Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 23 September 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira[2]	Western Metropolitan	FFV	Ratnam, Samantha[5]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem[6]	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina[3]	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee[8]	Northern Victoria	ON
Limbrick, David[4]	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard[7]	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

[1] Resigned 7 Dec 2023
[2] Lib from 26 Nov 2022 until 28 Mar 2023;
IndLib from 28 Mar 2023 until 27 Dec 2024;
Lib from 27 Dec 2024 until 28 Jul 2026;
Ind from 28 Jul 2026 until 6 Sep 2026
[3] Appointed 14 Nov 2024
[4] LDP until 26 Jul 2023
[5] Resigned 8 Nov 2024
[6] DLP until 25 Mar 2024
[7] Appointed 7 Feb 2024
[8] PHON until 3 Aug 2026

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 23 September 2026

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

Announcements

Photography in chamber

The PRESIDENT (09:33): I think this happened yesterday: I need to let the chamber know that there will be professional photographers around again.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Preventing Youth Crime, September 2026 *(Ordered to be published)*.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

Kingston Planning Scheme – Amendment C232.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C479.

Port of Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C7.

Port Phillip Planning Scheme – Amendment C235.

Surf Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C151.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Members statements

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:50): Over the last four years Labor has been busy delivering in the Southern Metropolitan Region. One of the things I am proudest of is the building of more homes for more Victorians that need them. We recently opened 285 new homes in Bluff Road in Hampton East, on top of 291 new homes in New Street, Brighton, as well as developments at Centre Road in Brighton East, Bangs Street in Prahran, Bills Street in Hawthorn and the Markham estate in Ashburton. We built the brand new Victorian Heart Hospital, upgraded the Sandringham, Moorabbin and Alfred hospitals and added 17,000 nurses and over 1000 doctors across the state. And there is a brand new ambulance station at East Bentleigh. There are new women's health clinics in Prahran and Sandringham. The Metro Tunnel has transformed our network. The new Anzac station is spectacular. Commuters in Southern Metro have got more options to travel. Frankston line trains are back through the city loop. There are 155 new services on the Sandringham line as a result of the opening of the Metro Tunnel. The level crossings in Glen Huntly are gone. There is a brand new and award-winning train station, tunnelling is underway on the Suburban Rail Loop and community facilities are being upgraded at Sir William Fry Reserve. We lead the nation in NAPLAN. We have upgraded schools, including Moorabbin Primary, Sandringham East Primary, Hampton East School and Glen Eira College. We have got new sports facilities at Sandringham College, Caulfield South and Hampton. St Kilda primary schools are getting new gyms. Gardenvale Primary is getting new classrooms. There is so much going on that I am running out of time. It is great.

Victorian Eagles kho kho club

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): On Saturday I joined the Victorian Eagles kho kho club at Billabong Park in Vermont South, with the candidate for Glen Waverley Jacky Sun. For anyone who does not know what kho kho is, it is one of India's oldest team sports. There is no ball. There is a team of nine players on each side who run between posts – one chasing, one defending – in a game of exhilarating exhibitions of athleticism, dexterity and changes of direction. It is absolutely brilliant. The ground came about because committee members, led by club president Randeep Kaur, kept asking and kept turning up at Whitehorse council and they made space at their local baseball club, who accommodated them. That is how a new sport can take root when people work together in that way. What I took from the exhibition match was that players were all ages and all genders, but it was parents who had immigrated from India teaching their children who had been born in Australia a traditional game and carrying on their tradition in that way. It is not just about food and dance, it is also about the sports that you inherit. It was really wonderful; I got sunburnt. My congratulations to Randeep Kaur, the Victorian Eagles committee and volunteers and the families who turned out. I look forward to playing in the first competitive season this year.

Data centres

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:53): 'We need data centres but we set the rules' – that was the headline for the Premier's big announcement yesterday on data centres in Victoria. Apparently, if his government gets the rules right, data centres will mean more jobs and investment. But the truth is the jobs only come during the construction phase. Once these hyperscale monsters are built, due to the nature of their highly automated facilities, these jobs will diminish. The Premier claims that data centres must protect homes, indicating that under these new rules data centres will be prohibited in residential zones, with a 150-metre buffer zone between a data centre building and homes. This rule, however, will not be retrospective, meaning for hyperscale data centres already in the pipeline or approved it will not apply. This just shows how scared this Labor government is of billionaire tech bros. This Labor government is relying on the goodwill of these tech companies to do what is right. Have they not learned that these tech bros only have one agenda: making money? At a time when Victorians are looking for courageous leadership when it comes to communities, the environment and the cost of living, the only thing this government is doing is incrementalism. These rules have gaping holes and raise more questions than answers. Moratorium now.

