. This is about ensuring that our kids have access to first-rate educational facilities right where they live. We are also looking after our youngest learners, with substantial capital funding to build and expand local kindergartens and Early Learning Victoria centres. This dedicated grants program is for 27 new and expanded kinders and significant funding to construct five brand new government-owned early learning centres in communities where local demand heavily outstrips supply.

For our school leavers and workers looking to upskill, we are continuing to champion vocational training, with sweeping investments across our TAFE sector, including fully funded places to keep delivering free TAFE across our 80 priority courses. We are injecting a massive multiyear pipeline of funding into the Social Housing Growth Fund. We are modernising our planning legislation to ensure planning approvals are processed faster, and we are backing the development facilitation program to fast-track major shovel-ready residential projects.

One that I am particularly proud of is the work to look after our most vulnerable people in the community. This budget delivers extra emergency accommodation and nine new specialist outreach teams to help rough sleepers connect with vital supports that they absolutely need. We are providing dedicated funding for stable long-term housing, with wraparound health care and social supports across five supported housing sites alongside targeted assistance to help vulnerable renters maintain their private tenancies so they do not fall into homelessness.

When it comes to health care, our Labor government always steps up. For the outer north I am particularly proud of the significant uplift to the Craigieburn Community Hospital. This expansion means families in Craigieburn and surrounding suburbs will have better, faster access to public health care close to home, without having to travel for hours to major inner-city hospitals. Statewide we are providing substantial funding to deliver tens of thousands of additional specialist paediatric appointments and thousands more planned surgeries for children. We are also funding hospital-level care directly in patients' homes, including dedicated support for home-based dialysis, making everyday treatment far easier and more comfortable for patients and their carers.

Our government is doing the hard work to support Victorians through tough times, but we have to look at the alternative. What we know is that the coalition has openly promised a massively devastating \$40 billion of cuts across our public services, and those cuts would inevitably mean fewer classroom teachers, fewer frontline nurses and longer wait times in our emergency departments. I have got to

say, we invest in our people. We choose to deliver genuine cost-of-living relief. We choose to build better schools across the north. We choose to make our public transport network work for local families, and we choose to deliver the world-class health care that our community needs.

As I look back on our investments over the last four years, I reflect on schools. I take a moment to acknowledge and pay my respects to so many of the school councils that I have had the privilege of working with and the volunteers who speak up on behalf of some very busy local parents to make sure that their concerns are heard and make sure that the vital upgrades that will change the educational experience for students right across the northern suburbs occur. I am particularly proud of, can I just say, the opening of Docklands Primary School. That community is thriving and growing, and many, many people are choosing to live their whole lives in Docklands. The stigma of it being a very transient community is well and truly over. The folks that are living in Docklands and choosing to educate their children in Docklands are now desperately filling our classrooms, such that we had a temporary school and now we have plans in this budget to build a new site for Docklands primary. It is kind of extraordinary and, I would like to say, possibly unexpected just how popular Docklands has become. I thank principal Adam Bright. To the team at Docklands primary, I have got to say it was a real point of pride attending your opening all those years ago and seeing your school community grow and thrive and become quite a force for change.

Furthermore, just with respect to our communities around there, I want to acknowledge the building of North Melbourne Primary School's second campus; it is one of our vertical schools, and we have got a few of them now around the place. It has been quite an adjustment for parents to embrace vertical schools, but I have got to tell you, the ones embracing it with open arms are in fact the students who are just loving the world-class facilities that we have there, whether it is North Melbourne Primary School or the Wurun campus there on Queens Parade, which is home to the Bundha centre, which has got all those excellent basketball courts. I think that vertical schools are here to stay, and I am going to continue to be, as much as I can, a very strong advocate for new ways of learning and providing world-class opportunities for our students.

Beyond education, I would like to acknowledge the critical investments that we have made across public transport, ones that I am enormously proud to help promote as the Parliamentary Secretary for Public and Active Transport, including of course the new trains. I spent a significant amount of time last week talking to commuters at Strathmore station, Coburg station, Moonee Ponds station and others. Watch out, train stations: I will be talking to more of you just about what the new uplifts on the Craigieburn and Upfield line mean.

There are hundreds of new services, and what I have seen is a real change in commuter behaviour at those stations. Years ago, if you heard those bells ring, you would see commuters running, running, running to make that train, knowing of course that it might be 20 minutes or so before the next one comes; that has absolutely changed now, and I have seen commuters go, 'Oh, well, there'll be another one here in less than 5 minutes.' The very fact that that behaviour has changed and the stress of running up the platform, finding your Myki, tapping on – 'Oh no, I've got to top it up' – is all gone. That is because not only have we improved the services on the Craigieburn and Upfield lines, we have also introduced the X'trapolis 2.0, which means that we have got bigger and more beautiful trains that allow for much more space and for many more commuters on board. I have got to say, tap-and-go has been embraced with quite a lot of enthusiasm right across the lines. Watching folks have their phones out in hand as they approach the platform in the mornings, ready to tap and go to get onto their services – knowing of course that those services are half price until the end of the year – does absolutely make a difference, so it is with great pride that I report that.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Sport, I get to hang out at sports clubs and see the growing, thriving clubs that keep our community strong. Big respect to our presidents, volunteers, canteen helpers, boundary runners, scorers, folks that pick up young ones and bring them to the game and folks that volunteer on the weekends to help mend a dusted-up knee or – sometimes it is worse – make trips to the urgent care clinic; all of what you do keeps our community sport strong. To you, the

volunteers, can I say thank you for doing what you do. I am proud to continue to work with this government to make sure that those vital investments – whether they are in safety, security, facilities, training centres or even just having, for the very first time, women’s change rooms – make all the world of difference.

I could go on forever, but I am going to leave my remarks there, and with great pride I recommend and commend the budget for 2026–27.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:54): I rise to speak to the take-note motion on the budget, and I have got to say that on the very last sitting day of this term of Parliament we are debating this because this government are so hopelessly chaotic that they cannot get their agenda right. The whole Parliament is a mess, the legislative agenda is a mess, and that is symbolic of what is happening in the state. It is a complete mess. It does not matter which part of the budget you look at, it is in big trouble. It is in big trouble because of the extraordinary debt that Victoria is in, and that is because of Labor’s out-of-control spending and their inability to understand the importance of responsible economic and financial management. And as a result we get failures in the system.

I want to come back to the health system. I listened to Ms Watt, who said it is a marvellous budget. I went to the table office to get the Treasurer’s speech to remind myself of what she said back in May, because it is now September and we are 65 days out from an election and we are debating this motion – I mean, spare me. But on the budget, I am reminded about what the Treasurer said on road maintenance:

... the largest sustained investment in road maintenance in Victoria’s history.

Because better roads do more than get people from A to B.

They make the trip safer.

They make it easier for parents, tradies, and regional communities to get where they need to go, sooner.

Can you believe the Treasurer? We have had a revolving door of treasurers in this term of Parliament, like we have had a revolving door of ministers. I mean, I am nearly onto my second hand counting the number of ministers I have had. But the revolving door of treasurers in this term of Parliament says everything as well. Listen to the words of the then Treasurer Jaclyn Symes, who had no clue. She went to speak to businesses and asked them what their favourite tax was, for God’s sake. I mean, heavens above, we are the highest taxed state in the country and she goes to the business community and asks them what their favourite tax is. That is the calibre of the government that is here in Victoria, and that is the calibre of these people that are running the place. It is no wonder that the budget is in a mess and the state is in a mess. The roads are in a mess with the potholes. And we have got the latest Premier – who is not a leader, he is a follower – saying, ‘We need to fix the potholes. We’ll invest a bit more’.

The Treasurer’s speech went on to say:

Because government investment should not live on a balance sheet – it should make life work better for people.

And the byline for the budget is ‘Easier. Safer. More Affordable.’ Well, it is not easier, it is not safer and it is not more affordable. I say again: look at the potholes in the roads and look at the catastrophes and the tragedies that have occurred. And more will happen because of the ongoing degradation.

The Treasurer’s speech went on to say:

We also have to ensure that every Victorian feels safe ...

Safe at home.

Safe in their communities.

Safe where they work, study and travel.

Look at the crime that is happening in this state. Look at what has occurred over the last four years: home invasions, carjackings, firebombings and machete attacks – the horrendous statistics of people

being murdered by people that are roaming around with machetes and committing the most horrific crimes against innocent Victorians. That is the state of what we are dealing with in Victoria. This government might say things, but their actions speak louder than their words. It is a disaster. There are too many innocent Victorians who have been subjected to crime; there are horrific outcomes of these machete attacks. But look at firebombings – I cannot even believe I am talking about firebombings. We have had over 200 firebombings. We had another one this morning. They are just an everyday occurrence. What state are we living in? What country are we living in?

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: It is shameful, Mr Davis. But it is symbolic of how this government has operated: turn a blind eye, say nothing, say these nice words on a piece of paper and everyone will think it is okay and will believe us. Well, Victorians have woken up. They are sick of it. They are sick of the deceit, the lies, the cons and the buying of votes. Remember the Commonwealth Games? All a con – they just lied to Victorians. They said they would do it; they never were going to do it. Like the PET scanners: they were going to deliver PET scanners around regional Victoria – they could not do it. They went out there and said they were going to deliver them, but they could never deliver these things because they did not understand that you have got to have nuclear medicine operations in there to deliver them.

This is a government that has got no clue about how to deliver services. I was listening to Ms Watt talking about our first-class healthcare system. This is no reflection on the doctors, nurses and others – the physios, the radiographers and all of those people that work right across our health system and make it tick – but let us not forget that at Mildura hospital, which the government runs, 150 Victorians' referrals were left in a box.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Health workforce

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (1501) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation has had 59 meetings regarding enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations with the Department of Health in the last 13 months. Why has the government failed to put a single offer on the table for these hardworking doctors who do so much within our hospitals?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:00): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. At the outset can I acknowledge the incredible work that our doctors, junior doctors, doctors in training, medical officers and specialists do right across the health system. I certainly want to acknowledge that the bargaining that is underway at the moment is an important process. I want to respect that process and not cut across that in the chamber during question time, but I do note that there have been a number of meetings with the union and the VHIA and other representatives where we have been seeking to, in good faith, come to an agreement that everybody is comfortable with. Those good faith negotiations are continuing. I certainly, as I have said in the chamber before, respect the rights of the members of the AMA and ASMOF to collectively bargain. On our side of the chamber, those are important principles, and I am not going to cut across those discussions here except to say that I am very much looking forward to these negotiations concluding in a satisfactory way for all parties.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): Minister, thank you for that response. These doctors are so frustrated with what has gone on through this negotiation and bargaining process, and they feel incredibly let down by the disingenuous way in which the government has handled it. Last week, on 15 September, there was planned a 24-hour strike by doctors, and that had been in the planning for three weeks, but it was called off after the government advised it did not believe hospitals

could ensure patient safety with the rostering of skeleton staff during the strike period. Do you have the same concerns about patient safety when hospitals will have skeleton staff rostered for tomorrow's grand final eve public holiday?

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure how that relates to the substantive, but I will call the minister.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:03): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. In terms of the industrial action that she refers to, ASMOF and the AMA withdrew their 24-hour action that was due to commence last week. There is always an expectation, regardless of whether it is in respect to protected industrial action or any other event, that safe patient staffing levels are in place across our health system. I do want to acknowledge that there has been very good and constructive cooperation on the ground between union representatives and health services when it comes to industrial action. But I do not make any apology for wanting to be assured, as our patients across the state would want to be assured, that safety is never compromised.

Ambulance Victoria

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:04): (1502) My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. Minister, more than 800 people completed paramedicine degrees in Victoria last year. Ambulance Victoria does not employ most of them. Its first intake this financial year put 53 people on the road – 48 graduates and five already qualified paramedics. You have said that paramedics are busier than ever and that the on-road workforce must keep growing to meet demand. The government cites hundreds of recruits and a workforce increased by half as evidence that it is meeting this demand, so my question is: have the 53 paramedics in this recent intake fixed the staffing issues related to ambulance services, or is that simply all the government is prepared to pay for?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:04): I thank Mrs Deeming for her question. I do not accept the premise of the question, however, and I do want to correct the record on a number of key facts. As the Labor government since 2014, we have invested more than \$2 billion into our ambulance services in terms of additional funding, and over that period of time we have actually increased the workforce by 53 per cent. We currently have over 5600 on-road staff, 5677 to be exact, and according to the latest ROGS data, Victoria has more qualified ambulance officers than any other state or territory in the nation. I do want to thank those paramedics and MICAs that are on the road. They do an incredible job. They are also of course with Australia's first paramedic practitioner roles out on the road, supporting Victorians with emergency care.

In terms of the relationship between our on-road crews and demand, there are a few things to say about that. We are still seeing record demand for our ambulance services across the state. I know that it has been particularly challenging in the last few weeks with a very late influenza A spike, and so there have been record call-outs. Again, we have a number of important programs in place to try to alleviate that pressure on the system, and as part of this year's budget we have built on our investments, with an additional \$50.7 million, which is supporting the secondary triage system. So that is really about when calls are coming in to 000, having ambulance paramedics on the phone, assessing whether or not there are options for alternative and safe care for those calls, and that has actually been seeing some pretty amazing results.

We are also continuing to invest in dispatch and delivery, as I have said, and also making sure that we are improving bed flow when people are arriving by ambulance at our emergency departments. So that additional investment is about dealing with some of the demand pressures which are not specifically related to how many ambos are on the road. It is more about the relationship between the numbers of calls coming through and our EDs across the system. I just want to acknowledge the extraordinary work that our ambos are doing at the moment, in a circumstance where there is record demand, and we will keep backing them in.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:08): So demand is at a record high, but in a single quarter last year Ambulance Victoria attended about 100,000 code 1 cases and is only clearing about two-thirds of those within 15 minutes. And in the media the government's answer has been recruitment statements – 294 paramedics last year, 53 in the first intake this year – but it will not say how long the queue for paramedic employment is behind those numbers. If demand for services is as high as the government says, why is the government not providing enough funding to adequately employ the necessary number of frontline workers to put an end to these issues?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:08): I thank Mrs Deeming for her supplementary question. As I said, it is not one single factor that is contributing to the complexity and the demand pressures across the system at the moment. I have gone to the significant increases in the workforce that our government has provided investment for, and we will continue to make sure that we back our paramedics. But it is also about finding alternative care and safe care pathways for those people ringing 000 who may not need an emergency response. As well as what I have already gone through in my substantive answer, I would point out that the virtual emergency departments and Nurse-on-Call are other ways in which we are diverting people who may not need an emergency response so that the sickest Victorians can get access to ambulance care where necessary.

Health workforce

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): (1503) My question is again to the Minister for Health. Minister, 6400 nurses will graduate this year. Can you confirm how many graduates have been offered a placement for 2027?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:10): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Of course our government is incredibly proud – again. When we are talking about investing in healthcare workers, since coming to office we have employed more than 17,000 nurses, since 2014, which is all about making sure that patients in our hospital services and our healthcare services are getting world-class care. I would point you to the significant reforms around nurse-to-patient ratios and midwife-to-patient ratios that our government has legislated and built on since coming to government. In terms of our graduate nurse numbers, there is a process that is gone through every year with the department and also when the tertiary placement numbers are provided. That is a process that is actually underway now. I am not in a position to give exact numbers to Ms Crozier on the numbers that have been offered, because as she knows, there is a –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I would ask you to ask the minister to come back. Can she confirm how many graduates have been offered a placement? I think I just heard the minister say she does not know.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was responsive to the question.

Ingrid STITT: I did not say that I could not give the numbers. I said the process was still underway. What I can say is that there has been funding provided in this year's budget for an additional 250 nurse and midwifery graduates in the transition-to-practice phase of their careers. There is a process every year that we go through, and that work is being undertaken currently by the department.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): Minister, given fewer than 3000 of the 6400 nurse graduates have been offered a placement in 2027, what advice have you received regarding –

Ingrid Stitt: On a point of order, President, my apologies, I just did not catch the beginning of Ms Crozier's supplementary.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, could you restart, please?

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, given fewer than 3000 of the 6400 nurse graduates have been offered a placement in 2027, what advice have you received regarding the projected shortfalls in the nursing workforce post 2028?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:13): Ms Crozier has asked me a question and asserted numbers. I have already indicated the process is still underway, so there is no final number that she is able to point to. We are going through the process as we normally do each year with the intake of our nurse graduates –

Members interjecting.

Ingrid STITT: As I was saying, we have invested in this year's budget again, and 17,000 additional nurses in the system –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I know the minister wants to avoid this question, but it is very specific: what advice have you received regarding the projected shortfalls in the nursing workforce post 2028? I would ask you to bring the minister back to responding to that very specific question.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was responsive to the question.

Ingrid STITT: Quite to the contrary – Ms Crozier asserts I do not want to talk about nurses – I always want to talk about nurses, because they are the backbone of the health system. We are proud to have employed more than 17,000 additional nurses since 2014, and we are going to continue to back in their incredible work.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, it is a very specific question, and I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to this: what are the projected shortfalls in the nursing workforce post 2028? She went nowhere near it, President. She fluffed around. She bumbled around. She went nowhere near it.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was responsive. In the start of her answer, she was responsive to the question. We have 7 seconds left. I am not sure if we will get to the point, Ms Crozier, where you are satisfied with the answer. So maybe, as a pre-emptive strike, I am happy to review the answers and come back to the house.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): I move:

That the minister's responses be taken into consideration.

Motion agreed to.

Dingo protection

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:16): (1504) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Last year's *Abundance of Dingoes in Victoria* report was released today. This report looks at current dingo population estimates based on statewide camera trap surveys completed across public land between 2021 and 2025. It found the wilkerr dingoes of the Big Desert had an estimate of 122 in 2025, reconfirming their risk of extinction. In March 2024 the government endorsed three more years of the order in council that allows dingoes to be killed in some of the cruellest of ways. The government has one month left to truly protect our native dingoes. The Liberals and the Nationals have made it clear that they plan to reinstate killing everywhere in the state. When will a decision be made on whether the order in council that serves as an eradication program for this misunderstood native species is going to be renewed or not?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:17): Thank you, Ms Purcell, for your question. I am happy to provide you some advice that I have in

relation to dingoes. You have talked about the release of the report in relation to numbers. Importantly, these numbers confirm that the dingo population in north-west Victoria remains at risk of extinction. In eastern Victoria the estimated population is much larger. I know you are familiar with these stats. In relation to the unprotection order and the timing, on 1 October 2024 a new dingo unprotection order came into effect. The order continues to permit the control of dingoes on private and public land in eastern Victoria until 1 July 2028. The unprotection order was discontinued in north-west Victoria, where dingoes are now protected on public and private land as the dingo population is at risk of extinction, which as you are aware was confirmed in the data in the report. The current dingo unprotection order remains in place until 1 January 2028 in eastern Victoria, as we said. It permits control just in that area. We will of course continue to balance conservation needs with needs for farmers to protect livestock, informed by monitoring evidence and engagement with stakeholders and experts. So the work continues.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:18): Thank you, Minister. The Barengi Gadjin Land Council strongly advocates for the protection of the wilkerr dingo populations, with the people of the Wotjobaluk nations having strong cultural and spiritual connections to the populations for thousands of years. In a statement, they have warned:

Don't wait until it is too late and they disappear through your neglect.

Of course, you have just touched on the ways in which this has been acknowledged by removing lethal control on public land in the north-west region and providing funding for some nonlethal options. But the numbers in this report show that by the time the government properly acts on wilkerr dingoes specifically, they could actually be extinct. What is the government's plan to conserve and strengthen the genetics of the wilkerr dingo population into the future?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:19): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question specifically in relation to the wilkerr dingo. We are taking a precautionary approach to protecting the north-west dingo population. It remains at risk of extinction. People are acutely aware of that. As I said, dingoes are now protected on both public and private land in north-west Victoria. In relation to other matters, the conservation regulator will only consider lethal control through an authority to control wildlife in extraordinary circumstances, such as human safety concerns or extreme and escalating livestock impacts where all nonlethal measures have been exhausted. We are also investing in ongoing monitoring. The dingo unprotection order support package funded the design of a statewide dingo-monitoring program. DEECA has allocated funding from the 26 January bushfire recovery support package for additional camera surveys in the Big Desert and Wyperfeld National Park later in 2026, so results in relation to that are due next year. The latest Arthur Rylah Institute report reinforces why the protection is important. 122 dingoes is the estimate – *(Time expired)*

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:20): I move, by leave:

That I provide a ministers statement regarding the important lived-experience child protection ministerial youth advisory group, who we are privileged to have in the gallery with us today.

Leave refused.

Electricity infrastructure

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:21): (1505) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. The Premier has promised no compulsory acquisition for the Western Renewables Link while the cost assessment is underway. When one landowner in Springbank asked for more time, given the complexity and volume of the paperwork involved, AusNet offered an extension to 31 December only if they first sign a land access consent form by 7 October, allowing AusNet onto their property to survey land. Minister, the Premier's promise is worthless if AusNet can simply

pressure and indeed blackmail landholders into consenting to land access. Will you order AusNet to withdraw this deadline today?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:22): Mrs McArthur, I am very happy to take some information from you, follow that up and provide you with a detailed response in relation to conversations that I am happy to have with relevant stakeholders.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:22): Thank you, Minister. Minister, will you guarantee that landowners who decline to sign a land access consent form by 7 October will not be disadvantaged in any future negotiation, compensation or acquisition process for this project?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:22): Mrs McArthur, I think it would be worthwhile my taking you through the process step by step, because you are conflating acquisition with access in the way that you have framed both your substantive question and your supplementary question. I agree with ensuring that everybody knows all of the steps and all of the deadlines and has all of that information available. I am just a little concerned, by the structure of your question, that you do not have the exact steps in your mind, and I think that is very important, because I want people to have the information. I want people to have the opportunity and the time to consider what options they have got. As I have said, I am very happy to take you through every step. I have taken other members of Parliament through all of the steps, and I am more than happy to do the same with you.

Mildura Base Public Hospital

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:23): (1506) My question is for the Minister for Health. The government has already undertaken significant planning for health services in Mildura and the northern Mallee, yet our region is still waiting for a clear, long-term commitment on the Mildura Base Public Hospital. Before the state election, will the minister clearly state whether the government will fund a new or substantially redeveloped Mildura Base Public Hospital and provide the proposed scope, budget and delivery timetable?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:24): I thank Ms Tyrrell for her question and for her advocacy for the people of northern Victoria. I am very proud of the fact that our government has been investing significant capital and –

David Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, Ms Tyrrell is not interjecting. It is her question. She wants to hear the answer.

Ingrid STITT: As I was saying, I am very proud of the fact that our government has invested significantly, both in terms of funding directly for our health services for the provision of health care but also in the area of health infrastructure, where we have actually invested, since coming to government, over \$15 billion in health infrastructure funding right across the state. We are always looking at what the future needs are of the community, including in regional Victoria, and the department and the infrastructure delivery authority do careful work, which is also of course based on population data and health service needs across particular regions. That work is ongoing. I have not got any announcements to make today, but I am sure that Ms Tyrrell will continue her advocacy. Should we be re-elected in November, we will continue the record investment in health infrastructure. We have built 12 new hospitals. We have significantly invested right across community health as well as mental health and hospitals, and we will continue that commitment to the Victorian community.

Bushfire preparedness

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:26): (1507) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The parliamentary inquiry into the 2026 summer fires called for urgent attention to areas of extreme fuel risk before the next fire season – this fire season. Minister, with the seasonal bushfire outlook warning of a heightened bushfire risk across large parts of Victoria this spring, what additional fuel reduction and bushfire mitigation measures has your department undertaken to better protect Victorian communities?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:27): I thank Ms Bath for her question. As you have indicated – briefings can be made available in relation to the elevated bushfire season – forecasts are indicating a more severe fire season due to prolonged dry conditions and above-average temperatures. Everybody is, I think, now aware of the El Niño situations that we are anticipating. It is a concerning season that is ahead of us. DEECA is taking steps to strengthen its preparedness ahead of the fire season, wanting to detect fires earlier and respond faster and making sure that we are in a position to maintain operational capacity during prolonged and above-average conditions for this fire season. There are currently arrangements being made so far by FFMVic. Aviation resources – we have brought them forward so that things can start earlier this year. That was an agreement recently through SEMPC and our budget committee to make sure that we –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, I am listening intently to the minister. The minister is speaking quietly, but I cannot hear because of the babble in the back row. I appreciate the work you are doing, but I cannot hear because of the back row.

The PRESIDENT: The minister has indicated that she is a bit impaired in her voice. It was hard to hear. If we could listen to the minister in silence, it would be appreciated.

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry, Ms Bath. I was going through the fact that personnel and aviation resources have been facilitated to be earlier this year, so funding has been brought forward in anticipation of an earlier start. In relation to fuel management, as of 17 September FFMVic has led the delivery of fuel management treatments across 3173 hectares this financial year, including planned burns and non-planned burns, and some of that is continuing subject to conditions. Seasonal weather did reduce availability for burn activity, unfortunately, in autumn. Landscape dryness prevented safe conditions for early planned burning. Rain and subsequent drying by mid-April allowed FFMVic to have a late season window to deliver the majority of the burn program. I will continue to be updated on this. We have got some scheduled works for November hopefully, including through this month. I am very happy to provide you with some of those activities. As I said, we are concerned about an early start, and we have therefore made our resources available.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:30): Thank you, Minister. My understanding, which I received from your information, is FFMV has so far done 3100 hectares of fuel reduction. Minister, the latest publicly available data says that around 110 hectares were treated across Victoria's 8 million hectares of public land, and that data, which is publicly available, is for 2024–25. Clearly 3100 is well down on that, so I need you to check that and see what is the total. That is about 1 per cent on last year's average. Government has failed to do this homework. It has failed to do the work on the ground. The bushfires royal commission said a 5 per cent rolling target. Why should regional Victorians have any confidence that bushfire mitigation is keeping pace with the risks that exist today, ahead of the bushfire season?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: There was a point of order earlier that we could not hear the minister. From all sides of the chamber, let us listen to the minister.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:31): I thank Ms Bath. Ms Bath, I am happy to get you as much detail as I can. You referred to the 2024–25 report. In 2025–26 FFMVic led the delivery of fuel management treatments across 73,301 hectares. And coming back to your earlier question around preparedness and some of the information I am able to provide you, I can confirm that there will be the attestation briefing for all members of Parliament, as is the annual thing, in October. Anything that you would like in advance of that, please let me know, and I will make sure it is available.

Data centres

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:32): (1508) My question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, this week the Victorian Labor government announced a new rule for a 150-metre separation zone between data centre buildings and homes. Data centres operate 24/7, and the potential health impacts of living near these facilities remain under-researched. Noise and air pollution are significant public health concerns, with exposure associated with increasing rates of respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions and cancer risk. Minister, has your department undertaken any modelling or health assessment to determine whether 150 metres is sufficient to protect the health of these residents and where these hyperscale data centres are being built?

Ingrid Stitt: I will just seek your guidance, President, because whilst Ms Gray-Barberio has framed her question around health, these are not policy matters that I have responsibility for as the Minister for Health. This question should be directed to the minister for AI and economic growth.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Gray-Barberio, are you happy to direct it to the Minister for AI?

Anasina Gray-Barberio: I have a supplementary that I would like to ask the minister.

The PRESIDENT: The issue is that the minister can answer now, 'It's not my responsibility,' and therefore your question and your secondary question would be moot. If you do direct it to the AI minister, it will be passed on. But it is nearly impossible to ask a supplementary to an answer that says 'It's not my responsibility' under the standing orders.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Can I rephrase my question?

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO: Minister, are you confirming you have had no input as health minister on these proposed data centres, given their health-related impacts?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:34): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her question. What I can say is that as a cabinet minister I have been involved in discussions about this policy matter.

Questions on notice

Answers

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:34): President, I notice in the Assembly the Speaker has taken an active role in ensuring that ministers answer outstanding questions on notice. There are many, many questions, some going back to 20 December 2022. I wonder whether the Leader of the Government would be prepared to give a commitment that questions will be answered, and whether you might seek to take an active role, as the Speaker has in the Assembly, to ensure that outstanding questions on notice are answered before the end of the Parliament.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, you and I over the years have had this conversation. We really want to respect and make sure there is an independence between both chambers, and I am determined to keep that. There may be certain activities that happen in the Assembly that we would not want to –

David Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: I cannot remember the last conversation we had where you and I thought they were doing something good. I think I will just leave my response at that.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:36): I have several unanswered questions, so if I could just work with the minister to get them addressed.

The PRESIDENT: Is there any particular minister, or is it a number?

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: There are half-a-dozen numbers here.

The PRESIDENT: Is there any particular minister that they were directed to?

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: It would be numerous.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Symes has indicated that if you pass that on, she will do that.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:37): I also have several unanswered questions, in fact 25 unanswered questions, spanning about two or three years. I have got a list. I am happy to give it to the Leader of the Government too.

The PRESIDENT: Is there a main minister that you –

Evan MULHOLLAND: There are lots of minister: the Minister for Education, the Minister for Environment, the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and the Minister for Police.

The PRESIDENT: Okay. Mr Erdogan, can you make a commitment to take that list?

Enver Erdogan: Yes. Thank you, Mr Mulholland.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:37): I also rise to remind the house that I have at least 25 unanswered questions, also to a variety of portfolios, from police to emergency services, education and health, and would like to have all of those responded to as well, please.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Erdogan, you represent police, so could you make a commitment to Mrs Hermans that you will take her list and follow up.

Enver Erdogan: Yes. Thank you, Mrs Hermans.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:38): I too have numerous questions unanswered – in fact 31, to be precise. They start with the Minister for Emergency Services, and they probably go through the full cocktail of ministers that have not answered questions. Where would you like me to land them?

The PRESIDENT: Who represents the minister for cocktails?

Enver Erdogan interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Erdogan has committed to it.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:38): I have 63 outstanding, over many, many, many months, and the majority of them are to the Minister for Environment but not all. I will make sure that they resend them to the Minister for Environment.

Jaclyn Symes: I am more than happy to have a look at that. But if anybody sees what I do in my chamber duty time, I sign questions on notice, and since becoming the Minister for Environment I have signed probably 400 QONs. So I just want to counter with: yes, we are more than happy to have a look at the questions you have raised, but there are hundreds of responses that go back.

The PRESIDENT: There is an indication that maybe they are on the way.

David Davis: For the record, there are 217 outstanding that I see there.

Lee Tarlamis: On a point of order, President, for the record, I do not have any unanswered.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:40): I just wanted to join in. I have got 19 unanswered questions for a variety of ministers.

The PRESIDENT: Is there a particular one you would like to pick on? I reckon you should hand your list to Minister Blandthorn.

Lizzie Blandthorn: I am happy to follow that up for you, Dr Mansfield.

Constituency questions

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:41): (2654) My constituency question is for the Minister for Children. The Labor government's landmark Best Start, Best Life reforms are delivering life-changing benefits for regional families across Eastern Victoria by expanding access to free kindergarten, rolling out additional hours of free four-year-old kinder and investing in modern early childhood infrastructure. In the South Gippsland shire, our local communities are seeing the direct benefit of these investments, including state-funded projects like the new government-owned Meeniyah Early Learning Centre, which I attended with the minister, and the Leongatha Early Learning Centre, alongside expanding and supporting services across Korumburra, Foster and Mirboo North – and more to come. Minister, could you please provide an update on how the Best Start, Best Life infrastructure, investment and workforce programs are currently supporting local families and early childhood educators across the South Gippsland Shire Council area? Free three- and four-year-old kinder changes lives. It is an investment in an entire generation. It gets parents back into the workforce and supports our incredible early educators. We cannot have the Liberals making cuts to three- and four-year-old kinder and early education.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:42): (2655) My question is to the Minister for Environment. Eastern Victorian Forest Fire Management Victoria contractors have told me that they are absorbing significant increases in diesel costs to continue delivering critical fuel reduction and bushfire preparedness works. With bushfire season fast approaching, these contractors play a vital role in helping Victorian communities remain safe, and yet they know that there is no clear mechanism for reviewing the rates when fuel costs rise sharply. I sent a letter to the former Minister for Environment back in April asking this very question. There is too much cost impost, and they are struggling then to be viable. My question to the minister is: will she outline steps as to how the government is making sure that these cost imposts are not undermining the viability of these contractors and therefore compromising bushfire preparedness capability?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:43): (2656) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. I was recently contacted by some constituents in Castlemaine about the lack of safe, reliable and accessible public transport options for students commuting to and from Castlemaine Secondary College. The local bus stop is about a kilometre from the school and runs to town – but at 2:40 pm despite school finishing at 3:15. Currently, existing bus routes do not adequately service all key residential pockets of the town during peak school travel hours, leaving many students without a viable public transport option and forcing families to rely heavily on private car transport. Students in Castlemaine deserve a service which fits the school timetable and allows students to get to and from town, the train station, work, home and extracurricular activities. Will the minister commit to introducing a new, dedicated bus route in Castlemaine that specifically aligns with the school's operating hours?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (12:44): (2657) My constituency question is for the minister for transport. Over the weekend, hundreds of residents and local traders in my electorate of Western Metro Region rallied at the Anderson Street rail crossing in Yarraville, calling for a pause to the Anderson Street level crossing removal project. Their concerns centre on the lack of meaningful community consultation on whether the current plan appropriately addresses the needs of local businesses and residents. Can the minister please update my constituents on whether the Carroll Labor government will consider pausing the project, reassessing community needs and reviewing the current design?

Western Metropolitan Region

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:45): (2658) My question is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence or police or the Attorney-General – I am not sure. We know that police must identify a predominant aggressor when they attend a family violence incident, and that statistically that is likely to be the male. But a father who is wrongly identified can face interim intervention orders restricting contact with his children, denying those children a good parent until the mistake is rectified. That initial misidentification can also flow into police and service records, impacting every other area of his life. Recent legislation requiring police and courts to consider the possibility of misidentification and allowing requests for review are sadly ineffective because the published review process states no deadline and correcting one record may leave others untouched. My constituent asks: will the minister please set a clear timeframe for reviewing a disputed identification and establish a coordinated process to correct the resulting orders, records and referrals when a mistake is confirmed?

The PRESIDENT: We will have a look at that and pick one of those ministers. Is that okay?

Moira Deeming: Yes, thank you.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:46): (2659) Gangland-style shootings, break and enters, car chases through suburban streets clipping every car in the street along the way, mafia and gang crime and hit-and-runs: it is not the next season of *Underbelly*, it is the electorate of Greenvale. Minister, my community in Greenvale are rightly shocked at the spiralling crime crisis that has happened under this government's watch. This culminated in a gangland-style attempted execution on Galileo Place in Greenvale, where six shots were fired before a getaway driver sped off, with the wannabe hitman still at large. My community have a right to feel safe in their homes and businesses, but under this government it now seems like a new season of *Underbelly* is ready to be filmed, with a crime occurring every 23 minutes in the City of Hume. I ask the minister to restore the 24-hour status of Craigieburn police station and deploy police resources to keep my community safe.

The PRESIDENT: Are we putting that to the Minister for Police?

Evan Mulholland: Yes.

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:47): (2660) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Mental Health, and my constituents ask: will the minister increase the funding for senior male mental health and men's sheds? Men's sheds have filled a perilous gap in the physical and mental health of men, especially in regional areas. In many cases men's days spent in the men's shed may be their only outlet for socialising and creativity. Men's sheds do amazing work in their communities. Some take care of the local primary school gardens, others restore bikes and furniture for underprivileged families. Almost all are keen to share their wealth of knowledge with young people who may not have someone to teach them. Men's sheds are a vital part of the community. My constituent Bill explained to me that there has been an explosion in the number of men's sheds in

Northern Victoria but a proportionate decrease in funding. Minister, will you increase the funding for senior male mental health and men's sheds?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (2661) It has been a very, very bad week for crime in my electorate. In Box Hill South we had a firebombing of a car yesterday. We had a home invasion with four youths armed with machetes breaking in in Box Hill North. Last week we had a 56-year-old stabbed by a group of youths in Box Hill Gardens. On Sunday we had two year 12 students from Box Hill High School stabbed at a bus stop in Box Hill North, and overnight in Bundoora we had the firebombing of a store. We had the firebombing of a Scout hall. We had a tractor used to ram through a cafe. You have been the police minister for long enough. You could have done something about this. Either prove you are not a lame-duck minister or make way for someone who will do something about it.

The PRESIDENT: We will have a look at that when we send that on.

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:49): (2662) My constituency question is for the Minister for Disability. A constituent in Lara has had to pull their daughter, who has autism, out of primary school due to the school being under-resourced and over capacity. They are now homeschooling her, which is causing financial stress for the family. It is not the first time my office has heard from a family regarding removing their child from a public school due to the school being inadequately resourced to support the needs of neurodiverse children. Especially in light of the recent cuts to the NDIS, will you commit to ensuring adequate funding for public schools in Lara to ensure students who have ADHD or autism have the support they need?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:50): (2663) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. The Northern Victoria Region covers nearly half of the state, and many local communities have felt the impact of natural disasters like floods and fires. As a member of the parliamentary inquiry into the Victorian floods of 2022, I want to highlight recommendation 73, which asked the government to report back to Parliament on progress made in implementing the recommendations. I ask the minister to provide an update, as many communities, like Rochester, have been left to wonder what has changed, and also respond to the committee inquiry report into the 2026 summer fires before the end of this parliamentary term. I again express concern at the proposed 50–50 cost-sharing Commonwealth disaster management reforms, and I note Gannawarra shire's submission seeking assurances that rural and regional communities are not disadvantaged by the proposed changes to the nation's disaster recovery arrangements. At times of natural disaster, regional communities cannot do it alone. We need community-enabled recovery, and that relies upon government support.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2664) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Minister, the Merri Creek Trail is a much-loved trail used frequently by Northern Metro constituents. However, in the last decade it has been a place where incidents of violence against women are on the rise. Women are being harassed, being stalked and experiencing indecent exposure. An audit was led by Monash University to improve safety infrastructure. However, Friends of Merri Creek and Co-Exist Australia say this is complicated to implement due to the ecological reserve of the area. I ask on behalf of my constituents: Minister, will you commit to ensuring safety infrastructure is prioritised along the Merri Creek Trail?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:52): (2665) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public Transport, and it asks: will the minister commit to a funded regular program of maintenance

and restoration of the Ballarat railway station? This magnificent 1860s heritage building is one of Ballarat's most important landmarks, but it is fast turning into a monumental embarrassment. Like much of our publicly owned infrastructure, it has crumbling render, peeling paint, missing timber mouldings, graffiti and deteriorating timber around the signal box. Meanwhile Labor has spent \$52 million on a pedestrian overpass and lifts at the station. The member for Wendouree is happy to celebrate a project that is vastly overpriced, but where was she when the heritage station needed someone to fight for its restoration.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (2666) My constituents continue to fight against this Labor government's inappropriate development plans, which are dodgy. They bypass local council and ignore democratic community consultation processes, and the rezoning of the Rosedale golf course is one of those. It would destroy vital green space, and locals are calling for the rezoning to stop. The Kingswood golf course plans would allow properties to be built on flood plains without essential infrastructure, and the community is advocating for the number of properties to be at least halved. For years I have stood with the locals against Labor's dodgy plans. While our sitting days are coming to an end for the term, their fight for justice is not, and I will continue to stand alongside them in their efforts. Minister for Planning, when will you stop the rezoning of the Rosedale golf course and adhere to all the findings of the committee in reference to Kingswood golf course and finally engage in genuine community consultation when making development plans?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:54): (2667) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister improve safety on Yan Yean Road during stage 2 works by installing more lighting? The Liberal candidate for Yan Yean Amanda Dow has been meeting with local residents and has heard concerns about safety on Yan Yean Road. During construction work for stage 2 of the road upgrade lanes are being closed, narrowed and realigned. There is a lack of lighting along the stretch of road near the Yarrambat Golf Club and Ironbark Road, and in the dark it is hard for drivers to see the new lane alignments and temporary line markings. The drastic reconfiguration of the road is catching out motorists, and there have been several accidents on the road in recent times. I urge the minister to install temporary lighting along Yan Yean Road to improve safety while stage 2 works continue.

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (2668) Rochelle Halstead, Jess Wilson and the Liberals will invest \$350 million into delivering stages 2 and 3 of the Wonthaggi Hospital redevelopment. This will add an additional 64 inpatient beds across the two new wards; a new birthing, labour and delivery complex; an outpatient clinic supporting services, including dialysis and chemo; refurbishing the allied health treatment; and completing the radiology precinct. This is because Labor promised this in 2022 and failed to deliver it, leaving a lot of people vulnerable. Here is a headline: 'Two months out from the November 2022 state election, former Premier Daniel Andrews pulled off a masterstroke in the campaign for the highly marginal electorate of Bass that almost certainly won Labor the seat.' Yet they did not deliver it. My question for the Minister for Health is: why didn't you deliver on this promise?

Sitting suspended 12:56 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted pursuant to resolution of Council of 22 September.

*Members***Nick McGowan***Valedictory statement*

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): In my maiden speech in this place some 1323 days ago I said, 'I do not expect nor hope that my time here is long.' Of course by that I did not mean life, I meant the Parliament. I have always understood intuitively the path I would tread. What I could not know was the unexpected course of events that would lead me to this point. My fate would be to fill a void I had not created, both for my party but more importantly for my community. The decision I made some three years ago was made at a different time, in different circumstances, but with the same determination. I am leaving this place to chase another: the lower house seat of Ringwood. This is not a goodbye built on certainty, it is a goodbye built on choice – mine. The driver for the change? Well, that is simple: I love what I have in the community I serve, and I am not prepared to hand it over to anyone else. It, and they, are my bucket filler. They are the reason for the joy in this job. They – every local primary school, community organisation and citizen – make this job worthwhile and eclipse the worst days and weeks when politics and tribalism seem senseless, albeit entirely necessary. Such is the condition of mankind. If it does not work, if Ringwood says, 'No, thanks,' I will still say the same thing I am saying now: it was worth the walk to the door, worth the knock, worth the risk of a no, because the alternative of staying somewhere safe out of fear of the unknown was never really who I was built to be. It was not where I have come from.

I was born in Airlie, Ivanhoe, in 1975. A second son, a quiet arrival to Barry William McGowan and Linda May Webb, kid brother to Christian, who came first and, I like to think, broke our parents in for the both of us. My earliest memories, however, are not of the sprawling east where I grew up – of Wheelers Hill, Vermont, Ivanhoe, Greensborough, Templestowe and so many more places – but of Ballarat, a weatherboard house on Queen Street North, still standing by the railway line fence, still facing the old Ballarat East Primary School across the road, and me still bearing the scar on my stomach I acquired as a child when I caught my young torso on a barbed wire fence.

My father's people came from grief before they came from anywhere else. His grandmother died when her boy, my grandfather, was only six. His own father, an Australian of Irish descent, proved fonder of the bottle than the boy: he walked away and never looked back. Our family's Irish threads run thin: a name, an affinity for the bottle, a mystery where the history should be. On my grandmother's side, the thread holds firm. Constantine Drab, who fled pre-World War I Poland under Russian rule, laid carpets for a living in the sprawling eastern suburbs of Melbourne and married Phyllis Newman in 1923. Theirs is the quintessential settler story. Some men and women vanish, some stay. Regardless, we are built from both.

My mother's people were English working class from London. Her father, Ernest Henry Webb, left school at 14 and joined the British Army as an apprentice fitter. During World War II Ernest served with the British Expeditionary Force and the 3rd King's Own Hussars. He was at Dunkirk, swimming cable lines out to the boats during the British evacuation through open gunfire, 400 metres out and 400 metres back again and again because, in his words spoken decades later, 'When you are 19, you think you are invincible.' He lay lines from the beach to the boats for those who could not swim safely. Ernest recalled a vivid memory of watching a German Stuka raid during the evacuation. He recalled the scene in a news article as follows: 'I was propped up on a dune, smoking a cigarette and without a care in the world.' Ernest rarely spoke of war, though he shared that on one occasion he and a fellow soldier had helped save two German pilots who had been captured by Belgian soldiers. He detailed how 'two Belgians with pistols were about to blow their heads off'. He said:

Myself and another man, who was also determined not to stand by and see murder done, bought our rifles up and stuck them in the ... ribs. They changed their minds soon enough.

Later in the war, when Ernest himself was captured, two German marines would intervene as Japanese guards viciously beat him. He felt as though the favour was returned. Ernest fought on through Egypt, was later captured at Java and endured years in the Batu Lintang camp in Borneo, where two of every three British soldiers never came home. He did.

Prior to his capture, 145 men in his unit, himself included, stood in a circle in Java on 6 March 1942 and voted to keep fighting rather than surrender so that Australia might be bought a little more time, even amidst the rapidly deteriorating military situation and an imminent Dutch surrender. Of those 145 men, only 50 lived to see peace. He was one of the 50. Ernest would later reflect:

Looking back now I realise that every one of those men was voting for a death in action or the horrors of captivity.

I would not be standing here at all if not for that circle, that vote, that terrible arithmetic of courage. Fittingly, Ernest's camp was liberated by the 9th Australian division on 11 September 1945. Just prior to this, a Japanese order had directed that every prisoner of war at the camp was to be killed on 15 September.

His wife, my grandmother May, grew up in the quiet Nottinghamshire village of Retford. They married at war's end, had my mother in 1946 and her sister in 1949, and crossed the world on the SS *Ormonde* – 42 days at sea, chasing a promise. But the marriage that survived the ocean did not survive the peace. May died in 1972, worn thin by illness and by a husband who left her with little more than his name. My mother was 25.

It is not hard, then, to see where my mother's steel was forged, nor how some of it was handed down to my brother and me. My parents separated when I was four, and from then on she raised us on her own – warehouse shifts, community child care, clerical work, whatever it took to keep her two boys fed and moving forward. Money, or the lack thereof, was a constant grievance in our house, though I never seemed to do without much. In truth, what I needed most never needed to be bought. We shifted rentals frequently – 13 times before I was 15; I have long since lost count – which meant we never quite belonged to one street, but we came to know a great many. I consider myself to have been lucky. I have always thought that was its own kind of schooling – in adapting, in embracing change, in listening and in finding common ground between people who did not start in the same place or possess the same wealth.

It was around those kitchen tables where my politics were quietly born, not from ideology but from necessity and love. Every house we left still lives in me, not in the walls but in who I learned to be there. It is a matter of pride that only recently, through my eldest son's interest in family history, that I discovered since being in this place, a place adorned with riches of the gold rush, that on my father's side sits a family from Tipperary – farm servants Cornelius Ryan and Bridget Leonard, who arrived here in 1841, into an Australia still becoming acquainted with its new name. Their daughter Johanna married Thomas Kennedy in 1851. Their child, my great-great-grandmother Mary Ethel, was born on the Eureka goldfields – born, as her obituary in the *Advocate* rather beautifully put it, 'in a tent on the gold diggings'. Her father Thomas stood, it is recorded somewhere, among the mayhem at the Eureka Stockade in 1854. So somewhere, in whatever stubbornness I carry, there may be a little of that too, a family that has more than once chosen to stand its ground before choosing to move on.

My interest in politics was a sickness I acquired early – grade 5 to be exact. I cared deeply about our natural world, wondered and worried that there may not be an Amazon left, no rhinos and no elephants. I fought against testing on animals for cosmetic consumables and was frustrated by the persistent nuclear testing in the South Pacific by the pesky French. I was also appalled to live in a world where apartheid could find any harbour, much less a home. These passions and my mother's intolerance for injustice and bigotry of any kind caused me to think of others more than myself, so I put my hand up for school council.

I joined the Liberal Party on 31 July 1991. I made new friends, found my flock, cold-called a 16-year-old Matthew Guy and asked him to vote for me if I rolled the branch president. We had the numbers. I became, while still a student at La Trobe, the first Liberal ever elected to that university's council. I also lost a tilt at becoming a shire councillor not long after. Losing, it turns out, was good practice for a life spent, well, losing. I finished an arts degree at Deakin, during which I flipped burgers at McDonald's, and by 20 I was myself a junior burger in the Victorian Premier's office, just old enough to understand it was an important moment and apprenticeship while still young enough to genuinely believe that the press secretary celebrating her 30th birthday had the best of her life behind her, particularly at that ripe old age. Oh, how perspective is everything.

Then the world called, as it has a habit of doing to the restless. I went to London in 1997, writing and working for Westminster council, the Disability Rights Commission and the National Consumer Council, volunteering first for UNICEF, then in Thailand with the Australian Volunteers International, learning that democracy is not a document but a daily act of patience and practice with no one prescription for success. Then the United Nations – Congo, Burundi, Uganda, a Liberia still raw from war, where I was a minor part of a team who helped walk child soldiers back from the battlefield and rebels to the negotiating table. It was in Congo, though, where I learned that peace, like most worthwhile things, is made slowly, is entirely imperfect and is brokered by people willing to keep listening past the point where listening is easy. In some minuscule way I helped rebuild the UN's operation in Iraq, first from Cyprus, then Jordan, before moving on to Afghanistan and then returning home at the end of 2005, carrying all of it with me, every hard-won lesson, every failed mission, every important though unheralded human success. I chased the world to understand my street and found the two were never as far apart as they looked.

Home again, I worked as a media director for Ted Baillieu, ran my own business, served the Australian Red Cross blood bank and returned once more to the UN in New York, this time working on policy, the environment, HIV/AIDS reduction, tackling poverty, fostering democratic governance and confronting head-on the challenges of gender equity, climate and environmental sustainability. Before entering this place I spent an exhausting though educative eight years on immigration and refugee review tribunals as an adjudicator of sorts between the state and the stateless. I cherished the opportunity and was pleased to leave the stress but not the people behind.

In 2022 I was elected to this place, the Victorian Parliament, where a boy from a rented house somehow found himself with a seat and a say. And what, in the end, does it mean to hold a seat in this place? I have loved the schools of my electorate and every student who has, quite unknowingly, made me want to be a slightly better man. I have loved meeting thousands of you in halls, in driveways and on nature strips at 7 in the morning. I have loved spending my office budget where it does the most good: on volunteers running themselves ragged and parents doing their sums twice because the cost of everything keeps rising. I have loved making a difference that was small in size but never small in meaning.

I have not, I confess, always loved coming to Parliament. Democracy is a wonderful thing, but parts of the process I could take or leave; the people, I will hold on to. I have loved working alongside colleagues in the true old-fashioned sense of the word – Michael Galea, Lee Tarlamis, Meng Heang Tak, Rachel Payne and Ann-Marie Hermans among them – people who from every side of this chamber helped me to help a young woman named Jana secure her Australian citizenship notwithstanding a lifetime lived with cerebral palsy. We will never truly appreciate what the certainty of citizenship means to a family like hers, though we can each take some comfort in our small part. I have loved helping raise the funds to let a bright five-year-old named Ivani, born with LAMA2 muscular dystrophy, get a car of her own so that she might simply get about the way any other little girl or boy would without a second thought or a taxi. I will never forget being blindfolded and following Lilly, who is blind, from Flinders Street station to her local station to help me and others understand just how important those little yellow dots are.

I will forever be grateful for the small things that mattered. Just yesterday I shared with Melissa Horne from the other place a photo of young Xavier. Xavier was a bright, bubbly, energetic six-year-old when a freak accident occurred in the classroom. He fell on his pencil of all things. It punctured his eye and pierced his brain as he fell onto it. The severe traumatic brain injury led to a bleed, a blood clot and multiple strokes. Melissa is important to this story because Xavier, on his long path to recovery, could not use a local path to get to school because it was muddy and unpaved. Melissa's example to all of us on that side, this side, the crossbench – whoever should be fortunate enough ever to be a minister – is that we each have a role to play, and regardless of who gets to govern, being responsive to the little things and to each other in this place and the other place will never make the headlines but really matters.

In this job you cannot hold on to the joy without encountering the sorrow beside it. I will never forget Bri, a mum who continues to try to make sense of the senseless by raising funds in memory of her son Patrick, who took his own life on 10 February 2023, aged just 17. I will never forget Wayne Holdsworth, whose son Mac at the very same age took his life on 24 October 2023. I will never forget sitting through 18-year-old Elijah's funeral listening to his parents Jo and Dave delivering a heartfelt tribute to their beautiful, talented son. And I will never forget Elbino Akueng asking me, as we sat in his living room with grief too large for the question, whether anyone in this place, in the Parliament, had spoken his son's name, Dau. Dau, 15 years old, was killed after playing a game of basketball with his mate, 12-year-old Chol Achiek. Elbino, the truth is too few people have mentioned your son's name or Chol's. Too many of our children are dying or being murdered – too many, full stop. There should be none. And too many – in fact most – are black. I raised this subconscious, perhaps even inadvertent, racism in my maiden speech. I raise it again now, because saying it once was never going to be enough.