Felicitations

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): As this term draws to a close, I want to pay tribute to the retiring Labor colleagues who have given so much to our movement and our state. To Natalie Hutchins, thank you for your leadership on treaty. You have walked alongside First Nations Victorians with genuine respect, doing the hard, necessary work to make self-determination a reality, and you have answered the calls of many generations of elders. Because of you, we can proudly say Victoria is the first state in Australia to deliver a treaty with its First Peoples. To Lily D'Ambrosio, thank you for being an incredible mentor to me and for spearheading the renewable energy transition that has made Victoria the undisputed national leader on climate action. To Danny Pearson, thank you for being a fantastic electoral neighbour in the northern suburbs. It is always good to see you and sharing our love of community in every single step, including mostly the love of our local libraries. We heard Harriet Shing's valedictory yesterday in this chamber. We will deeply miss her intellect and her huge heart. To my upper house colleague Gayle Tierney, your work making sure that free TAFE is here to stay has unlocked life-changing opportunities for thousands of young Victorians. To you, President: you have guided this chamber with fairness, wit and, frankly, far more patience than we usually deserve. And to all of my other colleagues – Jackson, Steve, Emma, Jordan, Mary-Anne, Maree and Jacinta – thank you for your service. You leave our state in a better place.

Felicitations

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:56): As this term of Parliament comes to an end, there has been a lot of reflection. I have worked hard to show what just one person can do for animals, people and the planet, fighting for wildlife, challenging powerful industries, pushing for better animal protection laws and putting on the parliamentary record issues that might have otherwise gone unheard. But this term has also been incredibly challenging. The same day my heart was broken by the government's decision to continue duck shooting I was photoshopped and became a global news story. I endured relentless sexist abuse, a new relationship attracted far too much attention and I navigated a high-risk pregnancy under relentless attacks from anti-choice activists. I returned to work just weeks after giving birth, navigating motherhood while juggling the life of a crossbencher with a region that is half the state, 25 animals, my partner's beautiful eight-year-old daughter and chairing a standing committee. As Ms Shing bravely shared about herself last night, I too learned I was neurodivergent, and my AuDHD diagnosis finally gave me a language to understand myself and why life in the public eye has sometimes been so incredibly challenging. There have been broken promises, legislation that should have passed, and campaigns where we did not get the outcome that we wanted, but ultimately representing the Animal Justice Party and Northern Victoria has been an honour. I am incredibly grateful to my team – Mitch, Caitie, Ethan, Isla, Sam and Amy – who are absolutely brilliant. We have achieved so much together, but there is still so much more to do, and we will be fighting to be back in here to make it happen.

Transport Workers' Union

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:58): I rise to deliver my final members statement of this parliamentary term, and I want to use it to speak about my union, the Transport Workers' Union. Just a couple of weeks ago transport workers across the country walked off the job in the largest strike in Australian transport history. Transport workers deserve to have stronger wages, fairer conditions and secure work, but corporations have been pocketing more revenue to boost their own profits instead of investing in their workforce. I am proud to see the TWU lead its biggest strike action ever, and I stand in solidarity with all these workers fighting for what they deserve. I want to applaud national secretary Michael Kaine and director of organising Sam Lynch and the rest of the team in the TWU for their hard work in organising this strike. I wish them the best as they continue to fight for transport workers in this state, as I have done for most of my life.

Drug use

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:59): As I prepare to depart from Parliament, I cannot help but reflect on how the conversation around drug use has changed. Just weeks ago One Nation's Victorian leader Warren Pickering opened up about his past drug use, prompting similar admissions from MPs across the political spectrum, to what can only be described as a collective shrug from Victorians. While I disagree with much of One Nation's policy platform – some good questions but answers that will not help working and marginalised Victorians – no-one can accept impaired driving, be that from alcohol or any other form of drug. Mr Pickering's story reminds us that drug use should be treated as a health issue, not a criminal one. I hope that we have played a part in normalising the idea that people can take drugs and still contribute to society. We are your shoppies, your tradies, your nurses, your teachers and, yes, even your MPs. We do not want special treatment, we simply want dignity, equality and compassion.

Bills

Liability for Climate Change Damage (Make Polluters Pay) Bill 2026

Statement of charter compatibility

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:00): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the 'Liability for Climate Change Damage (Make Polluters Pay) Bill 2026'.