In my short time in this place I do not believe I have achieved anything especially remarkable, and I find to my own surprise that I have made a kind of peace with that. But if you pressed me, if you asked me what one thing I would call an achievement out of everything, I think I would tell you about Jess Wilson. In full view of everyone in this building, Jess has done for my party what I hope she can do for our state: restore faith. I have had a front-row seat in watching her rise. You should all know this. I have taken delight in telling hundreds of primary schoolchildren from the Ringwood electorate the fact that up until a few months ago every minister in this chamber – bar one, apologies – was a female: Gayle, Ingrid, Lizzie, Jaclyn and Harriet. I was particularly proud of the fact that two of my own leaders on this side of the chamber have also held the torch for women everywhere as leaders of my own proud party, Georgie and Beverley. Women in all leadership roles matter tremendously, because in too many places even now women and girls are underestimated, undermined and almost always underpaid. My mum could have told you that a long time ago. Both my parents passed away some time ago. I will be forever thankful for my stepmother Judy McGowan, who remains and is cherished to this day, like my half-sister Nellie and step-siblings Sarah and Jon and my brother Christian. You are all loved.

I want to also give thanks to Georgie Purcell for her advocacy for animals, all creatures great and small. We live in a world that preaches individuality and then demands herd – it is an animal reference for you. There is nothing wrong with herds. Georgie has never once taken an easy exit from that contradiction. She has stayed unapologetically entirely herself in a society that does not always make room for that. It is not lost on me that women in this place are each in their own right genuine inspirations to women – not just the ones already in this building, but the ones watching from outside it, wondering whether there is space in public life for someone who refuses to shrink themselves to fit in. I hope every young woman who hears this takes the point that being entirely yourself is not a liability here; it is an asset no-one can ever take from you.

I want to also thank the Greens, with whom we share a common desire for the endless task of improving human rights, caring for the environment and fighting for our firefighters. Again, I have failed to achieve almost everything I sought to do. But I draw comfort from the fact that in the days

ahead some of my labour may bear fruit. In fact I am quite optimistic it will. The plight of our firefighters is a tragic one. We call them heroes. We send them into harm's way, and yet we deprive them of the tools they need to keep themselves safe, much less others safe.

Our system is built to be combative, but I have learned from my vantage point in opposition and time in this place as a member that combative need not mean individually antagonistic. Time and again ministers have assisted, perhaps not as much as I would always have liked, but frequently as much as was needed. If I name you, I feel this could only be interpreted as a hostile act seven weeks out from pre-poll and goodness knows how many weeks out from preselection, so I will not venture to do so. But you each know who you are. Without your assistance for members of my community, they would have been much less well-off and we would have been less well-off. Thank you to each and every one of you.

I have learned much and I have admired the patience of ministers, one and all, in and during the committee process. You have taught me that should I ever be in that place – and given I am moving houses, I may not ever be in that place; what a blessing – plain politeness and quiet patience carry us further than most of what gets said in here. From what I have watched across the bench in this place, this has impressed me. The system is built to clash. It does not follow that the people in it have to.

Know what follows a simple goodbye, only a change of address, and it is precisely because it is a change and not an ending that I want to get the thank-yous right out of the way before I move house. I would be nowhere in this chamber without my staff. Rachel, Stephanie, Jaguar and Brandi have been, quite simply, awesome, and I intend to keep testing their patience for a good while yet.

To the Parliament's own, Sally, Bridget, Greg, Adam, Peter, Grace, another Rachel and, yes, even Trish, and so many more I cannot fit into the time allowed, thank you for the quiet work that makes this loud place run. If I move to another chamber, you may see rather less of me from here on. I suspect that that alone might count as thanks enough.

President, your example has been one others can, I hope, learn from. Allowing the cut and thrust of respectful debate, no matter how loud, is not to be scorned but valued in my opinion. You have walked that line and done so with grace and patience, allowing grown-ups the time they need, including me, to act like it. Expressing our differences freely in the form of words is always preferable to the alternative. I have worked in those countries where the alternative prevails, and it never ends well.

There is one debt, though, I still have not properly settled. It dates back to my very first speech in this place. I stood here four years ago making a maiden speech I will charitably describe as somewhat lecturous. It was not the time then for thanks; it was the time for some home truths – a lot of them, as it turned out. Now is the right time for proper thank-yous to the tireless volunteers who put me here to begin with. You all know them and label them as the people to blame. My thanks to Jackie Douglas, Susan Turner, David Tatum, Nick Brown, Paul and Shirley Beraldo, Catherine Seagrave, Bruce Woodhouse, John and Cassie Mignano, David Vadnech, Chantelle Vidler, Jill and Keith Duncan, Michelle and Peter Penson, Brooke Lord, Sue Roche, Matthew and Renae Guy, Peter Perechi, Eve and Argy Leibe, Jeff Allan, Deirdre Diamante, Michelle Pavlo and Vi Hurley. You stood on roadsides when the margins were double digits and the outcome was anything but certain.

To everyone who helped me whenever I stumbled in here, my family, my friends, colleagues across the aisle and every constituent who trusted me with their story, thank you.

To my colleagues: in ways that you may never appreciate, you have kept me going. You have tested me just as I have tested and likely frustrated you. For those who I have trespassed upon and had less complimentary moments with, I am truly sorry. The journey has never been straightforward nor easy, though it has led us to a clearing where the promise of what can be achieved and what good can be done seems almost tangible and perhaps within reach.

To my family – saved for last because the best things always are. To Emmett, Aisha, Abram and Alison, you are the reason any of this had a point at all. Every early morning and every late sitting was

a debt against your patience. I hope in whatever years the next seat gives me – or stage – I can begin to repay that properly. I seldom, in fact almost never, mention family because their lives are their own. They have not chosen this path; I have. I know that in whatever path you choose you will each follow your heart, fail big time like me and be kind. You each are everything your mother and I ever wanted you or needed you to be – simply perfect. A beautiful daughter, two beautiful sons.

There is a story far older than this building and older still than settler Australia of Cheng Tang, first king of China's Shang dynasty – a dynasty so far back in time that most of what we know of it comes from bones and bronze rather than books. He is said to have inscribed on his wash basin, of all places, the words, 'If you can in one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation' – not a grand pronouncement carved for a temple wall, just a private instruction read each morning by a man to himself before anyone else was watching. I rather like that better than the more famous lines people reach for at moments like these. It asks for nothing heroic, only that you begin again tomorrow in whatever small way tomorrow allows. I have tried in four years to do that here. I intend to keep trying, whatever Ringwood decides. In that older spirit I can find not an ending but a daily renovation.

Members applauded.

Adem Somyurek

Valedictory statement

Adem SOMYUREK (Northern Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

Even though almost 24 years have gone by, it feels like yesterday that I stood where Mr Berger now sits and rose to give my first speech in this place.

I remember the excitement, the enthusiasm, the expectation and the commitment I felt to make some contribution towards a fairer society.

I did not intend to be here for a very long time.

Of course I wanted to become a minister. I have always believed that if you do not strive to reach the top of your chosen profession, you will not perform your job 100%.

But I certainly did not envisage spending two and a half decades in Parliament.

I was 35 when I was elected and always expected there would be another career after politics. My plan was to serve a term as a minister, make the contribution I came here to make, and then move on. I thought I would be out of this place by 45.

Yet here I am, about to turn 59 in a couple of weeks.

In politics, especially in major political parties, you generally do not speculate about retirement, even privately with trusted colleagues. The moment people think you may be leaving, attention starts shifting to the vacancy. Potential successors begin positioning themselves, alliances start forming and, before long, you can create a momentum towards your departure that you never intended.

In hindsight, perhaps I should have broken that rule and publicly announced my retirement plan from the beginning. As I accumulated more influence over the years, I also accumulated more political enemies. Had they known I intended to leave eventually, some of them might have been prepared to simply wait patiently for me to disappear, rather than getting their hands dirty with the various political assassination attempts I had to endure along the way.

Unfortunately, I kept the plan to myself.

Life rarely follows the script you write for it.

President, reading my inaugural speech again for this occasion took me straight back to that period. I could still feel the excitement and optimism in it, along with the confidence of a younger man who probably thought he understood more than he actually did.

My political philosophy has not changed fundamentally over the years, but experience has certainly tested it, refined it and, in many respects, reinforced it.

I have always seen myself as more of a social democrat than a democratic socialist. I believe that distinction goes to the heart of the difference between the Right and the Left in the ALP.

On the economy, I believe in capitalism and the market economy, but that does not mean government should stand back and do nothing. Protection of workers' rights and a strong welfare system are imperative in any civilised society. Government also has a role where there is market failure and where strategic industries require support.

On equality, I have always been on the side of equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. But I have also acknowledged that the idea of a level playing field is more complicated than putting two people from very different socio-economic backgrounds on the same starting line and declaring the contest fair. That is why I believe in strong anti-discrimination laws, good public education, universal health care and investment in the things that allow people to improve their circumstances.

I have always been more cautious about affirmative action and quotas where they substitute equality of outcome for merit. Part of my reasoning is that I believe people should be encouraged to play to their strengths. Effort, education and ability should count for something, and organisations generally work best when people are selected for what they can actually contribute.

Politically, that is probably why I found my home in the Labor Right. I was never particularly interested in ideological purity. I believed the Labor Party had to win elections, and that meant occupying the centre and then using government to improve the lives of working people.

That philosophy also explains why serving in the Andrews government was, at times, a challenge for me. Andrews increasingly sought to make Victoria a laboratory for a post-materialist social agenda, driven heavily by the politics of the inner city and the Left.

President, over the course of my long parliamentary career I served on eight parliamentary committees, including as chair and deputy chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, and I held responsibility for nine different portfolio areas across the shadow ministry and government.

I am not going to go through all of them.

But there are a few that were particularly important to me and helped shape the sort of parliamentarian and, eventually, minister I became.

My early work on the Outer Suburban and Interface Services and Development Committee took me straight back to many of the issues I had spoken about in my inaugural speech: how we build new suburbs, whether infrastructure keeps pace with population growth and, more importantly, how we build communities rather than simply houses.

I was lucky enough to also serve on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in my first term. On PAEC I came to fully appreciate just how large and complex modern government really is. Looking closely at expenditure, departments and the machinery of government made me realise how much there was to learn.

Motivated by my experience on PAEC and having always been eager to improve myself and become better at what I do, I went on to study and complete a Master of Public Policy and Governance. That study and qualification held me in good stead. It made me a better and more astute parliamentarian and, later, a better shadow minister and minister.

The Electoral Matters Committee became another major part of my parliamentary life. I had the privilege of being its inaugural chair and later its deputy chair. We dealt with the machinery of democracy itself: elections, political donations and disclosure, voter participation, informal voting and electoral administration.

The political donations inquiry in particular was important work. We were looking at money, influence and transparency in politics well before those issues became as prominent as they are today.

I enjoyed that work enormously, and I was proud when we eventually introduced legislation that brought an end to the donations arms race.

I never liked political fundraising. I hated being put in a room and expected to talk to donors. Most donors are business people, and business people generally think about return on investment. That always made me uncomfortable, and reinforced my belief that there should be as much distance as possible between money and political decision-making.

President, beyond the committee system, another important part of my parliamentary career was my time in the shadow ministry from 2010 to 2014. I was essentially the shadow minister for Industry, with my title being Shadow Minister for manufacturing, services, procurement and technology.

It was a tumultuous time to take on the manufacturing portfolio, but I learnt a great deal from it.

Victoria was being hit hard by the two-speed economy created by the resources boom. The Australian dollar went as high as \$1.11 against the US dollar in 2011, which was devastating for a manufacturing state like Victoria. Exporters were becoming less competitive and there were manufacturing job losses almost every day.

The prevailing economic orthodoxy of the Coalition at the time was that the market should simply be allowed to adjust and that industries which could not compete should disappear. I never accepted that in such a simplistic form. I agreed that economies have to play to their strengths and that Australian manufacturing could not compete indefinitely on price against low-cost countries. We had to compete on value, innovation, technology and higher-end manufacturing. But that did not mean standing back and watching strategically important industries disappear while we waited for the exchange rate.

The Victorian Coalition government was too driven by neo liberal ideological dogma to take action; they sat back and watched as very important industries disappeared.

The auto industry became the clearest example for me. Holden was telling me that even a public commitment such as a payroll-tax holiday would help them demonstrate to their head office that Australia and Victoria actually wanted them here. These companies were being courted by governments all over the world. Instead, at the federal level, Joe Hockey effectively dared the industry to leave. Eventually it did.

I thought that was a major policy mistake. When our objective should have been to move Victorian manufacturing further up the value chain, allowing one of our major high-technology manufacturing industries to disappear made very little sense to me.

That experience reinforced my view that the answer was not to retreat from manufacturing, but to become more strategic about the kind of manufacturing Victoria could sustain and grow.

Victoria already had some real strengths. We had strong universities, good research and innovation infrastructure and a skilled workforce. The Bracks and Brumby governments had invested heavily in building that capability. My view was that we had to keep building on those strengths and move Victorian industry further up the value chain rather than trying to compete on labour costs.

Years later, when we were in government, I was very critical of Andrews internally about what I saw as his lopsided approach to economic and jobs strategy. He was singularly focused on infrastructure and construction as the engine of jobs and investment. In that sense he became something of a one-trick pony: build more infrastructure, create more construction jobs.

My concern was that not enough attention was being paid to some of the less visible fundamentals that determine whether a high-cost economy like Victoria remains competitive over the long term: innovation, research, commercialization, skills and maintaining strategic industry capability. You cannot build a competitive economy on construction activity alone.

Being a shadow minister was also a very different job from being a minister. There was virtually no support. Apart from your electorate office, you were largely on your own. I spent most days on the road meeting manufacturers, unions, industry groups and other stakeholders, trying to understand what was happening on the ground and what government could realistically do about it.

Looking back, that period probably did more than any other to shape the way I thought about the role of government in the economy. It also left me with a strong view that the resources available to shadow ministers need to be bolstered. In a modern government, proper policy development and effective scrutiny of the executive are too important to leave to shadow ministers operating as one-person bands, running from meeting to meeting and trying to do everything themselves.

That experience proved invaluable when, eventually, I had the opportunity to put some of those ideas into practice in government. I held responsibility for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, and later Local Government and Small Business.

I did not come into the Local Government portfolio with the background that some MPs had from years in councils, but I took a real liking to it. My study in governance held me in good stead, as did my work on the Electoral Matters Committee, particularly our work on reforming voting systems for council elections. My experience in the shadow ministry had also taught me that some of the most valuable knowledge is gathered out in the field rather than from briefing papers.

In Local Government, I had the privilege of taking through Parliament the biggest overhaul of Victoria's local government laws in more than 30 years, strengthening democratic accountability and service delivery across all 79 councils. I became very absorbed in the portfolio and made a point of visiting all 17 of the small rural councils facing sustainability problems. I wanted to hear directly from the people dealing with those pressures on the ground, because that was where the real understanding came from.

It also reminded me that some of the most important work in government is not particularly glamorous; it is simply making institutions work better for the communities they serve.

That belief in the importance of functioning institutions and strong communities was tested almost immediately. During the Black Summer bushfires, as Local Government and Small Business Minister, I saw

at close range how badly whole communities had been hit. People's homes, businesses and livelihoods had been destroyed.

There were moments during the bushfires when I felt the limits of government very acutely. We could provide assistance, coordinate services and support recovery, but when people had lost their homes, their businesses and, in some cases, almost everything they had built, there were limits to what government could actually put right.

Within weeks, however, COVID confronted us with the opposite reality: not the limits of government power, but its extraordinary reach. We were about to witness, first-hand, just how much control a democratic government could exercise over people's daily lives in the name of protecting public health.

My concern, particularly as the crisis wore on, was how concentrated decision-making became.

The fact that Andrews remains such a polarising figure years later does not particularly surprise me. It shows that Victorians did not regard having their liberties withdrawn as a trivial matter.

For me, the lasting lesson was that extraordinary circumstances should never become an excuse for weakening the institutions that restrain executive power. If anything, Cabinet government, parliamentary scrutiny, proper debate and accountability become more important when government is exercising powers that reach so deeply into people's lives. Once those safeguards are diminished, public trust is very difficult to restore.

President, by then, I was already thinking seriously about life after Parliament. But before I conclude, there is another part of my political life that, for the historical record, I cannot simply pass over. I have moved on, but it was too central to the circumstances in which my career changed so dramatically to leave unaddressed.

The Labor Party is a very Byzantine organisation, with its factions and sub-factions, elaborate branch structures, governing committees and endless internal elections. Perhaps there was something in my Turkish heritage that made the Byzantine complexity irresistible.

By Sunday afternoon, 14 June 2020, I had well and truly conquered the Byzantine organisation that is the ALP. I was governing the Victorian branch through an alliance that controlled about two-thirds of the party. I was also one of Victoria's two Right representatives on the ALP National Executive, one of the party's principal national governing bodies. Taken together, that gave me considerable influence across the national party.

That was a very unusual position for a member of a state upper house to be in. No self-respecting federal MP should really have to put up with that sort of arrangement. It would be a bit like us in this place accepting that a local councillor had significant influence over what happened here.

But it was not a position I had spent years longing for. It was really the by-product of something else. Since around 2008, the Victorian Right had been fragmented and at the mercy of the Socialist Left. My objective was to put the Right back together so the Socialist Left could be reined in and the party brought back towards the centre.

Because I was the architect of that arrangement, I also became responsible for maintaining it. That meant acting as the go-between for union leaders and sub-factional leaders who, in some cases, had barely been talking to each other for a decade. When problems arose between them, they came to me. I negotiated between them, settled disputes and kept the arrangement together.

That is how the power accumulated. It was not really the object of the exercise. It was the consequence of being the person holding together a structure that otherwise had a tendency to fall apart.

By 9.30pm that Sunday night, my objective of serving one term as a minister before leaving Parliament was over. My victory lap had been cut very short.

The program's narrative was that I had become the all-powerful faceless man of the Labor Party, had taken control of the Victorian branch and accumulated an unprecedented level of factional power. The secret recordings were used to give that story colour and movement.

It is worth remembering that this was, fundamentally, an internal Labor Party matter. It is the sort of issue that would normally struggle to interest anyone outside the political beltway. Yet I was featured for an hour on prime-time national commercial television. In one sense, that fact itself says something about the level of influence I had accumulated and the interests that had lined up against me. I do not say that as a boast. Much of that influence had come reluctantly and almost accidentally, as a consequence of holding together the factional structure I had helped build.

The problem with the program's account was not that I had influence. Clearly I did.

The distortion was in how I had come to possess it and why. It portrayed me through what I regard as an almost Orientalist caricature: the ethnic branch stacker who had acquired enormous power by flooding Labor branches with hordes of ethnic members supposedly devoid of agency and simply under my control.

I reject that characterisation, and I reject the proposition that branch stacking was the source of my political influence.

That distinction matters to me, particularly as I look back on my career tonight. One version is simply about accumulating power for its own sake. The other is about trying to influence the direction of a political party I had devoted much of my adult life to – a party that was in government and making decisions that affected the lives of millions of Victorians. I had strong views about public policy and about the direction I believed Labor should take. Whatever mistakes I made along the way, power was never the ultimate objective. It was a means of trying to shape that direction.

Those recordings had been made by Anthony Byrne MHR and his staffer Alexander Stalder, two people I had regarded as among my closest political friends for more than two decades. By then, they had been secretly recording me for about a year. Byrne was also an important source for and a friend of the journalist who ultimately produced the story. The recordings continued during a short-lived branch recruiting war in the south-east, a return to the bad old days after years of factional peace in the region. In the aftermath, I came to suspect that the conflict itself had been deliberately manufactured, to draw me into situations that would produce more damaging material.

The irony was that Byrne himself was the branch stacker. Within only a few years of arriving in Victoria from South Australia, he secured preselection for Holt, then one of the safest Labor seats in the country, through the very branch-organising practices that later became central to the story told about me.

I think the elephant in the room has now been properly acknowledged. I will leave the fuller history to the book and return to my parliamentary career.

President, given the colourful nature of my political career, I could probably finish tonight by belting out a rendition of Frank Sinatra's *My Way*. I will resist the temptation. But I will borrow one line from that wonderful song: "Regrets, I've had a few."

And I have.

Once I had reached the ministry, I should have walked away from factional politics altogether. I did not owe my ministerial position to factional activism. But my demise was entirely due to my factional activism. That is probably the clearest lesson I can draw from my own career.

By then I had convinced myself that, because I had built the arrangement, I had a responsibility to keep holding it together. In hindsight, I should have recognised that my responsibility as a minister to the public mattered far more, and simply walked away.

Another regret is that I did not do more when it became obvious that Anthony Byrne was struggling. I saw the anger, the resentment, the constant sense that other people were responsible for his disappointments, and I heard things from him that should have troubled me more than they did. Rather than confront it or encourage him to get help, I rationalised it as Anthony being Anthony.

I also made the mistake of assuming that because we had been close for decades, and because I had stood by him politically, whatever resentment he carried would never be directed at me. That was a serious error of judgement.

After 15 June 2020 I saw Parliament from a very different perspective. For most of my career I had been inside one of the most disciplined political parties in the democratic world. I understood party discipline because, at different times, I helped enforce it. Once I was outside that structure, I came to appreciate much more clearly why this chamber matters.

The upper house is not supposed to be a smaller version of the lower house. Its job is scrutiny. That is why proportional representation matters. If a government controls both houses and every parliamentary committee, Parliament can too easily become an extension of the executive.

It is important to understand, though, that this great institution has its limitations. Many of its accountability mechanisms were designed at a time when disciplined political parties, as we know them today, did not exist. That creates a huge accountability gap when the executive controls a disciplined parliamentary majority. For all its imperfections, Parliament is still the least-worst system we have for holding executive government to account.

I have had a few political victories over the years. Some were hard fought, some were unexpected, and some probably meant more to other people than they did to me.

But the 2022 election remains one of the moments I am proudest of.

Almost everybody expected I would be gone at the 2022 election and never heard from again. When I announced that I was going to run, many people thought I was delusional. But I had crunched the numbers carefully and believed I could win.

What mattered to me was not the triumphalism of winning. It was that I had been returned directly by the electorate and had the opportunity to complete my parliamentary career on my own terms.

Looking back, I think what mattered most was not proving other people wrong, but proving to myself that my political career did not have to end in the way others had chosen for me.

President, I also want to acknowledge the people of the electorates and regions I have represented over almost twenty-four years. I came into Parliament from the outer suburbs and never stopped believing that the everyday concerns of working families; roads, schools, hospitals, jobs, housing, community safety and public services; deserve serious political attention.

I thank the many people who have worked with me in electorate, parliamentary, shadow ministerial and ministerial offices. Politics is a team activity, and I have been fortunate to work with many very capable people.

I also thank the staff of this Parliament who have supported members and kept this institution functioning with great professionalism over the years. I have spent the greater part of my working life in this building, and I have always appreciated the professionalism with which this place is run.

Finally, my family. Politics is not a normal occupation for a family. They live with the campaigns, the media, the constant demands and, occasionally, strangers camped outside the family home.

And that leads me to what is probably my biggest personal regret from my time in politics. I did not switch off enough. I took calls late into the night and across weekends when I should have been more present and more attentive to my children as they were growing up. At the time, there was always another issue, another call, another political problem that seemed urgent. Looking back, very few of them were as important as the time I was giving up with my family.

So if I can offer one piece of advice to members with young families, it is this: your work is important, but your family comes first. Children grow up very quickly, and the time you miss does not come back. There are times when you should simply switch the phone off.

My family has had to absorb the consequences of choices I made in pursuing a political career. They did not sign up for all of it, but they lived through it with me, and I owe them more than can properly be expressed in a valedictory speech.

I spoke in my inaugural speech about my parents coming to this country without English, working in factories and the sacrifices they made to give their children a better life. I will not repeat that story tonight.

But I do want to say this. When I became a minister of the Crown, I knew how much that moment meant to them. For me, it was bigger than the title itself. The son of migrant factory workers from a housing commission estate had become a minister in the government of the country they had chosen to make their home.

Whatever else happened later, no one can take that moment away from them or from me.

When I first stood here in 2003, I was 35 years old and thought I would be gone by 45. I am now almost 59. The journey was longer, rougher and considerably less predictable than I imagined.

There were successes and mistakes, victories and defeats, extraordinary friendships and some spectacular betrayals. I have seen politics from almost every angle, and I do not leave bitter about it.

More importantly, my years here have tested and refined the beliefs I brought with me, but in the end they have largely reinforced them: the importance of work, education, social mobility, strong public services, protecting working people and equality of opportunity.

President, I joined the Labor Party 30 years ago because I identified strongly with the values of the Labor Right. I came into this place as a Labor member carrying those values with me. I now leave with only one of those two things intact. I leave without membership of the Labor Party, but I leave with the values of the Labor Right.

My advice to members of this place who have been socialised into making their political party part of their identity is to think carefully about that.

Political parties are vehicles for values and ideas. They exist to translate those values into public policy and government action. They are not ends in themselves. They are not football teams, and they are certainly not your family, despite what you are sometimes told to keep you in line.

If a party no longer represents your values, and you have lost hope of pulling it back from a direction that is increasingly alien to those values, then it is perfectly legitimate to ask yourself why you remain so staunchly loyal to it.

That is where I eventually arrived with the Labor Party. I did not leave the values that brought me into Labor. In my view, the Labor Party moved away from them.

President, I thank the House for its indulgence tonight, and I thank the people of Victoria for the extraordinary privilege of allowing me to serve them for twenty-four years.

Motions

Budget papers 2026–27

Debate resumed.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:33): I was speaking before lunch –

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Quite right, Mr Galea; we have just heard from Mr McGowan, who gave a wonderful valedictory speech, I might say – a fascinating account of his experience in and out of here, looking forward to his journey to Ringwood. I certainly am looking forward to his journey in taking on the new mantle of the member for Ringwood. But I will get back to what I was speaking to around the budget and –

Jacinta Ermacora: Nice humility, Georgie.

Georgie CROZIER: That is quite right. On the budget: as I was saying prior to lunch, we are the highest taxed state and we have got a mountain of debt, and our services are suffering because of that. If it is not roads, if it is not hospitals, if it is not our police service – it is every area of government that is suffering. That is at the hands of, and is the responsibility of, 12 years of Labor, who have, quite frankly, wrecked the joint. There are so many people now that are very concerned about the future of this state. As we go into the grand final weekend there will be a wonderful reprieve from this place. We will enjoy the celebrations of the grand final, even though our teams will not be in it, given it is two interstate teams. It brings such a wonderful spirit to the city and to the state, and I am looking forward to seeing that. It is those sorts of events which we can be very proud of and we always have been very proud of. They give a bit of a sugar hit to the economy.

We have got to have a sustained investment, a sustained economy and a strong economy to be able to deliver all the services that are required. One of the things that Ms Watt mentioned was the Suburban Rail Loop. If you look at this budget like you look at previous budgets, there has been no change. In 2021 it was \$34 billion of investment – that is what the government said the Suburban Rail Loop would cost. Well, it is still \$34 billion, so in five years it has not changed. The \$34 billion amount has virtually remained static. No-one believes it, because if you look at the North East Link, it went from something like \$9 billion to \$26 billion in the same period of time with costs and cost overruns. Of course who can forget the \$15 billion of corruption –

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: at least, thank you, Mr Davis – that has set these costs to the Victorian taxpayer soaring. Nobody believes the government around these figures and the Suburban Rail Loop and the way they have just pursued this project. It has really been quite stunning, given where we are at and what we need to do.

If I look at health, look at the promises that Labor have made that they have not fulfilled, 10 community hospitals they said they would deliver back in 2018. Well, those budgets blew out. In this term we have seen that seven of those hospitals are somewhere in the process of being developed, but three have fallen off the radar. Those areas and those communities were again duded. Just like with the Commonwealth Games, where every single Victorian was conned and lied to by Labor, so were these communities where these community hospitals were going to be developed. The West Gippsland Hospital was another promise that Labor made. They promised \$675 million, and it was to start in

2024 and be completed in 2028. But there is still no line item in the budget anywhere around construction. It was another furphy, it was another con to that community.

I want to put on record my congratulations to the local member Wayne Farnham, who has been a terrific advocate in this regard. He has been relentless for the last four years in holding the government to account on their broken promise on this very necessary piece of vital health infrastructure, because if anyone has gone down to – I doubt whether the Minister for Health has and I doubt whether many of the current ministers have – the hospital at Warragul, you will see how substandard it is. Floors are wonky, there is asbestos, doors do not meet, there are narrow passageways. It is very dangerous and not fit for purpose – very difficult facilities for our doctors and nurses to be working in. It is another complete failure by Labor to deliver for that community, and there are so many more. It is not only that but Maroondah, and I know Mr McGowan has been a passionate advocate for that hospital. The government promised to start that last year, in 2025, to be completed in 2029. There is still no separate line item for the construction in the budget. The list just goes on and on and on.

The Armstrong Creek ambulance station, \$31 million – a massive cost for an ambulance station – was included in the 2023–24 capital budget. The completion date was meant to be this year, but it is still in the planning phase. I mean, this is a government that is very big on the headline, but it is not following through. They are not following through on these infrastructure projects. They will champion some of them. But with the new Footscray Hospital, which was to open with over 500 beds, all they have done is taken the existing beds from the old Footscray Hospital and transferred them. There are items in that Footscray Hospital redevelopment, like a tower that is not even open because there are no staff. The government have not put in the resources to provide the workforce planning for the future.

I questioned the minister in question time today about the graduate nurse program. I can tell she is oblivious to what is actually happening. But letters have gone out to graduate nurses. She told this house just a couple of hours ago that the process was not finished. Well, the letters are going out, and there are 3000 nurses that are going to miss out, and there are not enough nurses in the pipeline to deal with the shortfalls into the future. That is a fundamental failure of Labor, who have failed to recognise what needs to be done. I had a phone call this morning from a frustrated nurse who told me, ‘They’re not doing agency nurses. We’re expected to come off and work overtime. Graduates are the only ones rostered, so we’ve got to come off and do overtime, and it’s blowing the hospital budgets.’ This is a government that on paper will say their EFT is meeting expectations, that they are not blowing out, but they are costing the taxpayer a bomb because their planning and mismanagement of how they are managing health is causing so many issues. Those nurses who are doing the overtime are getting burnt out. It is not safe.

The government will not release the sentinel report. We do not know the health data, and I have been banging on about that for months. Where is the latest health data? I really question a lot of what is in this budget, given the level of secrecy and transparency. We have seen what the government has promised before, whether it is the Commonwealth Games or whether it is the Arden Street medical precinct, the biggest medical precinct in the country. That was never going to go ahead. The Commonwealth Games were never going to go ahead. These are big promises that were made. As a result of the current budget and how it has been managed – it is the management of the budget that is really critical – Victorians are the ones that are not getting the best value for money under this government. The failures are too profound, too significant and too widespread. They are in every portfolio.

I will go back to where I started as I come to the conclusion. The potholes in this state are symbolic of the degradation of the state. They are right throughout the state. And we have got potholes in this budget. We have got massive black holes, we have got broken promises and we have got a debt that is running out of control and a government that has no plan to fix it.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:43): It is a pleasure to rise and share a few words on another very important budget that was delivered earlier this year by the now Minister for Environment, who is in the chamber with us. It was a budget that once again was a good, strong Labor budget, because I believe – and I can be corrected by the minister – the surplus figures now exceed what was budgeted in that particular budget when it comes to the operating surplus. It is a budget that is focusing rightly on two things, and one is an overall fiscal strategy which is returning the budget to normalcy in the wake of the COVID impacts and continuing to manage the state budget appropriately.

It is also – and in my view just as importantly – focusing on the many millions of household budgets of Victorian families. That is what good Labor budgets do, and that is exactly what this year's state budget does. And it is, again, what we are continuing to do from the Labor side of the fence and what we are doing in fact when it comes to initiatives such as free dental, which a re-elected Carroll Labor government will bring in. They will bring in the same effectiveness of the urgent care clinics, which were often derided, slammed and undermined by those opposite but have been so enthusiastically taken up by the Victorian community that we are seeing really strong growth in the use of these facilities. In much the same way, we will provide these 10 free dental clinics to the people of Victoria, following in the footsteps of the urgent care clinics.

When it comes to the current financial situation, with the global effects of certain wars and trade impacts, there are many things that, like all jurisdictions in the nation, we are vulnerable to. It is so important that this budget has an emphasis on cost-of-living relief for Victorian households who need it the most. That is why we did see the very successful two months of free public transport, which was taken up very well. That is why we will see people continuing to be the beneficiaries of half-price public transport until the end of the year. In fact I was having a conversation with a constituent today who was remarking on their recent trip to New South Wales and the staggering difference in price for a family of three travelling around a city in a day in Sydney compared to Victoria. It was a remarkable difference – about a fivefold increase in the price they had to pay in Sydney compared to Victoria where they benefitted from those discounted fares. The regional fare cap – even under normal circumstances it is reducing the cost of all regional fares. Whether you are coming from the Macedon Ranges or from Mildura, that fare is now capped at the metropolitan maximum, so it is a significantly beneficial and ongoing discount for all regional Victorian communities. We have seen the absolute boom there has been in V/Line patronage. Through this budget we have seen a corresponding increase in the frequency of V/Line services across different parts of the state.

I will come back to some transport investments in a moment, but another investment in the cost of living that supported all Victorian households, or the majority of Victorian households, was the 20 per cent discount, or the rego rebate. Individuals were able to claim up to two vehicles and get that 20 per cent discount off their rego, putting hundreds of dollars back in Victorian households at the time when they needed it the most.

I did touch on the urgent care clinics at the start of my contribution. They are and remain a very important part of primary healthcare provision in this state. As I have said many times before in this chamber and in various different committees – such as the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, where we discussed urgent care clinics and had the opportunity to grill and interview secretaries and other officials about the funding nature behind them – we have to remember that both the then Andrews Labor government in Victoria and the then Liberal government in New South Wales decided to go it alone with primary priority care centres, which are now called urgent care clinics. It is a credit to both states for doing that under two different parties. But it happened in the face of and as a consequence of the complete dereliction of duty by the then federal Liberal government – one that certainly this Liberal opposition in Victoria seems determined to take its cues from.

It was a dereliction of duty in providing that primary care, causing that potentially catastrophic collapse in primary health care in Victoria and around Australia – as was seen in New South Wales – that prompted the state governments to intervene and set up these facilities, despite the fact that the federal government remains at least technically responsible for the funding of them. It is good to see that the

current federal Labor government has put its hand up to join the call, so to speak, and contribute by co-funding at the very least, even if not fully funding, these urgent care clinics. It is something that I very much look forward to seeing them take more of a role in to fulfil and acquit their responsibilities in this space.

It is not just urgent care clinics, though. If I look at my own electorate and the investments in health infrastructure, I can see right now major works occurring at Casey Hospital. What was opened about 20 or 25 years ago as quite a small, hospital on the then outskirts of Melbourne is now catering to a rapidly growing population in the Casey–Cardinia region. That hospital is going to benefit enormously from the new emergency department that is being built right now, as we speak. I know from speaking with many people from within my own family the impact that that will have, going from an emergency department that was at its limit. This government is making the investment. As the south-east grows, we are growing our healthcare infrastructure with it, and this emergency department will be absolutely terrific for the region.

We have seen the opening of the Cranbourne Community Hospital as well. This is an absolutely incredible facility that the member for Cranbourne has been hard at work advocating for. As she frequently reminds me, she also advocated to ensure that there would be no parking charges at this hospital, making it one of the very few hospitals in Victoria where you can get absolutely free parking. Certainly in metropolitan Melbourne it is something that her community see – and they have seen her advocacy for that – as so central to not just getting the hospital but getting all the services in there, such as dietetics, dentistry and other things, those ancillary healthcare services in the community hospital, providing those benefits to people in the day surgeries as well, but particularly the accessibility for the community, and the free parking certainly adds to improving accessibility.

In this year's budget we have also committed to opening a new urgent care clinic in the Cranbourne Community Hospital, which is going to be transformative. We already have one in the City of Casey, but with a population of probably well over 400,000 people right now, the City of Casey is on track at some point to overtake the population of Tasmania. We have one in the north in Narre Warren, and now with a forthcoming one in Cranbourne this will be a game changer for the local community. Certainly on the many times I have been out chatting with locals in and around Cranbourne with the hardworking local member Pauline Richards we have had many, many excited people who were very keen to hear about the new urgent care clinic at the community hospital.

Whilst this side continues to invest in and promote and support these essential services, the essential services and infrastructure that our growing south-east needs, we have seen, rather disappointingly, these services and in particular the Cranbourne Community Hospital being attacked by those opposite who are calling it a fake or not real hospital. That just goes very, very sadly to underscore the risk that we do have at the forthcoming state election, because when we have a party who seeks to claim government ridiculing a very recent but already very valued community healthcare facility, we know when they are facing a \$40 billion black hole in their spending what that is going to mean, because that is going to mean privatisation, closures or cuts – frankly, take your pick.

We know because in the very electorate of Cranbourne we have seen this before from the Liberal Party. Back in the 1990s – some members may not be aware of this – the Cranbourne ambulance branch was in fact the first and thankfully the only ambulance branch in the entire state which was privatised. It was privatised by the Kennett government, by the Liberal Party. It was a fiasco. It was a disaster. What we saw was the paramedics having to beg neighbouring public units for simple medical equipment, such as bandages. It undermined services to the community at a time when Cranbourne was a fraction of the size it is now. We know that the Liberal Party has a track record of selling off, cutting, flogging off health infrastructure and health services in the south-east and in particular in Cranbourne. And we know from their statements repeatedly in this place and on social media attacking the Cranbourne Community Hospital that the community would be very well within their rights to question what the risk would be of that side being in charge and what they would do to close or sell off the Cranbourne Community Hospital. It is a risk that I know the community does not want to

accept and one that the local member Pauline Richards will be fighting against every day to see that this hospital is not just retained but improved.

As I mentioned, the opening of the urgent care clinic that will be delivered under this Labor government, as well as the rollout of 10 free dental clinics across the state, is what Victorians can expect from a re-elected Carroll–Williams Labor government, because that is the track record of a government that has invested in health services, whether it is in the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, whether it is in the urgent care clinics or whether it is in opening a new ambulance branch just up the road from the Cranbourne Community Hospital in Clyde North just a few years ago, a terrific new four-bay facility that is already catering to thousands of calls each and every year. These are the investments that we have made and that we will continue to make, and we will jealously guard those vital pieces of community infrastructure that are already in place, because we know how much the community relies on them.

If I turn to education, we have spoken many times about Best Start, Best Life and free three- and four-year-old kinder. Both of these things have, again, been relentlessly attacked by those opposite and by – sadly, she is not here at the moment – Mrs McArthur, who has ridiculed free three- and four-year-old kinder, which just goes to show again a clear warning sign of what we can expect to be cut, something that saves families thousands of dollars a year, not only providing world-class education to our young developing minds but also providing meaningful cost-of-living relief through our rollout of kinders on school sites such as Topiram Primary School in my electorate in Clyde North and Lysterfield Primary School in a different part of my electorate. We are seeing the investment that these facilities make to support parents but also to provide that wonderful pathway from early education straight into primary school in a comforting and welcoming environment.

The investments in free kinder are transformative and, again, are very much at risk from what a Liberal or a One Nation–Liberal government would do. They would seek to cut that away from working Victorian families, Victorian families such as mine in the south-east, who can least afford to have those cuts inflicted upon them. When it comes to schools, we have built in just the past 10 years 100 new schools across Victoria, six of those in the past four years in the suburb of Clyde North alone – four primary schools and two high schools.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: Mrs Hermans is objecting, and it is quite remarkable that she is objecting to six new schools being built. While the same Liberal Party is opposing development in areas such as Kew and Camberwell, there is a surplus of classroom capacity that is requiring us to focus more and more of our development in the outer-suburban areas. We are meeting that demand. Where we have current peaks with new families moving into suburbs such as Clyde North, you actually see the long-term planning to provide the permanent classroom facilities for that long-term expected need whilst providing the additional near-term temporary accommodation given the current influx of young families in those suburbs. It is a sensible way to plan.

From the objections from across the aisle, I cannot help but wonder whether the two or three new schools in the Clyde North area committed to in this year's state budget will be in fact continued or axed under a dreaded prospective Liberal–One Nation government, because if they are objecting here in the chamber, again this can be used as a useful indicator for one of the many things that they will seek to cut. We have seen a very firm commitment when it comes to school funding as well from the Premier to acquit the full Gonski funding. We do now have, as a result of the successful EBA negotiations with Victorian teachers, a situation where Victorian teachers have gone from being some of the lowest paid to being the best paid in the nation. It is a worthy recognition of the fact that we have seen Victorian students get their best results in NAPLAN for a second year running, setting a new Victorian record but also setting the national record for the best results in NAPLAN. You can laugh and snigger and mock, but if you are sniggering at and mocking the achievements of our young people that our teachers have worked so hard to achieve, that would be very disappointing.

We are very proud to have invested in our teaching workforce, and we will continue to do so, just as we will continue to invest in the infrastructure and the capital. Those 100 new schools that I mentioned: one out of every two new schools built in the entire country over the past seven years has been built in the state of Victoria. For a quarter of the population, half of the new schools have been built in this state. That is the track record that we will seek to build on as we continue to build the Education State. Of course I have not even gone to tertiary education and talked about free TAFE. Again, there is the transformative impact that it can have on young people in honing a new skill and finding a new career, giving them every opportunity to have the best start. I have not even gone into transport, which would take another 15 minutes, I am sure. I thank you for giving me the time to talk today.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:58): I am pleased to rise to speak to this take-note motion on the budget, the budget that was delivered in May this year. I am very happy to come and speak on this and outline not only my grave concerns for regional Victorians in the state's budget but an alternate budget and an alternate vision for Victorians at the state election. The reason why we are here and the reason why we are doing this, in a sense – to the outside world, who cast a casual eye over this place – is because the government has not got its act together on a very important piece of legislation known as the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026. The government is ratting around trying to coordinate and organise its amendments, which should have been done days ago. The legislation is really important. It must pass this house tonight, so I am endorsing the passage of it; I am just not sure why we have not been able to start debating it today and get it done.

However, I am very pleased to speak about the issues in the budget that impact not only Eastern Victoria but regional Victorians. Acting President Broad, you well know that the Nationals have an undiluted focus on rural and regional Victoria. 'Is it good for rural and regional Victoria?' is our mantra, and we place our focus on that right across the state and indeed in the 2026–27 budget. What is not good for regional Victoria or any of Victoria is a net debt projected to be \$199.3 billion by 2029–30. We can round up, because I am sure by that time, if the trajectory continues, it will be over \$200 billion worth of debt. I do not know how normal people can picture what that looks like, but it is frightening. If you have been in small business like I have, owning and running a small business in regional Victoria, or if you have got a house or if you are wanting to invest, you know that debt is important. We know that debt is something that many people have and governments need to have, but it has got to be balanced with fiscal responsibility. This government over the past 11½ years has not been fiscally responsible. Indeed the debt is increasing by approximately \$1.65 million every hour. That is a burden that is going to impact people, who are already in a cost-of-living crisis, for decades to come.

I speak to many people in my electorate, and they say, 'Melina, you need to get in and turn this state around, but when you get in, how are you going to cope with that debt? How are you going to do it? It's going to be a basket case.' These are the concerns of residents in my electorate. The answer to that is that we must take the reins. We must take over. We must return to fiscal responsibility. We must return to discipline. We certainly have not only a 10-year economic plan – if I could use a prop, like some of those do, I would hold this up, but I am not going to; I am going to read from it – but we have a plan to turn this state around with discipline. It is important we do that without overburdening our communities or cutting frontline services. We hear from the other side this sort of scaremongering. We will put a hold on, we will stop, the back-end jobs. We will put a freeze on those public service jobs. No-one will lose their job. We will do that over that 10-year period and save \$20 million. This is very important.

What we will not do is stand by and see any more small businesses in our beautiful suburbs – in my patch, towns and communities – go out of business. We do not want to walk down our streets and note that that was a dress shop, that was a hairdressers and that was a coffee shop, and they have had to go under because they simply could not withstand some of the 67 new or increased taxes that have occurred since Daniel Andrews stood on the steps of Parliament in 2014 and said that he would not

implement or inflict any new taxes. Well, that has been a fallacy. Here we are today, only some 65-odd days out from an election, and we have got 67. It is probably more than that, but it may well be around 67. We have seen payroll tax double, we have seen land tax bills quadruple and we have seen the government claim in this budget to have a surplus while recording a \$7.7 billion cash deficit.

What have regional Victorians been doing all this time? Well, we power the economy. We provide agricultural goods and horticultural goods that nourish our state and that make sure we can export, not only interstate but overseas, the best quality produce that this country produces. It is highly valued and highly marketable. We do that. We produce energy. Down in my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region in Latrobe Valley we still produce energy that is keeping these lights on. This government has botched an energy transition and will continue to botch it if we are not careful.

We have seen the closure of the native timber industry – a sustainable, evolving industry that was providing localised hardwood timber for our mills and communities. If you go to Orbost, you will see – I spoke about those closed businesses – it has had a material impact on beautiful Orbost and many others. This has happened in this government. We see some budget papers in relation to forest transition. I had a look at some of the forest transition payments the other day, and I think some of them were to do with a small business involved in imaging in a local town and community. I am all for providing grants to community, but when there are people directly impacted – I am thinking of a transport operator out of Orbost that was a second tier, and he has not got a cent out of this government – then you have to ask: why is it botching it even further? It is creating an expectation, and then people have had to work so hard putting in submissions and grant applications to be turned down, with then some rather interesting choices. I value all of our small businesses, but when the government has directly impacted those small businesses as a result of this policy, not as a result of poor management or not being productive in their environment, then this government has a huge indictment on it.

There is also freight tourism. I often hear that we are going to see more ecological tourism. I love tourism. In eastern Victoria – Dr Heath knows it – we have some of the most beautiful locations, from Omeo down to Wilsons Promontory, Phillip Island and the Ninety Mile Beach and everywhere in between. It is a beautiful place to go and visit. You cannot shut down industries and say, ‘Here’s a little bit of sugar,’ and lo and behold there is environmental tourism. They can happen concurrently.

We also need to see – this is in my shadow portfolio – tracks open. Do you know the fantastic location at Wilsons Prom? I am trying to think of the name of it. It is a beautiful little location where the track into Sealers Cove took about six years to rebuild. If this is what this government calls making sure that it is open and accessible, I will go he. That is unacceptable. We also know that in the electorate of my colleague the soon-to-be-retired Tim Bull – of the soon-to-come-on-board Gemma Rendell – the bushfires impacted that area so significantly in 2019 to 2020, and they are still waiting for cabins at Cape Conran to be rebuilt. If this is a government that has any eye on regional Victorians, again I will go he.

On this side we know that we want to see a fair share for regional Victorians. A Jess Wilson and Danny O’Brien government will ensure that a minimum of 25 per cent of the infrastructure spend will be spent in regional Victoria on 25 per cent of the population, and that is what we make up. We do our heavy lifting in the economy. We do our heavy lifting in prosperity. We need that response back. We will ensure that our CFAs are properly resourced and have the appliances they need, not 27-year old appliances, as we heard in Ruffy from those that fought the fires and in Inverloch, where the pumper tanker is I think about 29 years old. The day I was there – thank you very much to the Inverloch CFA – I could put my finger through a rusty hole on the pumper. These are some of the things that the Liberals and Nationals are going to do – 25 per cent. All of those need to be addressed.

Then we look to hospitals, and across the benches we hear how important the health system is. I thank my colleague and our Shadow Minister for Health for being so vigilant and so dedicated in her work. We have solutions to take that frightening list of 86,000 people off surgery waitlists. We have heard

time and time again about the need for that. We know that we have a plan. We have a plan to start and complete the build of the West Gippsland Hospital. At the last election Daniel Andrews said, 'Guess what, people of Narracan, you can have a new hospital. The old one is very old, and people have to work in it under very difficult conditions.' Lo and behold, there is nothing. There is still a greenfield site donated by a very kind person years ago. The Liberals and Nationals will build it. We will also do stages 2 and 3 of the Wonthaggi Hospital. And we know that health is important, so we are going to incentivise our doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health workers to come out to the country so that they can see and understand and help supply our workforce needs. These are just a few of the things we will do.

I could go on about crime. The crime stats I think came out today. We know, sadly, in the beautiful region of Latrobe Valley those crime stats are alarming. We know that youth crime is still up. We know that car theft is up. I heard from one of my local constituents in Leongatha that their work vehicle was stolen in broad daylight only a few weeks ago. This should not happen. Very tragically we are seeing knife incidents with youths on the streets of the Latrobe Valley as well. We need to make this change. Victoria needs to make this change.

Let me just briefly, in the last few minutes, talk about roads. It is one of the primary concerns of all regional Victorians. Walk out the door, get in your car, drive down a highway and you will take your life into your own hands. Danny O'Brien and our Nationals and Liberals shadow cabinet have made the commitment to all Victorians of a 25 per cent uplift in road maintenance funding. We are going to eliminate 1 million potholes, and they are going to stay fixed. What we have seen over time is there is a bit of blue metal thrown in them and then the next week or after the next rain they are done. We need a better system. We need better contracts. We need better oversight. We will have Better Roads Victoria under a Wilson and O'Brien government. I am very excited about this.

This budget that we are debating today is from a tired government mired in debt and smeared with the corruption and waste of the Big Build – \$15 billion wasted. We need a fresh start. We need a fair share for regional Victoria, and that is exactly what you will get if you vote for the Liberals and the Nationals this 28 November.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:13): I also rise to speak on the budget take-note motion that was brought to this house in June. As we are about to finish up today in the 60th Parliament, I think it is really important that I address a number of issues as quickly as I possibly can. For a start, I think we need to remember that Victoria simply cannot continue on the path that it has been on all this time. It really does need a fresh start. It needs a transparent government. It needs a government that honours democracy. It needs a government of integrity. It needs a government that is going to show the people where their money is actually being spent.

I have had to listen to both Ms Richards in her speech that she gave in the other place and Mr Galea across the chamber speaking about the Cranbourne hospital. Let us talk about the Cranbourne Community Hospital. They are very upset because I have said it is not a real hospital. I remember in 2018 I was running for Cranbourne against Ms Richards. She won, of course, and has been the member for Cranbourne all this time. In that election she promised the community a hospital. A hospital will have an emergency department. A hospital will have beds. A hospital will have urgent care, and medical needs will be able to be met. A hospital will allow people to rock up and get medical attention.

The Cranbourne Community Hospital, which was an election promise in 2018 by Labor, is not a real hospital. If Labor made the effort to be that little bit more local, they would discover through their people and their MPs that it is not a real hospital. You cannot rock up there for urgent care. You cannot rock up there for a bed. You cannot rock up there for an emergency department. It does not have any of these things. The allied health services were up the road about 100 metres and perfectly happy there. In fact off the record I have been told by a number of these services and those that work in that area that they enjoyed working at the other facility more than the one they are currently at because it was

more fit for purpose. This so-called hospital that your taxes have paid for has been built in such a way that you could think it was a hospital if you were driving past, a little mini-hospital.

I might add that they talk about free parking. Let me tell you that area has always had free parking because there is a library that is there for the people, so of course it has free parking. And if they take away that free parking for this fake hospital, it will be an outrage. It is there for allied health services, and the allied health services had free parking. If you take away the free parking and make people pay, when they already had access to free parking for the allied health services in the first place, 100 metres up the road in a building that was fit for purpose, it does not make any sense. It is certainly not going to help them in the election.

All I say is that your taxpayers money has been used and a whole lot of promises have been broken or have not been delivered. They promised 800,000 houses would be delivered over 10 years. Have they been delivered? We are nowhere near that vicinity. We have a record waiting list of about 60,000 people waiting for social and public housing, people in great need. And that number continues to increase because domestic violence is continuing to increase because under this government we have had so many taxes brought in and we have so much congestion and so many potholes on our roads that it is very, very stressful for the average Victorian. People that are in high-mortgage areas are suffering, their families are breaking down and their home life is breaking down. And in those areas where there is high mortgage stress we have a situation where there is an increase in domestic upheaval. Some of that is resulting in the police coming out, and now we have a number of fathers locked up and unable to see their children. I just see a complete breakdown in the fabric of our society. We have an increase in youth crime, and some of that crime is potentially being facilitated by poor decisions being made by this government.