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with, promotes, and strengthens the human rights protected by the Charter.

I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

The main purpose of the bill is to impose liability for climate change damage on certain major emitters of greenhouse gases in Victoria.

The Bill would do this by imposing a new duty of care on major emitters, which would form part of a cause of action in negligence per Part X of the *Wrongs Act 1958*.

The Bill would not impinge on any of the Charter's existing rights, while actively strengthening rights such as the:

- **Section 9 – Right to life**: Section 9 of the Charter means every Victorian has the right to life and the right to not have their life taken. It also requires governments to protect the right to life.
- **Section 17 of the Charter protects families and children**: Section 17 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) recognises the family unit as a fundamental part of our society. It also recognises that children may need particular protection, to ensure the way they are treated is in their best interests.
- **Section 20 – Property rights**: Section 20 of the Charter protects Victorian's right to not be deprived of your property, including land, possessions and shares.

Therefore, in my opinion this Bill strengthens the Charter. For these reasons I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter.

Statement of treaty compatibility

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:01): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Statewide Treaty Act 2025:

In my opinion, 'Liability for Climate Change Damage (Make Polluters Pay) Bill 2026' is compatible with the matters set out in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 (Treaty Act). I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The main purpose of the bill is to impose liability for climate change damage on certain major emitters of greenhouse gases in Victoria.

The Bill would do this by imposing a new duty of care on major emitters, which would form part of a cause of action in negligence per Part X of the *Wrongs Act 1958*.

Compatibility of the Bill with the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025

In my opinion the Bill is compatible with the objects in section 66(3)(d) of the Treaty Act: advancing the inherent rights and self-determination of First Peoples; addressing the unacceptable disadvantage inflicted on First Peoples by the historic wrongs and ongoing injustices of colonisation; and ensuring the equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by First Peoples.

The Bill does not establish, remove or alter any rights, functions or institutions specific to First Peoples.

In fact, it would strengthen the rights of First Peoples in a climate crisis to take legal action against major coal and gas polluters, creating avenues for financial damages and/or injunctive relief, such an end to polluting activities.

To the extent that the Bill influences the social determinants of health and community wellbeing, it may support conditions that enable First Peoples to exercise their rights and self-determination more effectively.

For the reasons set out above, in my opinion the Bill is compatible with the objects specified in section 66(3)(d) of the Statewide Treaty Act 2025.

Second reading

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:01): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I rise in favour of the Liability for Climate Change Damage (Make Polluters Pay) Bill 2026, a Victorian Greens bill to make major emitters liable for the damage caused by climate disasters.

Climate damage is no longer a hypothetical threat in Victoria. It is here, it's happening right now. We saw it in the Black Summer bushfires of 2019, when the state was blanketed in smoke, entire parts of the country were destroyed, and 3 billion animals were killed.

And we saw it back in January this year, when communities in my electorate of Western Victoria were hit by concurrent bushfires and flash flooding. It was a horrifying, dissociative experience, seeing cars swept out to sea along the Great Ocean Road, while natural habitats went up in flames just up the road in the Otways, and dozens of homes were being engulfed in multiple fires across the state, including in places like Longwood and Harcourt.

As Labor politicians toured the region, offering their sympathies and a splash of recovery funding, none of them wanted to mention that just weeks earlier, back in December 2025, the state and federal governments had put out seven tenders for new oil and gas projects across the Otway and Gippsland Basins. Neither did Labor explain why families were left to fend for themselves, while the coal and gas giants causing the climate crisis are still out opening new projects and making billions in profit.

When the Prime Minister toured Harcourt after the fires, he announced a $20 million support package. Compare that with the $16 billion in subsidies Australia is giving to fossil fuel giants every year – or the hundreds of billions of dollars in profits they make while paying little to no tax. Anthony Albanese has since gone on to fight tooth and nail against a moderate – and incredibly popular – 25 per cent tax on gas exports. Anyone trying to square these priorities need only look at how much those gas companies donate to Labor – and the Liberal–National coalition, and One Nation.

So as Victorians stare down burgeoning energy and insurance bills, and a heating world that has officially missed the 1.5-degree threshold, none of the major parties want to touch the sides of this climate and cost-of-living crisis. They've failed to heed the warnings and it's us – ordinary Victorians – who pay the price. That's simply not fair. If a company is profiting from making the climate crisis worse, then at a bare minimum they should be legally liable for the damage they're creating.