The budget does not really show transparency in where all the money is going. It is really interesting that an Institute of Public Affairs major report reveals that the state government and the Labor federal government in Australia have been intentionally eroding democracy by handing out hundreds of millions of dollars each year to fund a network of progressive-leaning advocacy bodies that engage in lobbying back to the government. In other words, your taxpayer money is going into so-called services that are then going to feed back into supporting the Labor government. These are not always genuine bodies that have been set up, and this is a major concern because that is really a poor use of taxpayers money. The average Victorian does not have to go very far before they hit potholes, before they drive past weeds or before they are in a situation where they are seeing their roads crumble before their eyes to see that the money that we have been told is going through the budget into our areas has not gone where it is supposed to go.

I have visited a number of the CFA brigades, and I know that some of them have trucks that are over 20 years old. In one case in Skye you can still sit on the back of its truck, and that is simply not good enough here in metropolitan Melbourne. I have been to Carrum. I know that they are waiting for their promised vehicles and a number of things that they have been promised. A number of these CFAs have been promised all sorts of things with these budgets, and they have all been delayed.

If we talk about schools, there are about 27 schools that were promised funding that has now been pushed forward into 2027, and that is the earliest that they may get that funding. These are schools in desperate need today. It is simply not good enough to say you are going to deliver things – to go to an election and promise the people that you are going to deliver X, Y and Z, like you did with the Cranbourne hospital, only to deliver a very expensive multimillion-dollar building on land that may no longer all be public land and that is also not a real hospital. It is the removal of the allied health services from up the road into a very expensive building. I do believe you have added a little bit of physio up there and some mental health services, but that is not a hospital. It is deceiving the public to say that you are using public funds for a particular purpose and then fixing it up by changing the definition of the word ‘hospital’ by adding the word ‘community’ in front of it, as if somehow that changes how you are using the money. You are going to still use the word ‘hospital’ so you can say, ‘Tick – I delivered on my promise.’ But you have simply brought to the people a very expensive

building for the allied health services, and it is not one that is fit for purpose or one that they even asked for. This deception has to stop. This use of public funds inappropriately must stop. The only way that it can stop, of course, is if we get rid of this government.

It is time for a fresh start. I have had the great pleasure of working alongside Jess Wilson. I am very, very excited that the fresh start team, the Liberals and Nationals going into government at the end of this year, will be able to deliver a 10-year plan with less crime in the community; lower costs and lower taxes; lower government fees and lower charges; more transparency and more accountability; more investment in health, in education and local infrastructure; and a 25 per cent fair share guarantee for regional Victoria. It will not be a situation like we have had – and we are all feeling it – where almost \$600 million goes off to Glasgow for a Commonwealth Games that the public were promised at the last election: ‘This is going to uplift regional Victoria. We’re going to build this and build that. You’re going to be benefiting from it.’ Well, they did not benefit from it at all. It was a huge broken promise to the public – a broken promise with taxpayers money – and in order to get out of the promise they sent off a whole lot of money. It was not just a little bit; \$589 million went to Scotland so that they could hold the Commonwealth Games that were supposed to bring the money into Victoria and all of the tourists and all the people that would have been able to do business. We were supposed to flourish. The communities were meant to flourish by having new sporting facilities and new accommodation. None of it was delivered – nothing. They got nothing but a broken promise and a whole lot of money that got sent off to another country for people to enjoy the Commonwealth Games. That is not responsible government; that is irresponsible government.

I have in this place mentioned a ton of roads that have not been fixed, a ton of roads that were promised in budget promises, a ton of things that we were told would happen, but all we find in Victoria are cost blowouts. We have at least \$15 billion of corruption in Big Build cost blowouts. What about the machete bins? What was that, \$13 million? That could have fixed a couple of schools – maybe several of them – or rebuilt them. I know for a fact that these schools that are being built have got a situation where they still may have roof problems. They have playground inadequacies. In many cases they do not even have enough classrooms. It is just not good enough to have the money going off to corruption in these Big Build projects with nobody able to see exactly where it is going because they have clamped down to prevent anyone from finding out. It is simply not good enough. Crime is out of control in this state. Taxes are out of control. Businesses are leaving in droves: ‘Anywhere but Melbourne,’ they say. ‘Anywhere but Victoria. We cannot do business in Victoria. There are too many taxes. There’s too much red tape. It’s too hard. It’s too difficult. We can’t make money here. We can’t employ people here easily. It’s too difficult and we’re getting out.’

The state is in a situation which we have never seen before. This level of decay is the full responsibility of a failed Labor government, and you will be failing yourselves and your state if you vote for this government again. You cannot vote for Labor and the Greens again – you simply cannot. We need a fresh start. We need a Victorian Liberal–National coalition government so that your taxpayer money will go exactly where it is supposed to go and you will be able to see it. You will see it in action and you will see the difference. We will have 3000 more police and 200 more PSOs so that you will be safe at your stations and out in the community. We will make sure that you can see where that money is going. It is not going to be easy, because we know that when we get into government it will probably be far worse than what we have been able to see from opposition. It is not going to be easy. It is going to take everybody standing shoulder to shoulder and being prepared to do the hard yards and the hard work, but we can fix this state. Enough is enough. It is time for a fresh start.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:27): I rise to speak on the budget take-note motion. When this budget was delivered back in May, the then Treasurer Jaclyn Symes began her speech with words that I think are definitely worth repeating. She said:

For a long time in this country there’s been this basic deal: that if you work hard, do the right thing and look after your family, you’ll have the opportunity to build a decent life ... You’ll have a safe home and a secure job, good schools and good health care when you need it.

Enver Erdogan interjected.

Renee HEATH: What was that? I think even he sees the comical aspect of this. We will go and reflect on this in a minute, so you just hold fire there. I will return to Minister Symes's words:

You'll be able to put enough food on the table.

Those were the then Treasurer's words. I love the sentiment of those words, I really do. There should be a basic deal in Victoria: if you work hard, if you obey the law, if you raise your family, contribute to the community and do the right thing, there should be an opportunity to build a decent life. I am going to spend the next few minutes maybe measuring the outcomes of the policies of this government against those ideals.

First of all, you should have the opportunity to build a decent life and to work hard to get ahead. This would have been a lot easier before the government either added or increased taxes 67 times in the state of Victoria. That would have been a whole heap easier. The reality is that in Victoria today there is more debt than New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland combined. Then she went on to say that you should be able to afford a home. Property prices across the state of Victoria have increased dramatically due to the ever-increasing property taxes and the higher building costs due to Labor's mismanagement of the construction sector and the planning systems. What we are going to do to address this – I completely agree with the then Treasurer's words; unfortunately, it is not happening in the state of Victoria – is restore the dream of home ownership. There is nothing better than seeing a young person work hard, save up and see their dreams fulfilled. What we are going to do is, first of all, scrap the emergency services levy or volunteer tax.

John Berger: What's going to pay for things, then?

Renee HEATH: A great question by Mr Berger.

Members interjecting.

Renee HEATH: I am not calling a point of order. I do not mind a little bit of interaction. It is good to have a bit of life in here, because half the time they sit there reading. Remember that time when Mr McIntosh picked up his speech and said 'Talking points for' and the name of the bill? So I do not mind when they get out of it and use a bit of their own brain for themselves; it is good.

What we are going to do is scrap the emergency services and volunteer tax. We are going to exempt first home owners from paying stamp duty up to \$1 million. We are going to deliver land tax relief and we are going to release land in growth areas. These are things that make a real difference. But going back to what the then Treasurer said, I am also going to talk about why all these pieces of the puzzle begin to come together. It has become almost impossible to own a house, to become a first home owner in Victoria, for many reasons. But I am going to reflect on what Mr Watson said when he was giving evidence about the corruption on the Big Build, the CFMEU and government worksites. You guys know this well, but I will remind you. These are the flow-on effects. He said that the flow-on effects reach ordinary Victorians renovating their homes, because tradies cannot compete with wages inflated by union standover tactics on government projects. He said that on 31 July this year. I agree that you should be able to work hard. You should be able to build a home. But Labor has not created the policy environments and the economic environment to actually be able to do that. We will.

The next thing the then Treasurer went on to say was that you should be able to feel safe in your home. We completely agree – you should be able to feel safe in your home. Yesterday the Victorian Auditor-General's Office handed down its *Preventing Youth Crime* report, and there were some pretty shocking details in there. This one is amazing. I thought, 'What a sorry state of affairs.' It says a total of 236,727 Victorians, or 3.3 per cent of the state's population, were victims of crime, committed by offenders of all ages, between June 2024 and June 2025 – 3.3 per cent in one year. If this is correct, that is absolutely shocking. This was 17 per cent more than the previous year. But imagine that – between June 2024 and June 2025 over 3 per cent of Victoria's population became victims of crime. What the heck? And this is something –

Members interjecting.

Renee HEATH: No, I am serious. That is a staggering number. It is so hard to believe, but it is there in black and white, done by an independent investigator, not a member of the Liberal or Nationals parties. That is just pure data – no propaganda. It is not what you guys do when you bring out the numbers and say, ‘Oh, it’s actually doing really well. Crime’s going down.’ No, things have gotten so bad for people in Victoria. That is why we are going to increase the police force by 3000.

John Berger interjected.

Renee HEATH: We are. We have done it before.

John Berger: Where are you going to get them from?

Renee HEATH: I just love these things. All right, guys, let us go back a decade. Here we go. We did it last time we were in government. We were only in government –

John Berger: How long ago was that?

Renee HEATH: Yes, great question, because we did it then and there are often a lot of questions. I am glad I have got this little folder of facts, because it is very handy when dealing with you boys. By November 2014, compared to when we came into government in November 2010, the net number of sworn full-time equivalent police in Victoria had increased by – do you want to have a guess?

John Berger: Well, you’re telling the story.

Renee HEATH: I am – by 1975. So not only did we set a target, we exceeded it by 275. Then there was a net addition of protective services officers of over a thousand, 1020 – 80 more than we promised. Not only did we set a target, we delivered it and we exceeded it. We did it then, and we will do it again. We are going to increase the force by 3000. We are going to put the PSOs back on stations that the Labor government took them off – 119 stations – in the middle of a crime crisis.

Enver Erdogan interjected.

Renee HEATH: Great question, Mr E. No, we are not taking them out of shopping centres, we are adding an extra 200. That is what we are going to do. We have done it before; we will do it again.

While the Treasurer says in the document that we are talking about today that you should feel safe in your home, crime has absolutely skyrocketed. It has gone through the roof. In that year alone over 3 per cent of the entire population were victims of crime. That is unacceptable. That is why, as well, we are going to reopen over 43 police stations; it was 43 at one stage. Premier Ben Carroll came out when he first took the job and said they would not close a single police station. Well, the next week he did close two: straight after, he did it. You sort of wince at it. You feel awkward, don’t you? You feel awkward because you are like, ‘Oh, why does he have to say these things in public and then go and do the opposite so soon?’ I almost feel rude. It is like I am playing a really good tennis player; I am playing Sam Groth, for instance. There is no way that I am even going to be able to be competitive: he is just going to smash me. Sometimes that is how it feels when the Premier says something so obvious and then demonstrates that it is not true. You should feel safe in your home.

We are going to be tough on offenders, but we are going to be smart on prevention. I am so excited about the plan for that. How are we going to do that? First of all, our adult time for adult crime policy is going to have teeth. We are going to have 25 crimes in that, unlike Labor’s version, which does not even have rape and does not have arson; it does not have these things in adult time for violent crime. And when it was tested, all charges were dropped. But we are going to make sure that has teeth.

We are also going to invest \$100 million into a safer communities plan, which will rehabilitate kids and give them off-ramps, something that I am so passionate about. There is nothing better than when you sit down with somebody who has turned their life around – who was walking down a path of destruction, yet they have turned it around. It is going to happen more and more in this state, because

at the moment, according to this – this is a staggering number, and there is a lot that could be said about this – there are almost 27,000 alleged youth offenders currently in Victoria, 26,977 alleged youth offenders. The fact that that is happening and the fact that when these kids start being disconnected from school and nothing is done and then they go and they commit petty crimes and nothing is done and it is like they just build up and trade up their crimes until all of a sudden you see these kids locked up is devastating. You have got to begin to let kids know that they are worthy of more than that, and that starts at school. That starts with giving families proper supports, and we are going to do that.

I wish I had more time, because some people in here will say, ‘Well, how are you going to do that?’ Well, you can read our plan online, if you like. We are going to stop the revolving door of bail. We are going to introduce one strike and that is it. There are certain crimes that, when committed, if those people are on bail – you break bail, you will go to jail. None of this ‘Oh, well, let’s consider it.’

Enver Erdogan: What if they’re later found to be innocent – the presumption of innocence?

Renee HEATH: No. There are certain things, because community safety comes first. I am very excited that Frank Schiefler in Hastings has worked so hard to secure a commitment to have a 24-hour police station there. I am so excited about that. But it is not about me, it is about the people there that he is representing. It is incredible, because it was not long ago, and I raised it in this place, that in Hastings there was a particular criminal that was locked up that was targeting kids with disabilities. I could not believe it. That was completely egregious to me. Parents, people, community members in Hastings, were saying, ‘This guy’s getting out, and we are scared.’ We are going to restore that feeling of community safety and security, and one of the things that we are going to do towards that – there is much more; you can look at our website, Mr Berger, if you like – is make sure that there is a police presence, that there is somewhere you can go where you will not rush there and meet a locked door. No, you can go there and you can find a place of safety.

The next thing that the then Treasurer went on to say is that you should be able to find a secure job. I agree you should, and that is exactly why we are going to invest in people. In Victoria skill shortages are holding us back. That is the truth. We will equip Victoria for the future with advanced jobs in manufacturing and technology. We are going to make sure that the best opportunities for training can be found here. We are going to back small business. In this state 350 small businesses close every single day. One of the messages, a very strong message, if we are blessed to take government will be ‘Victoria, we are back open for business.’

Another thing that the Treasurer then said was that you should have access to good schools, good hospitals and emergency services when you need them. I agree you should. Do you know what would have helped that? The government delivering on its promise to Warragul for the West Gippsland Hospital and not breaking its promise to Wonthaggi for the upgrades. There was recently a fascinating article entitled ‘Show us the money: minister called out on \$290M Wonthaggi Hospital promise’. It was so good. This is the subheading:

Two months out from the November 2022 ... election, former Premier Daniel Andrews pulled off a masterstroke in the campaign for the highly marginal electorate of Bass that almost certainly won ... the seat.

But then it goes on to say:

However, given the ... state of the government’s finances today, doubt is being cast over the ability of the Allan Government to deliver on that key election promise.

John Berger: Where are you reading that from?

Renee HEATH: The newspaper. You should read it some time. What we are going to do is restore – *(Time expired)*

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment Bill 2026***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (15:43): I would like to begin by acknowledging the broad support for these reforms in the chamber and the constructive way that we have been able to engage with many of you on these reforms. As we heard in the second-reading debate, the bill does two key things. Firstly, it gives IBAC follow-the-money powers so they can investigate suspected corrupt conduct by third-party and private subcontractors where there is a connection between alleged corrupt conduct and the performance of a public function funded by government. It does this by providing IBAC with powers comparable to those of the Victorian Auditor-General. Secondly, it amends the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ to capture a broader range of criminal conduct and other integrity-compromising behaviours by enabling IBAC to consider any offence or a serious disciplinary matter or a serious breach of a relevant code of conduct, including the ministerial code of conduct. These changes are in line with recommendations made in the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) report into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

I do want to acknowledge the chair of that committee the late Dr Tim Read and pay my deep respects to him, his family and the Greens community, who are grieving such a heavy loss. His work alongside the committee’s has been instrumental in shaping the reforms in front of us today, and I would like to place on the public record the government’s appreciation for his work and dedication to integrity reform.

This reform delivers on the Carroll Labor government’s commitment that integrity is not negotiable. It must be said that this is a fast-tracked reform. It does not replace the broader reforms that this government is undertaking in relation to strengthening the powers of IBAC and considering the IOC report as a whole.

I will go into a bit more detail about the specifics of the bill now. Under the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 conduct must meet certain requirements to constitute corrupt conduct, such as conduct that adversely affects the honest performance by a public officer or public body of their functions, the misuse of information or material acquired in the course of their performance or conduct that involves recklessly breaching public trust. Currently conduct must also constitute a relevant offence before IBAC can commence an investigation. ‘Relevant offence’ is defined narrowly in the IBAC act as an indictable offence or any of the common-law offences of attempting to pervert the course of justice, bribery of a public official, perverting the course of justice or misconduct in public office.

The current definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ limits IBAC from investigating other integrity-compromising behaviours that may not meet the threshold of a criminal offence. To address this issue and give full effect to the government’s commitment, the bill amends the IBAC act to provide that ‘corrupt conduct’ means conduct that would constitute any offence or a serious disciplinary matter. ‘Serious disciplinary matter’ is defined as serious misconduct or any other matter that constitutes or may constitute grounds for termination of employment, appointment or engagement or a significant employment, appointment or contractual penalty or a serious contravention of the code of conduct set out in part 3 of the Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 or the Model Councillor Code of Conduct within the meaning of the Local Government Act 2020 or a code of conduct that applies to a responsible minister of the Crown or a parliamentary secretary.

The bill also gives IBAC follow-the-money powers. These changes provide IBAC with powers comparable to those of the Victorian Auditor-General in order to investigate corrupt conduct by third-party and private subcontractors where there is a connection between the alleged corrupt conduct and the performance of public functions funded by government. To do this the bill will amend the definitions of 'public body' and 'public officer' in the IBAC act to include reference to associated entities, drawing on the definitions in the Audit Act 1994. This is in line with the IOC report recommendation. The bill seeks to ensure that IBAC's jurisdiction is enlivened where there is conduct by an associated entity in the performance of a public function on behalf of a state public officer or body with a nexus or connection between the suspected corrupt conduct and the expenditure or use of those public funds or the publicly funded project function or undertaking.

Alongside the broad support for this bill, we have also heard about a number of concerns, which I am sure we will go into detail about in the committee stage, but there has been a breadth of comments as well. I want to touch on Mr Limbrick's concerns that these reforms could make IBAC into a default HR manager. That is not the intent of this reform. It is vital that IBAC maintains its focus on serious or systemic corruption. It is this provision at section 15A of the principal act that ensures that IBAC must have regard to matters that warrant their attention rather than matters that may be dealt with by a relevant employer or workplace standards committee.

Regarding issues of police misconduct – I am sure that we will also discuss this in committee – our government is committed to ensuring that our police oversight system is robust, accountable and meets the needs of the community. I do acknowledge that that has not always been the case. While this bill does not deal with those issues, we continue to work through recommendations related to police oversight in line with the government's response to the IOC report on IBAC's legislative framework that was tabled in Parliament earlier this year.

There are a number of other issues that have been raised that the government is responding to through three house amendments, which I will be moving, and I ask that those house amendments in my name be now circulated. Firstly, in respect to public hearings, we will be moving an amendment to remove the extraordinary circumstances test for IBAC to hold public examinations. Further, the amendment will provide that a decision to hold a public examination under section 117(1) must be made by both the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner. While IBAC will still be required to satisfy several other requirements in making their decision to hold public hearings, this will ensure that there is a better balance in IBAC's decision-making when it comes to public hearings. This responds directly to amendments moved by the opposition and the Greens, and the government believes that this strikes the right balance for accountability and transparency.

Secondly, in respect of the timeliness measures for reporting, we are moving amendments to introduce statutory timeline measures to facilitate timely reporting of IBAC investigations. Section 162 of the IBAC act sets out the legal requirements IBAC must follow before transmitting a special report to Parliament for tabling. A proposed new clause will amend section 162 to provide that a person or body has 20 business days to respond to adverse material. The person or body may, within 14 business days of receiving the material or notification from IBAC, request an extension. It is intended that IBAC will have discretion to grant any such extension and be able to determine the length of the extension, having regard to the individual circumstances of each matter. This provision responds to the concerns of many in this chamber and indeed many in the Victorian community.

Finally, we are proposing to amend the bill's transitional provisions to clarify the government's intended operation of the transitional provisions. There has been a lot of commentary about what these transitional provisions do or do not do. Whilst it is our government's strong belief that these provisions, which we have fast-tracked to deliver in a number of weeks, would effectively enable IBAC to undertake the investigations many in this chamber are referring to, the whole point of this reform is to improve accountability and integrity. As such, we have worked collaboratively with many in this chamber to clarify our intent so that Victorians can have confidence in these important reforms.

The government's house amendments will mean that the IBAC act, as amended by the bill, will apply to and in respect of any and all conduct which occurred before, on or after the commencement day. This means the changes to the definition of 'corrupt conduct' and the inclusion of associated entities will apply to future complaints and notifications regarding conduct that occurred solely or partly before the commencement day, complaints and notifications IBAC has already received, IBAC investigations on foot and matters that were previously the subject of a complaint or notification that IBAC had dismissed, referred or investigated. The previously proposed new section 200(2) will be removed by the house amendments as it is no longer needed. The transitional provisions will more clearly apply to past conduct, irrespective of how IBAC has previously dealt with it, so there is no need to make reference to the course of conduct, and the past conduct is taken to have occurred after the commencement day. IBAC will be able to determine to investigate any complaint or notification before the commencement day that it had dismissed, referred to a person or body other than the Ombudsman, or referred to the Ombudsman where the Ombudsman had dismissed it or had determined not to investigate it. Similar to proposed new section 200(3), the government's house amendment will still provide clarification that the transitional provisions do not of themselves require IBAC to reopen a complaint or notification IBAC had previously dismissed or referred to an investigation or to investigate a further complaint or notification to the IBAC about conduct that is the same or substantially similar to conduct that was the subject of a previous complaint, notification or completed investigation.

These provisions are not to be read in isolation. The existing settings in the IBAC act will continue to apply. They provide that IBAC must be certain of established criteria before determining to conduct an investigation into conduct that occurred entirely before the bill commenced. For example, IBAC must not conduct an investigation in relation to conduct which occurred entirely between the commencement of the Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment (A Stronger System) Act 2016 and the commencement of this bill if the complaint or notification lacks substance or credibility, the conduct occurred at too remote a time to justify investigation or the complaint or notification was not made genuinely or was made primarily for a mischievous purpose.

The government also recognises that there have been concerns raised about the provision of cabinet in confidence within the IBAC act. While we acknowledge that there are legitimate concerns about this, the government believes that this reform cannot be rushed. It is why the government will establish an expert panel by the end of October made up of organisations including the Centre for Public Integrity. The expert panel will be tasked with considering and consulting on options compatible with the IBAC act framework for providing IBAC with access to cabinet-in-confidence information relevant to its investigations, subject to safeguards, including consideration of relevant provisions in the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022. This is in addition to our commitment to deliver broader reform to the IBAC act and progress the outstanding recommendations of the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report into the adequacy of IBAC's legislation following further consideration by the expert reference group. This will include amending the IBAC act to empower IBAC to make findings of corrupt conduct and associated reforms and changes to their investigatory powers. This panel will work side by side with the ERG to deliver its recommendations no later than May 2027, which will be made public. I understand that a number of these matters will be raised in the committee stage, so I will leave my remarks there, but I do commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Instruction to committee

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea) (15:56): The President has considered the amendments on sheet IS54C circulated by Minister Stitt. In his view, amendment 1 is not within the scope of the bill. In addition, amendments 1 to 4 and 6 on sheet EM87C circulated by Mr Mulholland

and amendments 3 to 6 on sheet SMA101C circulated by Dr Mansfield are also not in scope. Therefore introduction motions pursuant to standing order 14.11 are required.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (15:57): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider new clauses to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 in relation to the holding of public examinations and timely reporting.

Motion agreed to.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:57): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider new clauses to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 in relation to privilege, the holding of public examinations and timely reporting.

Motion agreed to.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:58): I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider new clauses to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 in relation to appointments, the holding of public examinations, reporting and the IBAC's annual plan.

Motion agreed to.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (15:59)

Evan MULHOLLAND: Minister, what government advice has changed since March this year when the government voted down a bill that sought to give IBAC similar follow-the-money powers?

Ingrid STITT: Clearly, Mr Mulholland, the government has been carefully considering these matters. The Premier has made it clear that as well as calling a royal commission in response to the allegations that have been publicly aired about the construction industry, we have also been considering carefully the work of the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) of Parliament, and we had already been working on the reforms through the expert reference group, but we have determined, through the normal policy determination processes of cabinet, to bring forward a number of the important elements of that work.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Why are former premiers Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan, as well as former ministers, allowed to not cooperate with IBAC via public interest immunity?

Ingrid STITT: I do not accept the characterisation contained in your question. There are house amendments in respect to these matters, which we will no doubt deal with in due course in the committee stage today and into tonight. But I have been clear in my second-reading summing-up on the basis for the government bringing those amendments.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I just want to get to the sort of advice and thresholds on IBAC reopening an investigation, given amendments. If new and credible evidence were to emerge after IBAC had dismissed or referred a matter, why should IBAC be legally prevented from reconsidering that matter in the future?

Ingrid STITT: I have gone through the elements of the house amendment and transitional provisions, but the short answer is: they will not.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 and 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (16:03)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

1. Clause 4, line 11, before “In” insert “(1)”.
2. Clause 4, page 4, after line 20 insert –
 - ‘(2) After section 3(4) of the Principal Act **insert** –
 - “(5) The Minister must ensure that a copy of a code of conduct referred to in paragraph (c)(iii) of the definition of *serious disciplinary matter* in subsection (1) is published on an appropriate government Internet site.”’.

This is a straightforward amendment regarding the ministerial code of conduct. As we are all aware, the bill proposes to expand the definition of ‘corrupt conduct’ to include any conduct in breach of codes of conduct applicable to ministers and parliamentary secretaries. This amendment strengthens the ability of members of the public to make a complaint to IBAC around alleged breaches of the ministerial code under the new definition by making sure a copy of the code is publicly available. It is only relatively recently that Victoria’s ministerial code of conduct has been made public, and there is no guarantee a future government will continue to do this. The amendment is also consistent with several IBAC recommendations and findings, including Operation Richmond and Operation Watts.

Ingrid STITT: The government will be supporting Dr Mansfield’s amendment, which will require that the government publish a copy of the ministerial code of conduct online. And I thank the Greens and the other members of the crossbench for the collaborative way that they have engaged with us on this bill. These amendments merely codify a practice that was started by our Labor government, and we are certainly happy to support this to ensure that any future government remains equally as transparent with the Victorian community.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals will not oppose this particular amendment, but I want to ask Dr Mansfield about the purpose of this amendment, given the ministerial code of conduct is widely available online already.