This bill will rebalance the scales, by giving people and businesses affected by climate disasters the right to sue coal and gas corporations to pay for the damage these corporations have caused. The Victorian government would also be able to take legal action in their own right or on behalf of people affected by climate disasters.

The main purpose of the bill is to impose liability for climate change damage on certain major emitters of greenhouse gases in Victoria. The bill would do this by imposing a new duty of care on major emitters, which would form part of a cause of action in negligence per part X of the Wrongs Act 1958.

Major emitters of greenhouse gases, including fossil fuel producers and owners or operators of coal-fired power stations, would be liable for climate change damage if their total emissions are greater than 1 million tonnes in any 12-month period that began on or after September 1990.

That was the year the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report was released – meaning that from at least 1 September 1990, every major emitter should have known about the consequences of their actions.

Courts would have the ability to impose financial damages and/or injunctions on facilities owned by major emitters. Injunctions could force a facility to reduce their emissions, stop emitting entirely and, critically, not go ahead with future polluting activities.

A fundamental injustice of the climate crisis is that the costs will be borne most by those least able to afford it, while coal and gas giants making the crisis worse continue to rake in billions in profits. This bill would go some way to address this injustice.

Of course, no party can claim to have a credible climate policy if they're still opening up new fossil fuel projects. You can't put out a fire while also pouring fuel on it. That's why the Greens are strongly campaigning for an end to coal and gas – and in the meantime, we should tax their profits to pay for the climate adaptation we need, like helping communities recover from fire and floods and building more resilience into our state. We know that we are not ready for the climate change impacts that are already being lived by communities, let alone what has been baked in because of the complicity of governments in perpetuating the burning of fossil fuels.

The Greens have a costed plan to transition out of coal and gas and replace them with publicly owned renewables. This will include a massive program of putting solar on schools, public housing estates, and other government buildings. We also have a plan for getting more renewable energy online faster by fast-tracking planning approvals for wind farms and transmission lines, which are sorely needed in the transition to renewables.

The Victorian Greens will also end the corporate stranglehold we're seeing in governments by banning donations from fossil fuel corporations. We'll double the coal and gas royalties and cancel all subsidies and tax exemptions for fossil fuel projects.

By making the big polluters pay their fair share, we'll deliver grants to Victorian households to make their homes more resilient. These would fund insulation, home solar, batteries, electrification upgrades, EV chargers, electric bikes and other climate solutions.

The Greens will end Labor's attacks on nature, stop the AI data centre frenzy, and fund adaptation solutions we know Victoria needs. We'll reverse funding cuts to Parks Victoria and DEECA and create new reserves to protect what's left of our precious native forests, in partnership with traditional owners.

With this bill, we will be able to make major emitters liable for climate change, empowering the government and Victorians affected by climate disasters to sue the companies responsible for them.

By ending coal and gas, investing in publicly owned renewables, and taxing the big polluters, the Greens know that even in the face of global heating, we can adapt and build a better and safer Victoria – for both people and the planet. I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:07): I move:

That debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Production of documents

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:08): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes the:

(a) failure of the Carroll Labor government to publicly release the quarterly health services performance data from the Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI), and Ambulance Victoria response time data for the April to June 2026 quarter, more than 80 days since the end of the quarter;

(b) lack of transparency in the government's failure to provide timely publication of Victoria's vital health data that measures key indicators of how the health system is working;

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within seven days of the house agreeing to this resolution:

(a) all health services performance data from VAHI for the quarter ending 30 June 2026, including:

(i) ambulance services;

(ii) dental care;

(iii) emergency care;

(iv) hospital admission and discharge;

(v) mental health;

(vi) patient experience;

(vii) planned surgery;

(viii) quality and safety;

(ix) safety culture;

(x) specialist clinics; and

(b) all briefings, correspondence and other documents provided to the Minister for Health, or her office, in relation to the health services performance data for the quarter ending 30 June 2026.

I am very pleased to be able to rise and move motion 1641 in my name, a documents motion. I am calling on the Carroll Labor government to publicly release the quarterly health services performance data from the Victorian Agency for Health Information, or VAHI, and the Ambulance Victoria response times data for the April to June 2026 quarter, which was due over 80 days ago. I have been calling for weeks around all of these issues that are being attributed to health. There are a lot of delays and a lot of issues, and I think it is in the interests of all Victorians and clinicians to be able to have that data.