Sarah MANSFIELD: As I explained, it has been published, I suppose, by convention. This is to codify that, to make sure that all future governments continue to make that publicly available. There currently is not a legislative requirement for them to do so. They have chosen to do so. We think it is important that that is a requirement.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

New clause 4A (16:05)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 4 –
 - “4A Cabinet confidentiality**
 - Sections 98(5) and 143(5) of the Principal Act are **repealed**.”.

I wanted to move an amendment on cabinet confidentiality. This will enable IBAC, if it so chooses, to be in possession of or deal with cabinet documents as part of its ongoing investigations should they be of interest to IBAC.

Ingrid STITT: The government will not be supporting Mr Mulholland’s amendment. As I indicated in my second-reading summing-up, I do recognise the concerns that this amendment is seeking to address, despite some of the motives. However, the government does not support the hasty making of policy in regard to this, because it could have significant and unintended consequences. It is why we will be taking a considered, measured approach to the issue. It is why the government will establish an expert panel by the end of October made up of organisations including the Centre for Public Integrity. The expert panel will be tasked with considering and consulting on options compatible with the IBAC act framework for providing IBAC access to cabinet-in-confidence

information relevant to its investigations, subject to safeguards, including consideration of relevant provisions of the National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022. We will not be supporting this amendment.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I would like to thank Mr Mulholland for introducing this amendment in the chamber and Mr Newbury in the other place for highlighting this really important issue. By the same token, I hope Mr Mulholland appreciates that our office did a lot of work with Mr Newbury and the Liberals, including hosting an expert policy round table, to take an earlier attempt at this amendment that Mr Newbury introduced in the other place and strengthen it and improve it, which resulted in this updated Liberal amendment. There has been a lot of talk this week in honour of Tim Read and about how much politicians from all sides work together in good faith behind the scenes to try and deliver outcomes for the good of Victorians. I think we would all acknowledge that Tim was the master at this, but I think we did him proud this week by trying to work together. We do not always see that, but there was a genuine attempt to work together behind the scenes here to put Victorians' interests above our own.

There is no doubt that the Westminster convention of cabinet in confidence has significant benefits for democracy and public policy decision-making. We want our public servants to give frank and fearless advice to the executive. We want the executive to frankly and fearlessly examine all options at the cabinet table. You only have to look at the Commonwealth Games fiasco or the process of developing the Suburban Rail Loop to see what happens when frank and fearless advice and robust cabinet discussion are bypassed or ignored. But the Greens also strongly believe that cabinet in confidence, public interest immunity and executive privilege have been grossly abused by all governments to shield themselves from proper scrutiny and oversight, especially this state Labor government. Reform in this area is vital.

Ultimately, in regard to IBAC, we need to find a balance where the commission has effective oversight of the executive, including access to all cabinet-in-confidence materials but where frank and fearless advice can continue to be given and debated. There are various models where this already occurs – the NACC federally and ICAC in New South Wales are notable examples. Victoria's IBAC needs to adopt a similar model – we agree with that – and I know the Ombudsman is keen for something similar too. But despite the huge amount of work that my office and others have put into helping the Liberals develop and improve these complex amendments, ultimately I think we just ran out of time to come up with something that was equivalent to the other jurisdictions. The Greens will continue to push all governments to work and will work around the clock with all sides of politics, as we have been trying to this week, to enact these provisions. We genuinely support the intent of this but we cannot support this amendment in good faith the way it has currently been drafted as we believe it will not achieve either better public policy or better executive accountability in its current form.

David LIMBRICK: I actually have similar feelings to Dr Mansfield on this. I do think that there is reform needed in this area, and I think that this is a very complex area. I am concerned – and I thank Mr Mulholland for bringing this amendment and this issue up – but I feel that the way that this is drafted could have serious consequences. I think we do need to look at other models like the NACC or other models throughout other jurisdictions. I just feel that this is too rushed, and I do not feel that this is actually going to achieve what we hope it will achieve. Therefore, with some reluctance, I will not be supporting this either.

Council divided on new clause:

Ayes (14): Melina Bath, Gaele 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 (23): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David

Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

New clause negatived.

Clauses 5 and 6 agreed to.

New clause 6A (16:18)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I move:

2. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 6 –

‘6A Determination of claim

- (1) After section 59N(6) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(7) It is the intention of the Parliament that an application under section 59M be determined with as much speed as the requirements of this Act and the proper consideration of the application permit.”.

- (2) After section 101(6) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(7) It is the intention of the Parliament that an application under section 100 be determined with as much speed as the requirements of this Act and the proper consideration of the application permit.”.

- (3) After section 148(8) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(9) It is the intention of the Parliament that an application under section 147 be determined with as much speed as the requirements of this Act and the proper consideration of the application permit.”.

This is one on the timely determination of privilege applications, as discussed at great length in this chamber, including in a private members bill moved by my colleague –

David Davis interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Two private members bills moved by my colleague Mr Davis. This is to insert a timely reporting requirement for reports to stop an Operation Richmond–style delay, as per Mr Davis’s two private members bills, including one moved as recently as June, which were opposed by the Labor Party.

Ingrid STITT: The government does not support Mr Mulholland’s amendment. It is a matter for the Supreme Court to determine when to schedule and hear individual matters. It is not appropriate for them to be directed by Parliament.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The Greens will not be supporting this amendment. We feel that this does not add anything to some of the provisions that are included in some of the other amendments. We think they deal with this issue adequately. Additionally, we have had advice from the Centre for Public Integrity that this would not necessarily do anything additional and there could be some questions about constitutionality.

David Davis interjected.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes, we supported this previously in the context of a private members bill. There are other amendments that have been put forward, including the house amendments, that I think address the issue that is being attempted to be covered by this amendment.

Council divided on new clause:

Ayes (16): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, 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 (21): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

New clause negated.

New clauses 6A and 6B (16:24)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

3. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 6 –

‘6A Appointment of Commissioner

After section 20(3) of the Principal Act **insert** –

- “(4) Before making a recommendation under this section, the Minister must –
- (a) ensure that the role was publicly advertised; and
 - (b) be satisfied that the person recommended for appointment has been assessed as suitable for appointment by a panel established under subsection (5).
- (5) If it is necessary to appoint a person to the office of Commissioner, the Minister must establish a panel to consider the suitability of persons for appointment.
- (6) The regulations may prescribe any matters necessary or convenient for the establishment and operation of panels, including –
- (a) the composition of panels; and
 - (b) the procedure of panels; and
 - (c) the methodology to be used by panels assessing persons for appointment; and
 - (d) the provision of assistance by the Minister’s Department to panels, including secretariat services and clerical assistance.”.

6B Deputy Commissioner

For section 23(3) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

- “(3) Before making a recommendation under this section, the Minister must –
- (a) ensure that the role was publicly advertised; and
 - (b) obtain the concurrence of the Commissioner.”.

This amendment is strengthening the appointment process of the Commissioner. There are essentially three main ways that a government can restrict an anti-corruption commission’s ability to fight corruption. Firstly, it can restrict its jurisdictional powers, and I spoke in my substantive contribution about how both major parties have done this to IBAC for decades. Secondly, it can restrict its funding, and I will talk about this in my next amendment. And finally, it can choose to appoint commissioners and leaders to the commission who are partisan or who do not have sufficient experience or authority to effectively investigate corruption.

I want to stress the point that I do not believe that any Victorian government, Liberal or Labor, has to date appointed commissioners to IBAC that fit any of the above criteria. I have enormous respect for all IBAC commissioners and their work past and present. The amendment requires that vacant positions of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner are open and publicly advertised, something that I believe this government has done in practice, but a future government may not. It also provides that with the appointment of the Commissioner of IBAC the minister must establish a selection committee to consider the suitability of the appointment. Given the extraordinary powers that the IBAC Commissioner has, including over a government and executive that may have appointed them, we believe that the process for appointing the Commissioner needs to be strengthened. These amendments are in line with the Commonwealth’s Administrative Review Tribunal appointments, which were strengthened a few years ago and are, once again, strongly supported by the Centre for Public Integrity.

Ingrid STITT: The government will be supporting Dr Mansfield's amendment. Similarly, this is important. It is a previous amendment, but it codifies an existing practice of our government. We have always publicly advertised and established a panel for the recruitment of Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners and have no plans to change that process. On that basis, we are very happy to support Dr Mansfield's amendment to codify this.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Dr Mansfield, are you suggesting that any past Commissioner has been chosen due to political biases or lack of intellect or capacity to hold the role or investigate corruption?

Sarah MANSFIELD: As I said, no, we do not believe that has been the case at all; this is about safeguarding future appointments from any government that may make, for example, a partisan appointment or be perceived to have made a partisan appointment. This is about ensuring some faith and trust in the process for the public but also for all sides and all parties in this place.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I do not see this amendment as necessary at all. I do not believe any future government would commit any of the allegations you are putting about political appointments or lack of capacity in any Commissioner that may be selected by a future government. I think we are getting into the weeds of establishing a star chamber for standard government appointments. We will not be supporting this amendment, but we will not be dividing.

New clauses agreed to.

New clause 6A (16:28)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Payne, I invite you to move your amendment 1, which inserts new clause 6A.

Rachel PAYNE: I have also got a few questions that I would like to ask the minister. I wanted to let the chamber know, because I might take 5 or 10 minutes, if that is okay. I wanted to ask about unintended consequences of increasing IBAC's anti-corruption remit and leaving section 15(1A) unchanged or unrepealed. In increasing IBAC's anti-corruption powers and statutory remit in line with the parliamentary Integrity and Oversight Committee's recommendations without making changes to other definitions and provisions in line with the PIOC's other recommendations, including changes to section 15(1A) and the definitions relevant to police oversight, it is my understanding that there could well be unintended adverse consequences. What does the government intend to do to mitigate these inevitable adverse consequences and ensure that IBAC can, within its budgetary constraints, investigate police criminality, serious misconduct and systemic failures?

Ingrid STITT: As you know, the IOC, which you are on, made eight recommendations solely related to IBAC's police misconduct jurisdiction. Two of those were directed to IBAC and the rest to the government. These recommendations have been placed under review and referred to the expert reference group for advice on the feasibility of their implementation. The government remains committed to ensuring that Victoria's police oversight system is robust and accountable and meets the needs of the community, but we also understand that there is strong community interest in an effective police oversight system, as evidenced by the submissions and recommendations from recent inquiries, reviews and commissions into the police oversight system. The government has committed to undertaking further consultation on these reforms, and I am committed to ensuring the views of complainants and victims of police misconduct are heard in that process. The expert reference group is reporting back with their advice to government by May 2027 in relation to these matters, after which the government will seek to introduce a second tranche of reforms to the Parliament.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you, Minister, for that very detailed response; I appreciate that. Just in regard to statutory NDAs, in evidence that we heard in the IOC last year victim-survivors and also Integrity Oversight Victoria (IOV) noted that the patchwork of secrecy notices issued by IBAC under the IBAC act and the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012 causes confusion even to legal practitioners, with victim-survivors describing them as statutory NDAs silencing them from telling their stories and

causing fear of prosecutions if they speak out about their stories but in practice not protecting them from information leaks within Victoria Police. Given the review of information simplifications and those amendments themselves as recommended by the IOC are in effect low-hanging fruit and easy to achieve, is there any reason why the government is not implementing the IOC recommendations now?

Ingrid STITT: As you know, the main intent of this bill was to do two key things: provide IBAC with follow-the-money powers and broaden their jurisdiction. In the timeframe available since we took this position forward as legislation it has just not been possible to respond to every recommendation contained in the IOC report. However, as I mentioned, we do remain committed to this important work and expect the advice back from the expert reference group for the second tranche of reform in May next year.

Rachel PAYNE: Just in regard to police oversight and most recently as part of the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recommendations about standalone, independent police oversight or a police oversight body, when will the IOC recommendations and those of Yoorrook be adopted? Is this part of what is going to be considered in that May 2027 tranche?

Ingrid STITT: As I indicated, there are a number of reviews that go to these matters, including indeed the Yoorrook Justice Commission's report. Also, a number of the IOC recommendations are under review as part of that process. So there are a number of different reports from a number of different bodies that need to be considered in totality when it comes to coming up with the best advice about the future police oversight regime.

Rachel PAYNE: I want to talk about IBAC leaks. People involved in IBAC investigations and reviews as targets or as witnesses – there have been accusations made that IBAC or its staff or ex-staffers have leaked information to the press and elsewhere. With IBAC's anti-corruption remit and powers being extended, will Integrity Oversight Victoria also receive extended powers or funding to ensure confidence in IBAC and that allegations of leaked information are followed through?

Ingrid STITT: We do know obviously that there is an interconnected oversight system here in Victoria, and we know that there can be flow-on implications from one agency to the next, including IOV. But IOV have got a very important oversight role. I just want to clarify whether your question was in relation to whether this bill will change anything in respect to their responsibilities.

Rachel PAYNE: For clarification purposes, I think specifically what I am asking is: will Integrity Oversight Victoria receive any extension of powers in consideration of the extension of powers that we are legislating today?

Ingrid STITT: Not an extension of powers per se, but obviously if the remit of IBAC is being broadened, then that in itself means that it is potentially the case that there will be impacts on IOV's resourcing. They are a member of the expert reference group, so they are involved in this work. I am very mindful that all our integrity agencies are fiercely budget independent, so they do not deal with their line minister when it comes to budget processes – they deal directly with the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Treasurer. I have got no announcements to make today in the chamber, but there is obviously an important role that IOV plays in ensuring our integrity agencies are accountable. That is absolutely vital, particularly as we are so significantly widening the jurisdiction of IBAC.

Rachel PAYNE: I have got one last question, and then I will move my amendment and speak to that. Several stakeholders that I have worked with, in particular around police oversight, have expressed concern around police being on the expert reference group. Obviously the government established the expert reference group to respond to the IOC report, and from my understanding the expert group includes IBAC, the Victorian Ombudsman, Integrity Oversight Victoria and Victoria Police. There is concern there if police are investigating police. But there is a push to establish a framework for independent oversight if police are part of that conversation. What measures will be

put in place to prevent conflicts of interests and ensure that stakeholder voices are consulted on equal footing, including community legal centres and Aboriginal organisations?

Ingrid STITT: Yes, you are right. The expert reference group is made up of the heads of our integrity agencies – IBAC, the IOV, the Victorian Ombudsman – and also Victoria Police. As part of our government’s response, particularly in relation to matters of police oversight, the government has committed to undertaking further consultation on these reforms, and I am committed to ensuring the views of complainants and victims of police misconduct are heard in that process.

Rachel PAYNE: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 6 –

“6A Objects of Act and functions of the IBAC

Sections 8(aa) and 15(1A) and (1B) of the Principal Act are **repealed**.”.

I will just briefly speak to this. My amendment seeks to repeal sections 8(aa) and 15(1A) and (1B) of the IBAC act. Section 15(1A) requires IBAC to prioritise anti-corruption matters above all else. The intent of this amendment is that by removing this provision it is necessary to address the unintended consequences and restore the Commissioner’s discretion and ensure that IBAC can properly prioritise serious police misconduct and fulfil its independent oversight responsibilities. This is something that was raised in the IOC. It is something that was recommended there. I do note the government have indicated that there is further work being done in this space, but I would still like to move the amendment.

Ingrid STITT: While the government will not be supporting Ms Payne’s amendment, I do want to place some comments on the record. I do understand the intent of this amendment is to make improvements to the way that IBAC performs its police oversight functions, and I want to acknowledge Ms Payne’s advocacy for the needs of complainants and victims of police misconduct. I note that this amendment differs slightly from the recommendation of the IOC report, which Ms Payne was involved in, and while the government acknowledges the importance of boosting the police oversight function of IBAC, the government does not support the amendment in this form.

At a time when we are so significantly expanding the breadth and matters that IBAC will have the power to investigate, it is vital that we retain their focus on serious or systemic matters. I do want to say that there is a breadth of work already underway as the government responds to the IOC report into the adequacy of IBAC’s legislative framework, including, as we have been discussing, the establishment of the expert reference group made up of our integrity agency heads, who are considering the issues and the government’s response to this work. There are a number of important recommendations relating to police oversight, and I note many of these are not just limited to this particular report, as we have been discussing.

As we consider further reforms to IBAC’s legislative framework as part of the second tranche of reform for mid next year, we will continue to review the recommendations related to IBAC’s police oversight functions and how we can better meet the needs of complainants and victims of police misconduct. The government acknowledges that further consultation is required in relation to these recommendations, noting the differing views of many stakeholders, including concerns noted by Aboriginal Victorians and marginalised and vulnerable groups, and this work will also be considered by the expert reference group. I look forward to further engagement as part of this work.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this amendment. We believe that corruption matters are important for IBAC’s remit and prioritisation.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The Greens support the intent of this amendment that goes to the heart of one of the major issues with IBAC: its dual role between investigating police misconduct and public misconduct. The Greens strongly believe that we need an independent, well-resourced, dedicated police ombudsman to solve this issue. We have some concerns that the way this amendment is drafted

may lessen the effectiveness of the anti-corruption commission to combat both serious and systemic corrupt conduct and serious and systemic police misconduct. But we support the intent of this amendment, and so we will be supporting it today.

New clause negated; clause 7 agreed to.

New clauses 7A and 7B (16:44)

Ingrid STITT: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 7 –

‘7A Examinations generally to be held in private

- (1) In section 32 of the Principal Act –

- (a) in subsection (1), after “any other Act” **insert** “, other than the power to decide to hold an examination in public”;
- (b) in subsection (2) **omit** “117(1).”.

- (2) Section 117(1)(a) of the Principal Act is **repealed**.

- (3) After section 117(3) of the Principal Act **insert** –

“(3AA) Despite anything to the contrary in this Act, the IBAC is to be constituted for the purpose of making a decision to hold an examination in public by –

- (a) the Commissioner and at least one Deputy Commissioner; or
- (b) the Commissioner, if there are no Deputy Commissioners.

(3AAB) A Deputy Commissioner referred to in subsection (3AA) must be an Australian lawyer unless there are no Deputy Commissioners who are Australian lawyers.”.

7B Special reports

For section 162(2) and (3) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

“(2) If the IBAC intends to include in a report under this section adverse findings about a public body –

- (a) the IBAC must give the relevant principal officer of the public body an opportunity to respond to the adverse material within 20 business days or the extended period determined by the IBAC under subsection (3A); and
- (b) if the relevant principal officer responds within the period referred to in paragraph (a), the IBAC must fairly set out each element of the response in its report.

- (3) If the IBAC intends to include in a report under this section a comment or opinion which is adverse to any person –

- (a) the IBAC must give the person an opportunity to respond to the adverse material within 20 business days or the extended period determined by the IBAC under subsection (3A); and
- (b) if the person responds within the period referred to in paragraph (a), the IBAC must fairly set out each element of the response in its report.

- (3A) If a relevant principal officer or a person makes a written request to the IBAC within 14 business days after the day on which the IBAC first gives the relevant principal officer or person the opportunity to respond to adverse material under subsection (2) or (3), the IBAC may extend the period for the relevant principal officer or person to respond to the adverse material for a period determined by the IBAC.”.

This amendment removes the extraordinary circumstances test for IBAC to hold public examinations. The amendment will provide that a decision to hold a public examination must be made by both the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner. It is the intention of the government that IBAC must satisfy the requirements for a Commissioner and a Deputy Commissioner who is an Australian lawyer to make this decision with only exceptional circumstances. That would mean this decision is held by the Commissioner alone. IBAC will still be required to satisfy several other requirements in making their decision to hold public hearings, and this change will ensure that there is a better balance in

IBAC's decision-making when it comes to public hearings. This responds directly to amendments moved by the opposition and the Greens, and we believe this strikes the right balance for accountability and transparency. There is also a timely tabling of amendments, which will also introduce statutory timeliness measures to facilitate timely reporting of IBAC investigations. It will provide that a person or body has 20 business days to respond to adverse material. They may, within 14 days of receiving the material or notification from IBAC, request an extension. IBAC will have discretion to grant such an extension having regard to the individual circumstances of each matter. This provision responds to the concerns of many in the community and in this chamber. In moving this amendment I want to put on the record that it is the intention of this provision to avoid unreasonable delays for IBAC to table special reports. However, we note there is complexity in trying to legislate for procedural fairness, and the time an individual should be given to respond will ultimately depend on the circumstances.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals will be supporting this amendment as it is very similar to the opposition's amendment. I want to acknowledge the work of the government in coming up with this amendment and also the work of the Shadow Attorney-General Mr Newbury on coming up with an amendment but also working with the government and the Greens. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Greens on this. As I have not had an opportunity, I want to acknowledge the work of the late Tim Read and all the work that he did in the integrity space. I think he went a long way to formulating the Greens' policy positions in this space. I look to the approach of a federal Greens member Max Chandler-Mather. I remember him lining up with union bosses at a particular protest and seeing how that worked out for him. I am thankful for the work of Tim Read. The Greens in this state honestly have taken a very, very sensible approach to integrity issues. It has been quite a productive and I would say a positive experience working with both the Greens and the government in this space to actually get some outcomes and force some change that has been needed in this state for some time.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The Greens will of course be supporting this amendment. I just want to acknowledge the collaborative work across all parties. I think we have all got amendments that address this. I will note that historically there has been opposition to public hearings from both major parties. The Liberals did change their mind earlier this year on it. They had previously voted against removing the exceptional circumstances in the IOC report. But I think it shows that sometimes these sorts of changes take time and banging on about the same thing again and again – maybe it is just political circumstances. I am not sure what has brought on the changes, but we are here now, which is good. It looks like it is set to pass. I also appreciate that the government in its house amendment has chosen to adopt the Greens' additional clause requiring two IBAC commissioners to approve a public hearing. We think this is really important. It is an extra safeguard. Again, it is about building some confidence in that system. It is in line with the New South Wales ICAC and is strongly supported by the Centre for Public Integrity. Also, we will be supporting the timely reporting aspects of this amendment. I give credit to the opposition, who advocated for this IBAC reform in their previous bill. We have always supported this change to IBAC's reporting regime, so we will be supporting all aspects of this house amendment that has been put forward today. I think it is an excellent example of how we can work together to get a decent outcome.

New clauses agreed to.

New clause 7D (16:51)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

6. Insert the following New Clause before clause 8 –

'7D Annual plan

- (1) In section 168(1)(a) of the Principal Act, after "that financial year" **insert** "and including a request for funding for that financial year".

(2) For section 168(4) of the Principal Act **substitute** –

“(4) In the annual plan for a financial year, the IBAC must –

- (a) indicate the nature of any changes suggested by the Parliamentary Committee under subsection (2)(b) that the IBAC has not adopted; and
- (b) include an explanation for any difference between the funding requested in the draft annual plan and the actual funding provided to the IBAC in the annual appropriation Acts for that financial year.”.

As I have said previously, even where IBAC is given strong jurisdictional powers and has strong and experienced leadership, the government of the day can still effectively restrain the commission’s ability to fight corruption by cutting its funding. For this reason, the Greens have a very strong position that our integrity agency should have a means of funding that is determined independently of the government – as, for example, the salaries of MPs are. Earlier this year IBAC, the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office and the Ombudsman put forward a compromise to fully independent funding in a paper entitled *Advancing Budget Transparency for Victoria’s Core Integrity Agencies*. This amendment seeks to implement one of the recommendations from that report in regard to IBAC. Currently IBAC shares with the Integrity and Oversight Committee a draft of its annual plan laying out its operational strategy and goals for the next 12 months, but it cannot share with the committee its budget submissions or funding requests, which are considered cabinet in confidence. It is vitally important that Parliament has some oversight of whether or not the funding that IBAC has received in the state budget meets what it considers it needs to achieve its strategic goals. If its funding is insufficient, we should know what functions or goals IBAC have had to cut due to insufficient funding. The Greens amendment provides this parliamentary oversight and public transparency in terms of IBAC’s funding in that IBAC will be required to share its funding requests with government and the IOC prior to the state budget and it will be able to provide comment if the actual funding it receives falls short of this amount.

Ingrid STITT: I thank Dr Mansfield for bringing this amendment. The government will be supporting it. We do note that there are a number of budgetary measures currently being considered by the government in response to the IOC report into the budget adequacy of our integrity agencies. However, the government believes that this is an important transparency and accountability measure for both IBAC and the government of the day, and we will be supporting Dr Mansfield’s amendment.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I thank Dr Mansfield for bringing this amendment to the chamber. The Liberals and Nationals will not be opposing this amendment. This is something that we have spoken to for some time. I do think that the joint report that was put together by our integrity agencies is well worth a read. It is clearly something that they have been quite frustrated with over a long period of time.

New clause agreed to.

Clause 8 (16:55)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Dr Mansfield, are you withdrawing your amendment 7?

Sarah MANSFIELD: Yes. As with the public hearings one, the government has a house amendment that effectively mirrors the Greens amendment. We thank the government for their constructive collaboration on this, and we will withdraw ours given the house amendment is effectively the same.

Ingrid STITT: I move:

- 2. Clause 8, lines 10 to 35 and page 8, lines 1 to 18, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –

“(b) conduct all or part of which occurred before the commencement day if the conduct –

- (i) is the conduct of, or in relation to, a person or body (whether or not still in existence) who or which would have been a public officer or public body within

- the meaning of this Act as amended by the amending Act had the amending Act been in force at the time the conduct occurred; and
- (ii) would have been corrupt conduct within the meaning of this Act as amended by the amending Act had the amending Act been in force at the time the conduct occurred.
- (2) The IBAC may determine to investigate any complaint or notification to the IBAC that the IBAC has before the commencement day –
- (a) dismissed under section 58(a); or
 - (b) referred to a person or body (other than the Ombudsman) under section 73; or
 - (c) referred to the Ombudsman under section 73 and the Ombudsman has dismissed it or has determined not to investigate it.
- (3) Nothing in subsection (1) or (2) requires the IBAC –
- (a) to reopen –
 - (i) a complaint or notification to the IBAC that it had dismissed or referred to another body before the commencement day; or
 - (ii) an investigation, whether of a complaint or notification or an own motion investigation, that it had completed before the commencement day; or
 - (b) to investigate a further complaint or notification to the IBAC about conduct that is the same as, or substantially similar to, conduct that was the subject of –
 - (i) a complaint or notification to the IBAC that it had dismissed or referred to another body before the commencement day; or
 - (ii) an investigation, whether of a complaint or notification or an own motion investigation, that it had completed before the commencement day.”.