Ben Carroll has said that integrity is not optional. He has told Victorians that on numerous occasions. He goes out there and says that he is not Daniel Andrews or Jacinta Allan and that integrity is not optional, but there is no integrity without transparency. We are not getting the transparency that we need. We are not getting the data and the details of what is happening in our health services to understand exactly what is going on. That is why I am asking for this information to be released, because the lack of transparency means that we do not know how our health system is operating.

What we do know is that in the quarter from January to March there were over 68,000 Victorians who were waiting for vital surgery – surgery that they need to get them out of pain, to get them out of debilitating situations and to allow them to get on with their lives. We know that number is well in excess of 68,000, and that is why the government will not release it, because it is a bad news story. If you look at today's front page of the *Age* with the Royal Children's Hospital, 20 emergency beds cannot be opened, and that is just the extraordinary lack of resources, planning and ability of this government to be able to manage health. If you go and look at what other quarterly data VAHI responds to, it is not only that vital surgery that I have spoken about but ambulance services. One in three code 1 ambulances do not arrive within the 15-minute benchmark, so they are way off meeting the government's own targets of 85 per cent. We need to understand why, where the gaps are, what is happening and what is working.

Dental care: on average, for people to get general dental care, it is a wait time of 151 days, and that is compared to New South Wales, which is just eight days. This is months and months and months for people, some very vulnerable people, and the wait times for more complex cases are sometimes way longer than that – years.

Emergency departments: I have mentioned the Royal Children's Hospital and the failure of the government to resource and fund that properly and to plan and manage the issue. We know that the wait times in emergencies are growing as well. Over 50 per cent of people are waiting more than

4 hours in our emergency departments, and in many instances the number of people that are waiting in excess of 24 hours is growing too, particularly in the regions.

The government has mismanaged all of these areas of health. But there is other data that we need to understand: hospital admissions and discharge, mental health. There are proponents who have been very strong in their criticism of the government around not addressing certain needs, as recommended by the royal commission. My colleague Emma Kealy has been very strong on pointing out the failures of Labor over 12 years, even though they promised to improve issues in mental health. Those statistics are damning as well.

The patient experience, quality and safety – look at the numbers around the violence, the occupational health and safety issues that are arising: 65 incidents a day are occurring in our hospitals. These patient and safety issues are very, very concerning. Again, the government has failed to address them. That is why we have made an announcement of trialling PSOs in some of our busiest and more challenging EDs to give the backup of security to the clinicians so they have the safety and security that they deserve and need. That has not happened. Enough of the talking. We do not need another talk taskforce. We just need to get on and give the security to our hardworking frontline workers. As Mrs McArthur will know, two midwives in Geelong were assaulted after a shift at night. This is just not on. It has got to stop. As I said, on safety culture and specialist clinics, 150 Victorians have been forgotten, with their referrals left in a box in the Mildura hospital. The government took over the Mildura hospital and said they would deliver better services. It has been a debacle for that community, and that is just one example of the many things that have occurred.

This documents motion goes to those very important issues around data, but it also calls on all briefings, correspondence and other documents provided to the Minister for Health or her office in relation to the health services performance data for the quarter ending 30 June 2026. We need to understand exactly why the government and the minister have not provided this information. She keeps telling the media it will be released in the coming weeks, shortly, within a fortnight. I mean, these are just hollow weasel words, and the government needs to be more transparent. I go back to Ben Carroll: 'integrity is not optional'. Well, there is no integrity without transparency.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:14): The quarterly Victorian health services performance data is released approximately every quarter, as the name suggests. But one of the important aspects about health data, as with all data, is that it undergoes a validation process and quality assurance processes, and because our health system is complex, the data is coming from a range of health services into a central location. The team at the Victorian Agency for Health Information do a great job at pulling all of that together. It is not a process that you want to get wrong. It is not a process that you want to rush and put out in the absence of the data quality, data assurance and validation processes having taken place because of the significance of that data and that information for not only the system but the patients, the clinicians and the health practitioners, all of whom have an interest in high-quality data being made available. That is why, as the minister said yesterday in question time in response to a question from Ms Crozier, once those processes are completed, the data will be released. It is a pretty straightforward answer to a pretty straightforward set of circumstances – that is, when the data validation processes and quality assurance are complete the data gets released. Sometimes that process can take longer than at other times for a range of inputs that I think should be in the hands of the data experts and not politicians to determine.