This is in relation to transitional provisions. The house amendment proposes to amend the bill’s transitional provisions to clarify the government’s intended operation of these provisions. I did go to this in some detail in my summing-up. For completeness, there has been a lot of commentary about these transitional provisions and what they do or do not do. It is our government’s belief that these provisions, which we, as I have indicated, have fast-tracked to deliver in a number of weeks, will effectively enable IBAC to undertake the investigations many in this chamber have been referring to. The whole point of this reform is to improve accountability and integrity.

I do want to take the opportunity to thank members of the chamber who have worked very collaboratively with the government to clarify our intent so that Victorians can have confidence in these important reforms. The government’s house amendments mean that IBAC will be able to determine to investigate any complaint or notification that it had dismissed, referred to a person or body other than the Ombudsman or referred to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman had dismissed it or had determined not to investigate it. These provisions are not to be read in isolation. As I indicated previously, the existing settings in the IBAC act will continue to apply. They provide that IBAC must be certain of established criteria before determining to conduct an investigation into conduct that occurred entirely before the bill commenced. It is important, from the government’s perspective, that people are satisfied that these transitional provisions do as intended.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 9 and 10 agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (16:58): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (16:58): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

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

Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (17:00): I will begin by acknowledging that there is broad support for this bill in the chamber. This bill is part of the Carroll government's commitment to integrity and to acting on allegations of crime, corruption and misconduct on government-funded major construction projects in Victoria. This bill will provide important new resources and powers to the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria. It will create an office of special prosecutor to work alongside the commission to refer individuals to authorities for prosecution or regulatory action. It will also provide the commission with new powers to compel the production of information and witness statements, not just documents and attendance to give evidence at hearings.

The bill creates an office of special prosecutor for the first time in Victoria. The office is a dedicated resource specifically for the major construction projects royal commission. It is important to acknowledge that a royal commission does not have the power to charge or prosecute anyone. It is an investigatory body only. It can compel evidence and make findings, but it cannot put people before a court. That is why we are establishing an office of the special prosecutor, so that when wrongdoing is uncovered, it is investigated and it is pursued and people face consequences. The Inquiries Act 2014 already enables the royal commission to refer information to law enforcement agencies, but this bill will provide the major construction projects royal commission with a specialist, dedicated and embedded resource to work in real time as evidence of crime and misconduct is uncovered.

The appointment of a special prosecutor will streamline appropriate action being taken by relevant bodies where corruption, criminal conduct and serious misconduct is identified. The special prosecutor will be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier, following consultation with the royal commissioner. The special prosecutor will be independent of government. The bill clearly states they are not subject to the direction or control of the Premier or any other minister. This is critical to public confidence in the office. The special prosecutor can only be removed from office on grounds such as misconduct or neglect of duty. The appointee will be required to have at least eight years experience as a legal practitioner. The bill facilitates the appointment of a Crown prosecutor, should they be recommended for appointment to the role.

The functions of the special prosecutor are to work cooperatively and in conjunction with the construction royal commission to refer information to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities and any other relevant Victorian, interstate, territory or Commonwealth body for investigatory, prosecutorial or regulatory action. The bill enables regulated flow of information between the office of the special prosecutor and the construction royal commission, including the sharing of information obtained by the commission from Victoria Police, IBAC and other regulatory

and licensing authorities with the special prosecutor. The special prosecutor can have access to information acquired by the commission and can share that information with other authorities. The bill also ensures the special prosecutor has the same confidentiality and information-sharing obligations that currently apply to royal commission officers under the Inquiries Act. The bill permits bodies that receive information from the special prosecutor to report back to the royal commission and special prosecutor on the actions they intend to take in relation to that information.

The bill will commence on the day after it receives the royal assent and ahead of the November caretaker period. Together these reforms will enable the construction royal commission to carry out its duties in accordance with the commission's objectives and terms of reference. Importantly, we are establishing the special prosecutor in two phases. This is because we need to understand how the royal commission wishes to use this additional resource as its inquiry evolves. This bill represents phase one of the establishment of the special prosecutor. A re-elected Carroll government will introduce legislation to specify further powers and functions of the special prosecutor. It is essential that any additional powers and functions are developed carefully and in consultation with the commission, Victoria Police, IBAC, the Office of Public Prosecutions and others to ensure that they do not prejudice or unduly interfere with the existing powers and functions of those bodies. The intervening period will enable the appropriate model of interaction between the different entities to be designed based on the commission's specific operating model. In the meantime, the special prosecutor will have a significant role in assisting the work of the commission as an independent, dedicated and embedded resource.

Clause 4 of the bill gives Victorian royal commissions new powers to compel the production of information and witness statements. This will broaden the existing powers under the Inquiries Act. Currently Victorian royal commissions can compel the production of documents and the attendance of an individual to give evidence at a hearing, but this does not enable them to compel the production of information that does not exist in documentary form or that is not readily identifiable across a multitude of documents in advance of calling an individual to give evidence at a formal hearing. The new power will enable the construction royal commission and future royal commissions to compel a person by written notice to give information or a statement in writing before a specified time and in a specified manner. This is intended to include information created from a person's knowledge, in addition to information held in documents. Commonwealth royal commissions already have this power under section 2(3A) of the Royal Commissions Act 1902. These new powers will assist the royal commission to target its efforts and avoid unnecessary cost and delay by obtaining specific information without needing to call for or trawl through vast document searches, obtaining relevant information from an individual in circumstances where no relevant documents exist or identifying who has what information relevant to the commission's inquiry before convening formal hearings by requiring a witness statement. These new powers are subject to the same processes, checks and balances as the existing compulsive powers of a royal commission. They will arm this and future royal commissions with the ability to obtain fulsome evidence in a targeted and efficient manner. The principal concern raised about the bill relates to a staged approach to the vesting of powers in the special prosecutor. We have explained why this approach is both necessary and desirable, as it will ensure the ultimate model is tailored to the royal commission's needs.

In relation to the opposition's amendment, I am just going to place a few comments on the record. Some issues were raised about public interest immunity claims under the Inquiries Act. Public interest immunity is a well-established rule relied on by successive governments to protect the public interest in maintaining the proper functioning of government and its agencies. Accessing and making public interest immunity claims is a core duty of the state in our democratic system. Providing protection for material subject to public interest immunity in the Inquiries Act ensures that government departments and agencies go through the exercise of identifying which documents require special attention in relation to confidentiality. Government does this in accordance with the whole-of-Victorian-government guidelines for public interest immunity claims. What is clear from those guidelines is that decisions about making such claims are informed by what is in the public interest. If the public interest in disclosure outweighs the public interest in maintaining confidentiality, then an immunity claim

cannot be made. The commission and government agencies can consider how access to critical information can be provided without further undermining its confidential status where that is appropriate. The commission can assess where the balance lies between the public interest in disclosure or non-disclosure. That assessment is informed by the terms of reference and how important the information is to the royal commission inquiry.

Settings for the release of documents and information need to ensure they do not undermine or prejudice one of the ultimate objectives of the royal commission and special prosecutor by making information available to the very people who are likely to face prosecution for their involvement in crime and misconduct on construction sites. Merely repealing section 18(2)(c) would leave a regulatory vacuum in respect of the safeguards required to protect the further disclosure of sensitive and confidential information. That would be irresponsible and could prejudice police investigations and the personal safety of individuals. I know there will be some questions in committee. I will leave my remarks there. I do commend this bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (17:11)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I circulate amendments in my name, as outlined in my second-reading speech. The amendments were not ready to be circulated at that point in time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Are there any questions on clause 1?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Minister, why does the legislation not provide the special prosecutor with the powers to prosecute now instead of into the future?

Ingrid STITT: I did go through that in quite a bit of detail in my summing-up, Mr Mulholland, but I am happy to go to it again if that is your desire. Some of the issues that that you have raised and your amendment that you have circulated go to these concerns. Public interest immunity (PII), as we know, is a well-established rule. It is relied upon. But I think the circumstances of how these matters are determined with a royal commission are slightly different to the issues that we were discussing earlier in relation to the IBAC bill. But there is a process that government departments and agencies go through to exercise and identify which documents require special attention. Sorry, I am going on a completely incorrect tangent.

Evan Mulholland: It has been a long day.

Ingrid STITT: It has been a long week.

Evan Mulholland: Prosecutorial powers.

Ingrid STITT: Correct. Bear with me for one moment while I gather my thoughts.

As I was indicating in my summing-up, we will be establishing the special prosecutor in two phases, and that is because we need to understand how the royal commission wishes to use the additional resource as its inquiry evolves. This bill represents phase 1 of the establishment of the special prosecutor, and we intend to introduce legislation next term to specify further powers and functions of the special prosecutor. The reasoning behind this is that it is essential that any additional powers and functions are developed carefully, in consultation with the commission, Victoria Police, IBAC, the Office of Public Prosecutions and others to ensure that they do not prejudice or unduly interfere with the existing powers and functions of those bodies. The intervening period will enable the appropriate model of interaction between the different entities to be designed, based on the commission's specific

operating model. In the meantime, however, the special prosecutor will have a significant role in assisting the work of the commission, as an expert, dedicated and embedded resource.

Evan MULHOLLAND: What do you anticipate the special prosecutor will do from when it is established to a future second tranche of the legislation that will be introduced in the following term?

Ingrid STITT: This particular bill sets out the powers of the special prosecutor in accordance with the Royal Commission into the Integrity of Major Public and Civil Infrastructure Construction Projects in Victoria letters patent, and the special prosecutor will have the power to do all things that are necessary or convenient to be done for or in connection with or as incidental to the performance of their duties and functions.

As I have indicated, there will be two tranches to this reform. The special prosecutor is to work cooperatively and in conjunction with the construction royal commission to provide information or documents to Victoria Police, IBAC, regulatory and licensing authorities or other appropriate Victorian, interstate, territory or Commonwealth bodies for those bodies to consider whether to take relevant action in accordance with their functions.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just on the appointment of a special prosecutor, when will the appointment of a special prosecutor be made by?

Ingrid STITT: It is intended that the appointment of the special prosecutor will be made as soon as practicable after the passage of the bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Do you have an exact timeframe, Minister?

Ingrid STITT: I do not have an exact timeframe, Mr Mulholland, but I can indicate that the appointment will be made in consultation with the royal commissioner.

Evan MULHOLLAND: You said earlier that the government agreed with the principle of setting up a panel for the appointment process for an IBAC Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner. Did you have any consideration of a panel process for a position like a special prosecutor, especially given its significance in prosecutorial powers and the powers that it will hold, not being someone that can be called into disrepute?

Ingrid STITT: I am sorry, can you repeat the last part of your question?

Evan MULHOLLAND: As I was discussing, the government agreed in principle and agreed with an amendment to set up a panel for the purposes of making it clear for IBAC. Was that taken into consideration in the appointment process for a special prosecutor, or will that be, and if not, why not?

Ingrid STITT: In terms of the bill before the house, it is intended that the special prosecutor is appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier, but before making their recommendation the Premier must consult the construction royal commissioner. I am certainly not going to pass any judgement on the process that a very esteemed commissioner will be involved in. There are also requirements in the bill about the appropriate suitability of the special prosecutor in terms of their legal experience.

Evan MULHOLLAND: What funding will be given to the special prosecutor?

Ingrid STITT: The cost of the special prosecutor will be met by the government, and it will be in addition to the \$50 million that has already been committed to the work of the royal commission. Like the royal commission itself, the special prosecutor will be resourced to do its important job of working alongside the commission to ensure that when wrongdoing is uncovered it is investigated and pursued by the appropriate agencies. As I was saying earlier, the special prosecutor will be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Premier. They must be a person who is an Australian lawyer who has practised for not less than eight years, and they can be appointed for up to two years.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I understand it is in addition to the \$50 million, but can you give us a ballpark on the funding? Are there any kind of funding requirements?

Ingrid STITT: As I indicated, the special prosecutor will be resourced in a manner that ensures that they can do their important work alongside the commission. There will obviously be the need to have remuneration associated with the role, and that will be in accordance with the single officer bands at schedule E of the appointment and remuneration guidelines. Obviously, the precise remuneration will depend on the appointee and their seniority, and those are discussions that will occur. The government is very clear that both the royal commission and the special prosecutor will be provided with all the resources they need to do their job.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Why does the bill allow for public interest immunity to be claimed by former premiers?

Ingrid STITT: I have gone in some detail already to the process that is undertaken for public interest immunity when it comes to the royal commission. I can certainly go back to those matters again, if that is the line of questioning you want to pursue. I outlined in my summing-up the important reasons why a proper process for public interest immunity sits alongside the royal commission's work. PII is a common-law and statutory rule under which a court or inquiry will not order the production or admission into evidence of a document or information where the public interest in preserving confidentiality outweighs the public interest in producing or admitting the material into evidence. As I indicated earlier, there is whole-of-Victorian-government policy and procedure that determines how these matters are determined as to whether documents claim public interest immunity. It is important that the royal commission's work continues, and that process I have clearly outlined in my summing-up.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Following the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, the government actually committed to removing this ability. Why does that public interest immunity continue under this bill?

Ingrid STITT: It is important that public immunity be retained for the construction royal commission, and it is to ensure that highly sensitive information is protected in the public interest, such as law enforcement information that is disclosed which would put people at risk of serious harm or the release of information that would prejudice ongoing Victorian, national or interstate police criminal operations. Existing arrangements facilitate flexibility in how PII materials are used and managed. A complete statutory abrogation of PII would create a regulatory vacuum, as I indicated earlier, compromising necessary safeguards relating to disclosure of sensitive material, including that detailing police operations.

The royal commission also made it clear in its opening hearing yesterday that with respect to public interest immunity claims, given the terms of reference, the public interest in releasing documents is exceptionally strong. Counsel assisting highlighted that any claim will have to be made document by document and justified, and counsel assisting will test each claim. The royal commission also observed that transparency is key to rebuilding trust. The royal commissioner is independent, and he will make his own independent decisions in relation to every public interest immunity claim.

Further, the government takes very seriously the important work of the royal commission. The Victorian government approach to the royal commission was demonstrated when the relevant state department provided the two ministerial briefings to the royal commission that were tendered in evidence yesterday, with no public interest immunity claim being made. These two ministerial briefings are now publicly available on the royal commission website. I also note that the construction royal commission has published on its website a practice direction regarding the production and management of documents, including the process that must be undertaken by the commission when considering PII claims.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 4 agreed to.

New clause (17:27)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I move:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 4 –

‘4A Variation or revocation of notice to produce or notice to attend

- (1) Section 18(2)(c) of the **Inquires Act 2014** is **repealed**.

- (2) After section 18(2) of the **Inquires Act 2014** insert –

“(2A) It is not a reasonable excuse for a person to fail to comply with a notice to produce or notice to attend by refusing to give information to a Royal Commission if the information is the subject of public interest immunity, including if it is subject to Cabinet confidentiality.”.

It provides that it is not a reasonable excuse for a person to fail to comply with a notice to produce or notice to attend by refusing to give information to a royal commission if the information is the subject of public interest immunity, including if it is subject to cabinet confidentiality. I think the thing that most people feared about this royal commission was that it would be another hotel quarantine whitewash where you would have former premiers or current ones saying that they do not recall or refusing to answer particular questions because the matter was privileged. This increases integrity by removing public interest immunity. I think the chamber should support it as well. We do not want to get to a point during this royal commission where we see, potentially, former premiers frustrating the work of the royal commission, because I suspect that is what may happen. I suspect we will be looking back at this time in the chamber when we could have done something and regret voting a particular way because of what we will see in the future. I ask the chamber to support my amendment.

Ingrid STITT: As I have already indicated, the government will not be supporting this amendment. Public interest immunity should be retained for the purposes of the royal commission to ensure that highly sensitive information is protected in the public interest, such as law enforcement information that, if disclosed, could put people at risk of serious harm or the release of information that would prejudice ongoing Victorian national or interstate police criminal operations. That is a very serious implication of the opposition’s amendment. Existing arrangements facilitate flexibility in how PII materials are used and managed. A complete statutory abrogation of PII would create a regulatory vacuum, compromising necessary safeguards relating to disclosure of sensitive material, including those detailing police operations.

As I just indicated in answer to Mr Mulholland’s question, I think it is a very important consideration to note the royal commission’s opening hearing remarks yesterday that with respect to the public interest immunity claim, given the terms of reference, the public interest in releasing documents is exceptionally strong. Counsel assisting highlighted that any claim will have to be made document by document and justified, and counsel assisting will test each claim. The construction royal commission has also published on its website a practice direction regarding the production and management of documents, including the process that must be undertaken by the commission when considering PII claims. There is a very robust process in place, and we do not support this amendment.

David LIMBRICK: I note the government’s comments on this. I am a bit perplexed by Mr Mulholland’s insistence that this is something very important. If it was very important, then maybe I would have gotten a briefing on it from the opposition rather than being briefed by the government on the opposition’s amendment. As it so happens, I think that the existing arrangements, in both the way that the inquiry is being conducted and the arrangements in the act, are sufficient. I do not know. If the opposition think this is important, maybe they should have briefed us on it. We have not been briefed on it. I do not know about other crossbenchers; maybe other crossbenchers are more important than me. Nevertheless if they want to get the support of the chamber, maybe they should ask for it.

Sarah MANSFIELD: The Greens will not be supporting this amendment. While I think we have sympathy for the intent here, as discussed with the IBAC bill, we do not believe that the way this is

constructed, and particularly how it works in this instance, is appropriate. We are concerned that there could be unintended consequences that could potentially make things worse. We are not in a position to be able to support it today.

Council divided on new clause:

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 (23): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

New clause negatived.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: That will be our last division of the 60th Parliament. I thank everybody for their cooperation in committee over the term of the last eight years.

Clauses 5 to 8 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (17:40): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (17:40): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

Business of the house

Adjournment

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (17:41): I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until a day and hour to be fixed by the President, who will notify each member of the Council accordingly.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (17:41): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Bulleen Art & Garden

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:41): (2840) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. For nearly 70 years Bulleen Art & Garden has been a vital institution for the City of Manningham and the state of Victoria. Beyond its role as a premier destination for gardeners, it serves as a cherished social hub, combining plant nurseries, art spaces and community education on sustainable living. The high social and cultural value of Bulleen Art & Garden has been repeatedly recognised at the highest levels. The independent advisory committee for the North East Link Program (NELP) environment effects statement highlighted BAG's extraordinary community support, describing it as a local institution that brings people together for a positive common cause. The Minister for Planning's own EES assessment explicitly agrees with the IAC recommendation, noting that Bulleen Art & Garden should be offered every opportunity to continue operating by avoiding or minimising acquisition impacts. The *Birrarung-Bolin Framework Plan 2024* recognised Bulleen Art & Garden as a cultural icon in the area.

Following the acquisition of nearly half of Bulleen Art & Garden's site for the North East Link works, the business was granted a short-term licence on offset land to keep operating. Bulleen Art & Garden has invested significantly and endured substantial operational turmoil to adapt to this temporary footprint. While written assurances were previously provided by the project authority, including a December 2022 letter from NELP's director of land acquisition anticipating a long-term lease aligned with Bulleen Art & Garden's current lease, recent communications indicate that no decisions will be made until after project completion in 2028, which leaves the future use of the land subject to an undetermined process by an unknown authority. Without long-term tenure, this iconic community and cultural asset faces unacceptable operational uncertainty. Therefore the action I seek is for the minister for roads to make good on previous commitments to secure a long-term lease guarantee for Bulleen Art & Garden over the offset land following the completion of the North East Link project.

Child protection

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:44): (2841) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is for the minister to review a particular case where children in a foster care scenario have been denied access to essential medical testing and treatment and, for the next few days while she is in charge, direct the department to ensure that when a child's health is at stake, their best interests come before parental objections and/or the state having a power to act. The case I relate involves siblings in out-of-home care who have been diagnosed with a rare and chronic medical condition. Specialists recommended genetic testing to identify the exact strain of the condition and help tailor treatment and support for these vulnerable children. After waiting 18 months for an appointment, consent was then refused by the biological parent and the testing did not proceed. The children deserve the best treatment possible. They need answers about their condition and their future. They have been denied this opportunity. I am advised the department has the capacity to override such a decision, yet the department chose not to.

The same issue has reportedly arisen with prescribed medication recommended by medical professionals. This is a failure of the system that is supposed to protect Victoria's most vulnerable children. If the government is willing to take responsibility for a child's care, it cannot then wash its hands of responsibility when that child needs medical treatment. What is the point of state care if the state stands by while children are denied access to treatment and denied information about their own health? The principle should be very simple: the welfare of the child comes first. In this case, the

wishes of an adult appear to have been given greater weight than medical advice and the needs of the child. A child-centred system would not allow an 18-month wait for specialist care to end in a preventable refusal. Carers want to know why this government has not put children's interests first, and they want the minister to take action while she is still in charge. Vulnerable children deserve the most support from this government, and until the minister is divested of her position in November 2026, she must do the right thing by these children.

WorkCover

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:47): (2842) My adjournment is for the attention of the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, and the action I seek is that the government commission an independent investigation into WorkSafe Victoria and the WorkCover scheme, including claims handling by agents, following multiple reports from injured workers that the system is not performing its duties. Earlier this year this house referred TAC claims to the Legal and Social Issues Committee after similar reports from accident victims. That inquiry found that complex processes can add secondary trauma, that people with severe injuries struggle most to navigate the scheme and that administrative burden can deter treating practitioners. It recommended better support for those with severe injuries, peak body representation on the clinical panel and a client advisory group of survivors. Those findings pointed towards constructive reform. I am now receiving comparable accounts from WorkCover claimants. Workers describe long-recognised supports being withdrawn despite unchanged disability, treatment delayed or refused despite specialist evidence, unpaid invoices, incomplete records, restricted access to material provided to independent medical examiners, premature return-to-work directions that worsen injury and people falling between WorkCover, Centrelink and the NDIS. The process itself is described as adversarial rather than rehabilitative. WorkSafe's outstanding claim liabilities have grown substantially. Claimants reasonably ask whether more is spent helping people recover or managing them while they become sicker. Injured workers should not have to fight the scheme designed to help them. I ask the minister to investigate these issues with the same seriousness given to the TAC inquiry so that legitimate claims are handled fairly, promptly and with a focus on recovery.

Get Active Kids voucher program

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:48): (2843) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Community Sport Ros Spence. Round 11 of the Get Active Kids voucher program is now open and incredibly relevant in this Melbourne grand final week. It just goes to show that little children need to be encouraged to be active in sport. Certainly Nick Daicos was an active little young person, and look at him now. So the action I seek is an update on how these \$200 vouchers will ease cost-of-living pressures and help more little Daicoses in Victoria to participate in sport.

Gendered violence

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:49): (2844) Every year since I have come to this place I have used my last speech to remember the life of Celeste Manno, a beautiful 23-year-old who was stalked by somebody that she worked with. She followed the law to a T and she got an intervention order. The intervention order was breached, and then the man, Luay Sako, was arrested for breaching it. On the way back from being released, he bought a knife and went silent for three months. He continued to stalk her, so much so that he found out where she lived, the layout of her house and all of her movements. In November 2020 she was asleep in her bed. He broke through her window with a hammer and violently stabbed her to death. The cause of death was a stab to the heart. Despite seeking help from police and legal protection, there were still no protections for her, not enough to keep her alive. It has just been absolutely tragic.

Her death prompted the Victorian Law Reform Commission to look at and to find what holes existed for people that were suffering stalking in Victoria, and the law reform commission came back with well over 40 recommendations. Some of those things have been done – you can get an intervention order through the court's own motion and there have been some definitional changes – but still a lot

of those recommendations have not been fulfilled. One of those is mandatory training for police to help them identify stalking behaviour. There still need to be upgrades to the law around things like cyberstalking. There still is not specialist support for stalking victim-survivors such as safety planning and such as the advocacy they need and such as counselling. People that are being stalked in non-family violence settings do not receive the same protections that those in family violence settings do. Police are not even required to help people that say they are being stalked, and I think it is because they cannot identify them properly. They still are not even referring people to make sure that their phones or their cars are not being tracked.

We are now six years on from the tragic death of Celeste Manno, and in her honour I will use my last speech of the whole year in this place to call on the Attorney-General. The action that I seek is for the Attorney-General to make sure every one of those recommendations that was handed down by the law reform commission of Victoria into stalking are implemented and that it is done soon.

Western Metropolitan Region

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:52): (2845) My adjournment item for this evening is for the Premier. Premier, it is refreshing to see that you are turning over a new leaf and giving your government a fresh start compared with the previous Labor governments. The action that I seek is for you to respect Victoria's fastest growing region and provide adequate services to allow families in the Western Metro to get ahead.

I was elected four years ago for half a million Victorians in Melbourne's west, who are the youngest and fastest growing cohort in this state and who are always served last. Our infrastructure is 40 years behind. Werribee station has not seen a major upgrade since 1983. Trains from Geelong fill to capacity before they even reach Wyndham Vale or Tarneit, the two busiest stations in Victoria. New suburbs like Eynesbury and Brookfield have no bus services. Our roads are more potholes than road. Every school zone is packed with traffic at drop-off and pick-up, schools are full of portables multiple storeys high and our schools are still the fastest growing and most overcrowded in the state. This year they even opened short of teachers. Thirty-five thousand teachers walked out in March, the first statewide strike in 13 years. Melton is still waiting on its hospital in the forward estimates, and we are still waiting on the Melton rail upgrade, which is some kind of evolving commitment. The West Gate Tunnel opened three years late at \$10.2 billion, against an original promise of half a billion. The Suburban Rail Loop actually has no delivery date for the west, and children starting prep in Tarneit next year will be close to retirement before they see any benefit for the west at all. The people in the west are actually the ones that build this state's houses. They drive its freight and they staff the night shifts, and yet they are the part of the state that is left to last to build for.

Family First stands with families where the day actually happens – at home, managing the bills and the house; at school, keeping children safe and parents informed; and at work, standing with the people who build this state and not the ones who tax it. The west needs someone who sees the people of the west at home, at school and at work and who is on their side every single day.