It is also really rich for the Liberals to complain about the release of health data when the last time that they were in government they barely released it. The last time the Liberal Party were in government, when Mr Davis, who is still here apparently, was the health minister, they consistently failed to release quarterly health data in a timely fashion. Once it took them more than 18 months to release data, and another time they put it out three days before Christmas. Nothing screams 'We're trying to hide' more than the Liberals releasing their health data three days before Christmas, so forgive this side for being a little sceptical. It is a little difficult to take seriously the exhortations of the shadow minister in critiquing a minister who said only yesterday that when the data validation processes were complete

the data would be released as she got up and repeated some of the claims that she made yesterday today when the track record of her colleagues is the exact behaviour that she is now critical of others for, without foundation and without merit.

I suspect that it is just a distraction to get the public's attention away from what is really going on – that is, a Liberal Party that has got plans to privatise more of our public health system. Because that is what Liberals do: they shut hospitals and they privatise the public health system. We know that the Liberal Party are sharpening the axe for health care, because they have committed to cutting the budget by $40 billion, and you cannot cut $40 billion out of the state budget without cutting health care, without undermining frontline health services. We saw them do it when the Kennett government was elected, when they shut public hospitals. You can imagine the jobs that are at risk in the health department, probably including those of the very people who put this data together. They are at risk and on the chopping block under the Liberals. That is the real agenda. This motion is a distraction from it.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:19): I rise to speak in support of Ms Crozier's documents motion about the validation of data around healthcare services. The reality is that there has never been such a delay in the release of data around health services than there has been under this government. That is the reality. The scare tactics around privatisation – not only is it untrue but it is taking the spotlight away from the people that this is intended to serve, and that is the patients. There are well over, some numbers say, 68,000 people on the public waiting list trying to get in for surgeries, and some of these are quite serious. When I was working as a chiropractor, so many people were desperate for disc decompression surgery, and the change and the impact that it had on their lives were nothing short of devastating. My younger sister had private health cover, but it was not the right type of health cover – it did not cover spinal surgery. She was so desperate for that surgery. It was going to cost her upwards of $50,000, $60,000, which she just quite frankly did not have of course; there was a plan around that. But she had to go and change her health cover and wait a year for that to come through in order to get her surgery. She was a category 1, which is urgent, meaning it should be done within 30 days. It was quicker for her to wait one year for her private health cover to kick into gear. She was very lucky. She had, in my opinion, one of the best spinal surgeons. His name is Greg Malham, and he was just incredible. She had a thing called spondylolisthesis. Basically one of her vertebrae had moved forward significantly. He opened her from the front, he moved her aorta off the spine, he pushed it back and he caged that in. Then the next day he turned her over and did another surgery from the back.

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Renee HEATH: Did your mum have that? Amazing. Thank God for modern science. But the reality is that there was a time when she could not walk. She was in absolute agony. When people go through these things they even become incontinent, and if that spinal cord is not decompressed urgently, they can lose that function forever. Well, I thank God for that surgeon Greg Malham. Because of him, my sister can walk today. She is not wetting herself today, because of Greg Malham and because of that surgery. But he cannot work today, and because of that, so many others cannot walk, they cannot manage to live a life that is actually functional. This is why we have to get clarity on exactly what is happening in our healthcare system – who is on the waiting list and why that is – because if these category 1 surgeries do not get treated within 30 days, those issues can be detrimental. If it is cancer, it can spread. If it is an infection, it can kill somebody. If it is a spinal injury, it can cause neurological damage that will never repair. In fact some of these nerves, once they are damaged, repair about this much a month; the growth is a matter of millimetres a month. These people will never get that function back. That is why we are so passionate about getting the healthcare system back on track and about making sure that doctors and nurses are equipped with what they need, that they have the ability to go into country areas and work there and find a place and live and that surgeons can go in and practise and be the sorts of people that turn around lives because of the life-saving surgery they can give.

The deflection from the government is not surprising. But it is also quite insulting, because it takes the focus off the people we are meant to be focused on, who are not the opposition – they are the patients. I commend this motion to the house, and I hope that we can get these documents in a timely manner.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:24): I also rise to make a contribution on Ms Crozier's motion in regard to the release of quarterly health services performance data, and I think Mr Batchelor stole my thunder in speaking about this. But I am going to repeat what Mr Batchelor said, because it is worth repeating and repeating often. Honestly, we will not take lectures from those opposite about the timely release of health data. I know those opposite like to rewrite history, but it is worth repeating history, because everyone needs to know what those opposite did when they were last in power.

When they were last in government Mr Davis was health minister, and under his leadership the Liberal–National coalition government consistently failed to release quarterly health data in a timely fashion – consistently. It is called quarterly for a reason. They once failed to release health performance data for 18 months. They failed to release quarterly data – that is data that should be released four times a year – for 18 months. They released both the June 2011 quarter and the September 2011 quarter on the same day, just three days before Christmas. That is called burying something, and that is what they did. You only have to think about what the data would have looked like and why it was buried, because it would have been bad under their watch. What they did not know was how much their government was failing Victorians. They buried it. Then they released the December 2010 quarterly data six months into 2011, again, not in a timely fashion, deliberately delayed and in a manner that was designed to bury the true picture of what was going on. We hear lots of talk over there on the opposition benches about how this government lacks accountability and we need transparency and the like. But look at this record. This record speaks volumes about those opposite and what would in fact happen if they were ever given the privilege again of governing for the people of Victoria.

Then the December 2013 quarter was released, four months late. There is a consistent pattern here, not just a mistake, not just a once-off, not just a glitch or a blip. There was a consistent and persistent pattern of conduct by those opposite to hide the parlous state of our medical system, in failing to release this data from the Victorian Agency for Health Information. This is the sort of data that is covered: things like ambulance response times, ambulance services, dental care, emergency care, hospital admissions and discharge, mental health, patient experience, planned surgery, quality and safety, safety culture and specialist clinics. All of those matters were hidden. So the hypocrisy of those opposite, on the other side, lecturing this government about accountability and transparency – the record shows what they did, failing to release quarterly health data in a timely fashion. We are not rewriting history, and we will not allow those opposite to rewrite history either. Everybody needs to know their pattern of conduct in regard to this. It is shameful, and we know what would happen if they were ever given the privilege of governing for Victoria.

A One Nation–Liberal government cannot be trusted with health care. Jeff Kennett's campaign of cuts is still felt in the healthcare system to this very day. Those cuts were deep, and we know those opposite have pledged to cut $40 billion from the budget. That means more cuts to health. Kennett, when he was in government, cut paediatric services at the Alfred, closed the St Kilda day hospital and gutted staff at Wangaratta hospital. Only Labor can be trusted with Victoria's world-class healthcare system. We have invested in it. The government will not be opposing this motion.

Motion agreed to.

HIV

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:28): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) Victoria has an historic opportunity to become one of the first places in the world to virtually eliminate HIV transmission;

(b) the Melbourne HIV consensus statement 2026 was launched last week at the Australasian HIV & AIDS Conference and is supported by community-controlled organisations and world-leading researchers and clinicians;

(c) this statement called for the Victorian HIV plan midpoint review to be publicly released, a report which is now considered overdue;

(d) to achieve the aim of virtually eliminating HIV by 2030 we must be able to track progress towards this goal, for which this report is critical;

(2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 30 days of the house agreeing to this resolution, the overdue 2025–26 midpoint review of the *Victorian HIV Plan 2022–30*.

We are at a historic point here in Victoria, where we are in a position to be one of the first places in the world to virtually eliminate HIV. I did not live through the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, but I do think that young people today want to understand just how deeply this time impacted the community, particularly LGBTQI+ people. The loss, the fear and the human tragedy of those times is something that I feel really keenly aware of in speaking about this issue today. There are so many stories we can point to of the compassion, of the activism and of the sense of love that saw so many from the queer community rally around people who were ill, people who were dying of HIV/AIDS.

I had the privilege of attending the launch of the Victorian HIV Consensus Statement 2026 at the Australasian HIV & AIDS Conference just last week. This statement lays out a really clear pathway to achieving the aim of virtually eliminating HIV by the end of this decade, and I and my Greens colleagues absolutely support it. All parties have been called to support that statement. I cannot speak about HIV prevention and prevention of transmission without mentioning my friend and colleague Dr Tim Read. As was said in this place just yesterday, before becoming an MP Tim was a GP during the HIV/AIDS crisis, he was a sexual health doctor and he was a medical researcher whose PhD focused on HIV control. Tim had a lifelong commitment to HIV prevention and treatment during his time working as a doctor, which shifted to advocacy when he entered the Parliament. He was deeply committed to the elimination of HIV transmission, and I want to ensure that his advocacy continues as long as I have the privilege of remaining in this Parliament.

But for Victoria to achieve the aim of virtual elimination by 2030, we need to be sure that we are on track now. That is why it is so important for this midpoint review to be released, which was a key ask of the Victorian HIV Consensus Statement:

> Finish the job: virtually eliminate HIV transmissions by 2030.
>
> Victoria set 2025 as the year to virtually eliminate new HIV transmissions. That deadline has passed; this Parliament can finish the job by 2030.