Ukrainian community

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:55): (2846) My adjournment this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action that I seek is that he continues to support Victoria's vibrant Ukrainian community. I am conscious of the fact that I have spoken about the matter of Ukraine quite a lot in this Parliament, and I am also cognisant of the fact that we are first and foremost a state Parliament, but there is much that we can do and that we have talked about in support for our local community that I have been very proud to, in a small way, contribute towards along with Mr Tarlamis, the member for Bulleen and several other colleagues in this place. I am cognisant of the fact, though, that it is not our role as state MPs to spend the majority of our time talking about international issues, nor in fact should my commentary be seen to be minimising any other conflict, whether it be in the Middle East or in Sudan or any other part of the world where people are experiencing great hardship. I thought I would take a brief moment to talk about why I do talk

about Ukraine. Several members of this place have asked me if I have Ukrainian ancestry; I do not. My drive on this issue really started before I was elected in 2022 when I was horrified at what I was seeing on my TV screen: a free, liberal democracy being invaded by a totalitarian evil neighbour. I was shocked and outraged and felt powerless about what to do.

Ukraine made a conscious pivot towards free, liberal democracy in 2013, and for that they were punished and invaded the year after, an invasion which escalated in 2022. Shortly after the full-scale invasion, I, along with many others here, was first elected to this chamber, and I had a platform to speak. But more than a platform, I found a community, an incredible community: the Ukrainian community here in Victoria, including in the south-east based in Noble Park and across this state. There are so many incredible people I have had the opportunity to work with, including Chrestyna Kmetj, Ashley Awramenko, Eugene Hawryszko, Teresa Lachowicz and many, many more and of course the late, great Stefan Romaniw. I also, through some of these people, had the opportunity to visit Ukraine and saw some horrifying and shocking things, but I also saw the spirit of the Ukrainian people loud and clear. It was a spirit of democracy, of human rights and of freedom, and it is a spirit that tells me that they will win.

We can all be very proud that Australia has contributed, along with many other countries, to Ukraine's success, and I welcome today's announcement of a 10-year strategic partnership as I call again for our governments to do more. It is a moral imperative, and it is in our country's strategic interests to do so. For my last adjournment today, I will reiterate that for as long as I have a voice to I will continue speaking up for the Ukrainian people and their struggle for freedom. Slava Ukraini.

Data centres

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:58): (2847) I will start by saying first of all that data centres are essential to our economic future; all our future businesses and industries are going to be built off the back of them. We must have data centres in Victoria; however, they are an industrial process, and they belong in industrial areas. About this time a year ago Victoria had about 22 per cent of the nation's data centres whereas New South Wales had about 40 per cent, and this is a significant problem for us and for our economic future. The Labor government, effectively having had no policy on data centres whatsoever, panicked. It is no surprise New South Wales are ahead, because they had a plan five years ago and had implemented it systematically. What the government did in response was simply go pick up the phone and approve data centres randomly across the state in any location simply to catch up, and then they spent the first six months of this year bragging about how they were catching up to New South Wales and how successful Victoria was in bringing in this capital. It was pretty important we got that capital, because that capital is the only reason Victoria is not in a net capital outflow right now. It is the only thing keeping Victoria out of recession right now. As a result, we now have data centres in completely inappropriate places.

It was Labor that approved data centres in and adjacent to residential areas. It was Labor that approved data centres in green wedge areas. It was Labor that completely abused the development facilitation plan process to ride roughshod over local communities. It was Labor that had absolutely no infrastructure plan for energy or water. It is Labor's fault that there is now a serious social licence problem for an essential piece of our economic future. You have taken a golden opportunity for this state and destroyed it. And now with your cack-handed new policy you are doing everything to ensure that we have the worst of both worlds, because there are no protections for our communities and there is no new systematic planning, but you are doing everything you can to drive billions and billions of dollars of investment out of our state. There is between \$150 billion and \$180 billion of private capital investment to be placed in Australia for the jurisdictions that can put a sustainable, systematic data centre program in place, and the state that achieves that will have the economic infrastructure that will see it through the next part of this century. It is essential, but only Labor can screw up a golden opportunity in this way.

The question I ask to the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy is: can you please name one of the existing data centre approvals that is going to be changed as a result of these new policies? Name one community you are protecting. Name one community that will have relief from your cack-handed management of AI and digital economy policy.

Youth homelessness

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:01): (2848) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Homelessness, Minister Staikos. Every year young Victorians experiencing homelessness present to services carrying the impacts of family violence, trauma and complex mental ill health, yet too often the response remains one of crisis management rather than providing stable, supported housing that can help prevent young people from entering a cycle of repeated crises. Two weeks ago I met with Lee, an advocate on youth homelessness, and they shared their brave yet heartbreaking story. Lee grew up surrounded by family violence, poverty and trauma. At just 18 they left home and for years they couch-surfed, experienced further violence and homelessness, slept in their car and stayed in shelters. Lee endured extreme cold and hunger. They watched their friends come close to death. While living without a home, Lee was simply trying to survive. All of this was compounded by longstanding mental health challenges. For many young people it is a result of years of trauma, violence and poverty, and once someone is caught in that cycle, surviving can become a full-time job.

Victoria's Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recognised the importance of this approach and recommended 500 supported housing places for young people. Six years into the 10-year reform agenda, that commitment remains unmet. There is a compelling economic case for action. New analysis by Equity Economics commissioned by Melbourne City Mission and Orygen estimates that each supported housing place could generate approximately \$2.2 million in benefits over 20 years, compared to approximately \$280,000 in costs for a two-year stay. Across 500 places this represents an estimated \$1.1 billion in benefits, compared to \$140 million in costs. Supported housing is therefore not simply about providing a roof over a young person's head. It can provide the stability, safety and support needed to address mental ill health, prevent repeated homelessness and help young people transition into a safer and more secure adulthood. The action that I seek is that the minister commit to the delivery of the 500 supported housing places recommended by the royal commission as a priority.

Shepparton sports and events centre

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:03): (2849) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to commit \$12 million to fund a new indoor sports and events centre in Shepparton. Shepparton stadium has served the community well for more than 50 years, but it no longer has the capacity to meet demand as participation in basketball and other indoor sports has exploded, while the ageing facility fails to meet safety and accessibility standards. A new stadium has been one of the council's top priorities for years, and Basketball Victoria has identified this project as their number one infrastructure project in regional Victoria. After Labor's persistent refusal to invest in this vital community asset, Greater Shepparton City Council has done a lot of work to rescope the project and create a plan that will still achieve their vision for a sports and events centre that the city can be proud of and that will attract national and international sporting events.

The new stadium will have four multi-use courts that meet national standards and a show court with seating for up to 3000 spectators, allowing more fans to get a ticket to watch the Gators. There will also be function and event spaces, a reception, a cafe, new changing rooms, accessible amenities and more car parking. Council has committed \$10 million towards the project and is seeking an investment of \$12 million from the Victorian state government to realise its vision. My advocacy for this project has been unrelenting. At the start of the 59th Parliament, in 2018, the stadium was my first constituency question, and again in 2022, at the start of the 60th Parliament, it was my first constituency question. Now in the final week and the final adjournment of my parliamentary career,

it will be the last thing that I raise, asking once more for the state government to invest in a new sports and events centre that Shepparton needs and truly deserves.

At every step of this project the city's vision for a new stadium has been blocked by one thing: the Labor government's refusal to invest in regional Victoria. For Labor politicians and bureaucrats in Melbourne, rural and regional Victoria is often an afterthought, meaning places like Shepparton have missed out on vital sports infrastructure funding. Twenty-five per cent of Victoria's population lives in the regions, but under Labor only 12 per cent of the infrastructure spending has gone to regional Victoria. The Liberals have pledged to end this neglect and guarantee that 25 per cent of infrastructure investment goes to regional Victoria. Shepparton cannot wait any longer. We need a new stadium that will serve our children now and long into the future and allow them to keep participating in sports as the city grows. We also need a sports and events centre that reflects the city's growing role as a regional centre for major events, and attracts national and international tournaments – *(Time expired)*

Waste and recycling management

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:07): (2850) My last adjournment for this year is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, regarding the ongoing illegal dumping along Boundary Road between Tarneit and Truganina and the uncertainty surrounding the responsibility of its management and clean-up. The action I seek is for the minister to urgently determine who is responsible for this section of Boundary Road between Tarneit and Truganina, ensure that the waste is removed and work with the relevant authority to prevent further dumping. I have been contacted by residents who have raised serious concerns about the illegal dumping along Boundary Road and the nearby access road. For months piles of household rubbish, building materials, waste and potentially hazardous material have been piling up along the roadside, creating an eyesore and a growing safety risk to residents, motorists and surrounding landowners. Residents report that the problem has escalated to a point where access is becoming a safety and health hazard. There is also concern that rubbish is being blown onto neighbouring farmland, affecting farming operations and creating additional clean-up costs for local landowners.

I am particularly concerned by one report that a potential hazard may have been dumped in the area, raising questions about environmental impacts and the possible contamination of nearby water sources. While residents have attempted to raise this issue with relevant authorities, local and state governments are playing ping-pong regarding who is actually responsible for managing the site. Too often under this Labor government responsibility is lacking. Disputes between different levels of government and land management are leaving community stuck in the middle, with the problem getting worse. Regardless of whether this land falls under state or local government or another authority, my constituents, the residents who pay their taxes, deserve a clear answer and prompt action. The current situation poses risks to public safety, the environment and local community, and cannot simply be allowed to continue because of uncertainty over jurisdiction. The community simply want the rubbish removed, the area made safe and responsibility clearly established so that future dumping can be addressed quickly and effectively. So I ask the minister: will the Carroll Labor government ensure the waste is removed without further delay, or is this government going to kick the rubbish down the stream of potholes along the road?

Health workforce

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:09): (2851) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to provide the amount spent last financial year on agency nursing staff to relieve the stress on nurses from excessive overtime and workload. We know we are not going to get the annual reports, because the Parliament is not sitting. We have got no transparency from this government. They refuse to release any data, and we are not going to understand exactly the true state of the health system. I am asking in this adjournment to be provided with this, and the reason I am doing so is because health services are struggling under very severe financial pressure. Many are in deficit. Many are very concerned about the operations that they

are expected to be undertaking. At the same time they have got these workforce shortages that are looming next year and in the out years. These shortages are a direct consequence of a government that has failed to properly plan for and manage the growing demand on our public health system.

I have raised today the issue around graduate nurses – 6400 will graduate this year and less than 3000 will get a placement. Those letters are going out. I do not know where the minister is. I do not think she knows what she is doing. But I am telling you, there are thousands of nurses in this state who are graduating who will not get jobs. They are going interstate, and next year, the year after and the year after that it is only going to get worse. We have got this absolute dilemma on our hands. This is a government so inept that it has allowed this to happen. They have let down Victorians and they are letting down those frontline workers – the doctors, nurses and everybody that works in our health system – in being able to do the work that they need to do to give patients the care that they deserve and need.

The nurses and everyone are facing this unsustainable workload. The pressures are huge. Occupational violence is going through the roof. They are taking time off because of what is going on. I hear from nurses who ring me directly to say that they are asked to do overtime because the shortages are there and the only staff they have got are graduate nurses. That is not safe. This is a huge issue, and it is a massive, massive failure by Labor, who have been in government in this state for 12 years and have made this system an absolute mess. Victorians deserve a health system that is properly staffed, financially sustainable and has the capacity to meet the needs of the community. Labor, I say again, have failed every single Victorian. They do not have a plan. They have got no ideas – they have run out of those. Only a Jess Wilson government will deliver the disciplined management of health and fix this broken health system.

Homelessness

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:12): (2852) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, Building and Precincts, and the action I seek is a commitment to at least double the number of public homes in Victoria. One of the reasons I became politically active was my sense of outrage at the injustice of our housing system. Working as a GP at a service for people sleeping rough and experiencing poverty, the utter abandonment of so many people by our governments was laid bare. So often I would be treating things like infected blisters on people's feet because they had to be constantly on the move with disintegrating footwear, figuring out how we could find refrigeration access for someone 24/7 so they could store the insulin on which their life depended, begging emergency accommodation for a night so someone with pneumonia did not have to sleep in the cold or organising counselling for people to help with their mental ill health before sending them back onto the street to be retraumatised.

Some of the most difficult situations were experienced by women. Every single one had a story marked by violence – violence that forced them out of their homes, forced them to live in fear and forced them to erase their identities, and violence that caused unspeakable injuries, pregnancy losses and deaths. For every woman I saw in that clinic, I knew that countless were couch-surfing or sleeping in their cars or tents, often with children, or on the brink of losing the roof over their heads. On any given night in Victoria over 30,000 people are unhoused. In 2024–25, 105,125 people across Victoria sought housing support from the specialist homelessness sector. Fifty-nine per cent were women – it is the fastest growing demographic experiencing homelessness – and 36 per cent were children and young people under 25. Family and domestic violence is the driver in at least 44 per cent of cases.

The median age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 55 years old, almost 30 years less than the national average. Housing instability for children leads to lifelong disadvantage that is perpetuated through generations. This is just so profoundly unjust, especially in a country as rich as ours. Evidence shows that countries that have more public housing also have lower rates of homelessness. Yet Victoria has the lowest proportion of public housing of any state or territory, with social and public housing sitting at roughly 2.88 per cent of all households, against an average of over

4 per cent, and that has been falling for decades. Labor has spent \$2.5 billion demolishing public housing and outsourcing its responsibilities to the community housing sector and the market. Labor has walked away from public housing, yet building more is one of the most powerful things we could do to address the housing crisis and homelessness. We can and must do better.

Coliban Water

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:15): (2853) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water. I raise concerns about the significant increase in water and sewer connection charges being applied by Coliban Water and the impact this is having on development and investment in Bendigo. Mr Justin Morris of Bendigo Lifestyle Village has raised concerns that a connection which cost around \$3579 just three years ago is now costing more than \$8100. That is an increase of more than 120 per cent. The village has approximately 20 further houses planned, meaning that if these charges continue at the current level, connection costs alone could exceed \$160,000. The purpose of the development is to provide affordable accommodation, and he notes that they cannot simply pass an \$8100-plus connection charge directly onto an individual purchaser.

I acknowledge that new customer contributions are approved by the Essential Services Commission and are intended to ensure new customers contribute to the cost of infrastructure required to service growth. However, legitimate questions have been raised about the scale of these increases and how Coliban Water's charges compare with other Victorian water authorities. The action I seek is for the minister to review the current new customer contribution arrangements applying to Coliban Water and seek advice as to whether these changes are reasonable and equitable, particularly for regional developments creating significant new investment, housing and employment. I ask the minister to urgently consider whether there are appropriate mechanisms to support developments such as this, where significant up-front connection costs may ultimately constrain the delivery of additional housing in regional Victoria.

Donnybrook Road upgrade

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:17): (2854) I rise to speak on a topic I think I have spoken about every single sitting week in this Parliament over four years, and that is of course Donnybrook Road in my electorate in the northern suburbs. My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is to provide a clear explanation of what works are about to take place on Donnybrook Road, if they are occurring now and when Donnybrook Road will start construction. I have been advised that the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority has been requested, at 5 seconds to midnight, to put up some construction safety barriers and roadwork infrastructure along Donnybrook Road prior to the election. This of course was met with a no from VIDA to the government, because that would mean that 40-kilometre speed limits need to be put up on Donnybrook Road. If this is correct, the minister needs to explain exactly why the government is asking the infrastructure delivery authority to put up roadwork infrastructure when works are not actually due until probably late next year, if not the middle of next year. The government's own project information says that stages 1 and 2 remain in preconstruction, with technical investigations, design work and approvals still underway. Residents are entitled to be sceptical if barriers appear before the election.

After 12 years of neglecting Donnybrook Road you cannot fatten a pig on market day, and we have seen this government pour billions upon billions into a rail line in the eastern suburbs while Donnybrook Road is neglected. When the Liberals were last in government, we duplicated the Mickleham side of Donnybrook Road through a developer contribution plan that allowed Donnybrook Road to be duplicated while the estate was actually being built. Unfortunately, under this government – 12 years of neglect – we have seen nothing. We have seen nothing for Donnybrook Road. You cannot fatten a pig on market day. Only Amanda Dow, our Liberal candidate for Yan Yean, and Eddie Dadisho, our Liberal candidate for Kalkallo, have a \$524 million plan to duplicate Donnybrook Road for good, from the bridge over the Hume all the way to Epping Road, including the level crossing.

This comes after a lot of advocacy by me every sitting week in the Parliament and by my colleague Wendy Lovell as well. We can only deliver it with a plan, and only Jess Wilson and our Liberal team have a plan to duplicate Donnybrook Road for good.

Ringwood East train station

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:20): (2855) Not in the history of this 60th Parliament, not in the history of this chamber and in fact – I will go one step further – not in the history of this Parliament has one single toilet been spoken about so much. It is only appropriate that on this last occasion we bring this yet again to the Parliament's attention and perhaps more specifically, given we have a new Premier, to the Premier's attention. I would like to ask the new Premier in the few days he has left before caretaker mode kicks in to consider very seriously my repeated – I would say consistent – requests for a public toilet at Ringwood East train station. If anyone is in any doubt, I am only too happy to provide the address. I am happy too to provide a personal tour of the site for the Premier; I am that generous with my time. I am also happy to take him up to the existing toilet block, which is behind the IGA. In fact when the IGA shuts it has no lighting whatsoever. It is a very dank, somewhat smelly –

David Davis interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: Dangerous, Mr Davis – a very dangerous place. I would not want to see anyone going up that laneway in the small hours of the morning. You never know what you might find before you even get to that toilet block.

David Davis interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: There are certainly no PSOs, since those opposite have unfortunately stripped out the PSOs from Ringwood East train station.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: It is a great shame. I digress for a second from what is critical, and what is critical is a public lavatory, or, as they say in America, an ablution block, whatever that means; I do not really know.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: Old-fashioned English, is it? Well, whatever it is, we just want one teeny, tiny toilet we can all share. There is no doubt about sharing. We are all sharers in this place. We have proven that today. We have proven that many other times. In fact every time we step on a plane we all prove we can share a toilet. All I am proposing, Premier, is that we do likewise at Ringwood East train station. We have spent – that is, the Victorian taxpayer – willingly or not, billions on two level crossing removals and one brand new train station at Ringwood East. It is an enormous amount of money. President, I know you are very familiar with this site, it being part of your constituency as well. While we welcome the investment of the significant funds to do those level crossing removals and the new train station, it came without actually installing a single public toilet, and that is a great travesty.

While I jest about my repeated requests for that toilet, there is a serious point here, and that is this: if we are going to have a public transport system that is accessible to everyone – to women, to pregnant women, to the elderly, to anyone who has an ability constraint – you have to make it accessible. It is not accessible when you do not provide a public toilet. It should be standard fare in this state that when we build a brand new train station it comes with a toilet for all abilities at all times so everyone can access the public transport network as we would want them to, because that is how we get people out of their cars and into public transport.

Local government integrity

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:23): (2856) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Local Government. It is about the ongoing issue of the conflict of interest of Mr Hockley in Kingston and Cr Hockley in Bayside. Mr Hockley is listed as advocacy lead in the Kingston area, and he is elected as Cr Hockley in the Bayside area as well. What is significant here is that Mr Hockley voted against a motion on 25 April 2025 that opposed the Suburban Rail Loop project in its entirety. It required writing to the relevant ministers, the Premier and so forth, seeking an immediate stop to the program.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

David DAVIS: Yes, Mr Staikos is right up to his neck in it.

At the same time I am aware of figures that show Mr Hockley's area at council level has a significant number of people and properties impacted. In the Iverson ward there are 806 individual lots affected by the draft structure plan and 1766 individual lots within the declared planning area. Within the Highett suburb boundary there are a total of 648 individual lots in the draft structure plan area and 1652 individual lots in the declared planning area – thousands of properties impacted in that area. Equally, when one looks at the areas involved in Bayside, they are very significant, as well as the Kingston scope. The Kingston information says there are 11,880 properties that fall within the SRL Clayton and SRL Cheltenham declared areas within Kingston. For Clayton we have 3356 properties within the declared area and 1919 properties within the structure plan boundary. For Cheltenham there are 8524 properties within the declared area and 3305 properties within the structure plan area. Mr Hockley over here in Kingston and Cr Hockley there – one side is fighting for the Suburban Rail Loop and the other is conflicted by his representation of a council ward that is not in favour of the Suburban Rail Loop. He is so conflicted. It is true that the member for Bentleigh is up to his neck in this as well. I have got to say there are real problems here and something needs to be done to deal with this conflict of interest. Hockley is up to his neck in it – Hockley not properly making declarations, Hockley voting, Hockley acting as a paid advocate over here in direct conflict with his council responsibilities in the neighbouring council. He needs to be dealt with – *(Time expired)*

Education system

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:26): (2857) My last adjournment question in the 60th Parliament is for the Minister for Education. This Labor government has failed Victorian families. How can this government call this the Education State when one-third of our students are struggling to meet basic standards in English and maths and up to 40 per cent are not equipped with basic grammar and punctuation skills? This Andrews–Allan–Carroll Labor government has neglected students by failing to focus on core literacy and numeracy skills, and it has burdened teachers with heavy workloads, delayed overdue pay rises and forced them to teach contentious content without the knowledge or consent of parents.

The Liberal–National coalition has a plan to deliver excellence in education, to support students to excel in literacy and numeracy, to declutter the curriculum and to help build resilience to better prepare students for life. A Wilson-led government will establish three new select entry schools to meet high and currently unmet demand, with one potentially being located in the south-east around Langwarrin, Cranbourne South or surrounding suburbs. In addition to these three new select entry schools, we will also have six existing schools chosen to become fully or partially select entry. This will be determined through local community consultations and will give more students greater opportunities to achieve excellence and their full potential. The coalition government will provide more support for teachers and evidence-based learning in every classroom. Contrary to some comments of some of the Labor MPs, I, as a Liberal MP, along with my family, have fought very hard to see teachers wages rise and their conditions improve to become more flexible and fair.

Some Victorian teachers have left the profession because they do not want to discuss inappropriate sexualised content or enforce gender theory with children in our classrooms, and local parents and teachers have spoken of their concerns and distress about what their children have discussed in school. One Cranbourne Pakistani mother said to me, 'We brought our children to this country to give them a good education.' She said this while holding up a highly sexualised image from the curriculum her primary school son had. And she said, angrily, 'This is not a good education. We did not come here for this.' I must admit I was ashamed of what she showed me. It was inappropriate.

The action I seek, Minister, is for an independent, data-driven inquiry into the Safe Schools and Respectful Relationships programs in Victorian schools to ensure there is no avenue to allow paedophiles to groom students for sexual and emotional abuse with this curriculum. An effective curriculum against bullying that teaches human dignity and respect should not put children and minors at risk of being sexualised or expect them to keep secrets from their parents about what they are being taught. Families deserve to have their voices heard, particularly when it comes to protecting their children. This Labor government has ignored parents and teachers for too long. It has failed them, and Victorians are simply fed up.

Responses

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:29): There were 18 matters raised by members tonight that will be passed on to the relevant ministers. Thank you for your kindness in not having any of them directed to me this evening.

I have a few short words in relation to the end of the 60th Parliament. I put on the record my gratitude for everyone in this chamber, of course starting with the clerks. Thank you, Robert, and thank you, Richard, and the rest of your team, for your immense work commitment and ability to just keep the show going. To the table office and in particular Hansard, thank you so much. It is a tough job that you guys do, and we appreciate your efforts, particularly with some of the late nights that we have kept you here and the dinner breaks that we have tried to deny you. The same goes for the cleaning, kitchen and garden staff. I want to give a particular shout-out to the staff that assist with the committee stages in here but also the committee work of the upper house. We know that we work much harder than the Assembly, and there is no clearer evidence than in relation to the work that the committees do.

I would really like to thank Mrs McArthur, Ms Crozier and Mr Davis as the three leaders of the opposition for this term. You have always been very good to work with as the opposition leaders. You have always been very up-front. We have not always agreed, but the place functions because we have managed to be mature enough to tell each other what is going on and the like. It is a credit to the chamber that we have managed to keep up that consistent relationship. To all of the coalition members, again, I think we can have fun in here. We can argue, we can laugh and we can all say hello to each other outside the chamber, which is something that I think we should all be very proud of. I know everyone is here for the right reasons: representing their constituents and putting up the good fight.

Dr Mansfield, you are always consistently here at the end of adjournment. Good on you. None of the other crossbenchers ever hang around. Likewise, as a Leader of the Greens, you have been very constructive to work with, and I really appreciate the way you go about the work that you do. The other crossbenchers are not here. They have all got pros and cons, but again they have been consistently, most of the time, looking forward to doing the right thing.

To Lee in particular, as someone who has been a whip, he is the best whip the government has ever had. He is amazing at the job, and I know that he makes everybody's ability to do their job across all of the parties that much easier: thank you, Lee. To my colleagues, we are friends. We are like a family. We see so much of one another. We like being in each other's company. We are looking forward to not being here for a little while, I am sure. Particularly to those here on behalf of the others: Mr Batchelor, Mr Galea, I love ya guts heaps, so thanks so much. To everyone, the campaign will be –

Bev McArthur: Fun!

Jaclyn SYMES: It will have fun times. It is a challenge, and I wish everyone well.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:33): Thank you, Minister, for your words. I can endorse most of them, actually – like thanking all the staff. Of course we are indebted to them. We could not operate without them. Across every area of this Parliament they do an amazing job and put up with us not knowing things or getting it wrong or asking for changes all the time. We are indebted to you.

It is a great honour to be here, and it is an enormous privilege. We can work constructively and also combatively but for the right reasons, because we all want this place to be a better state and we want Victorians to have a better life. We all are here for the right reasons, I believe, and we will get there via whatever route we choose.

I endorse the minister's comments to Dr Mansfield, who is a colleague of mine in Western Victoria Region. We have been able to work extremely cooperatively together. I thank her very much for her efforts in accommodating whatever we have tried to do together, so thank you. Thank you, everyone.

I absolutely endorse the comments about the whip, but we have also got a fabulous whip, who has doubled as a shadow minister in a dual role. They are both indispensable. Who knows what is going to happen into the future, but thank you both so much for looking after us. To our fabulous President, who has kept us all in the chamber – in the other place they seem to be pitched out. I think you do a fabulous job, Shaun. Thank you so much for everything. Thank you to my colleagues. It has been great working with everybody and an enormous honour to be a leader in the chamber.

David Davis: I have got two points of order, very quickly. The first relates to the lifts. You know my views on this, but it may be that the clerks can find a solution to the risk with the lifts – which a number of us were nearly caught in today again – in the interim period before the next Parliament sits. The second one is something that the Leader of the Government may be able to assist with. Do we have an assurance that all of the annual reports will be tabled before the writs are issued?

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order. The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:36 pm.