We need to know what is working and what needs changing. There are communities out there who are not being reached by the usual avenues, people out there who may not be reached by health promotional material, who do not see themselves in health promotion campaigns. The consensus statement talks about targeting prevention and testing where diagnoses are falling – and rising – in some, particularly overseas-born gay and bisexual men, people not accessing specialist sexual health primary care and heterosexual men and women. It talks about funding HIV community controlled health promotion led by and for people living with and affected by HIV that reaches every affected community. It talks about sustaining and growing funding for community-controlled and peer-led organisations, centring the meaningful involvement of people living with HIV, including women with HIV.

If we are to meet this milestone of the virtual elimination of HIV transmission, we need to be sure we are on the path to success. That is why this interim review is so important. This work requires action. It requires political will from governments. We do not need a government that just nods along. We need a comprehensive approach. We need sustained funding to ensure all elements moving towards these goals are being achieved. Here in Victoria HIV treatment should be free, and the government should be covering the PBS co-payment on HIV medicine. This is something that Tim had been advocating for for a long time. We are effectively the last big state to charge for HIV treatment. We need to expand access to testing, to PrEP, to PEP and to condoms. We want to make it as easy as possible for people to access testing and to access support and preventative measures. We need to ensure that community-led initiatives can continue to do their vital work to improve awareness and to provide access to testing and treatment. Health beliefs and attitudes to accessing care are strongly socially determined, and not everyone is going to immediately access specialised sexual health services to get HIV testing and treatment, so having skilled people and people with lived experience out in the community providing appropriate peer support is critical to meeting people where they are at.

We need continued investment in community health centres and for sexual health care to be embedded in these community centres as part of a holistic health approach. At a time when places like the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre cannot offer a drop-in clinic and when Sexual Health Victoria has to close its CBD clinic, both due to funding concerns, we need this investment from government. Access to services is a key factor in reducing transmission and prevalence, and so now is the time for the government to be doing more, not less. Now is the time to show this state where we are at so we can make sure that we do all things possible to reach the end of the 2020s having achieved the goal that has been set out: to end the virtual transmission of HIV. I call on the government to release the overdue 2025–26 midpoint review of the *Victorian HIV Plan 2022–30*. I commend the motion to the house.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:34): I rise to make a contribution on the short-form documents motion moved by Mr Puglielli regarding the production of the 2025–26 midpoint review of the *Victorian HIV Plan 2022–30*. In line with the usual conventions of this place, the government will not be opposing this motion, and I would like to thank Mr Puglielli for bringing this matter today. Given the subject matter of the motion before us, it is highly appropriate to briefly acknowledge the late Dr Tim Read. His extensive clinical work and dedicated research in sexual health and HIV played a vital role in shaping our state's public health response and advancing the care of so many Victorians.

Victoria's response to HIV has led the nation because it has always been built on evidence, harm reduction and genuine partnership with community-controlled organisations like Thorne Harbour Health, Living Positive Victoria and Positive Women Victoria. When we released the *Victorian HIV Plan 2022–30* we set out a clear vision: the virtual elimination of new transmissions. We set our sights on reaching a 95–98–98 cascade by 2025, ensuring that 95 per cent of people living with HIV are diagnosed, 98 per cent of those diagnosed are on treatment and 98 per cent of people on treatment achieve an undetectable viral load. Crucially, the plan recognises that public health is about more than just viral suppression. It sets a target of 75 per cent of people living with HIV reporting a good quality of life and commits to driving reported stigma and discrimination in health care and social settings down to below 10 per cent by 2030.

The plan also lays bare the hard truths about where our system needs to adapt. The epidemic in Victoria is shifting. Over 40 per cent of new diagnoses are amongst people born overseas, with more than half of those from Asia, and over 40 per cent are now being diagnosed in low caseload general practices, rather than the specialised inner-city clinics that might come to mind. We know women are still being diagnosed late, because they often do not perceive themselves to be at risk. Thanks to life-saving therapies, 44 per cent of Victorians living with HIV are now aged over 55, but they additionally face complex comorbidities.

We are constantly investing in the future of prevention and treatment to meet these evolving challenges through things like the mRNA Victorian Research Acceleration Fund. This Labor government is directly backing local researchers to develop the next generation of mRNA vaccines and medicines.

This program provides grants to fast-track mRNA-based therapeutic research and has proudly delivered funding to Victorian research teams to accelerate new cutting-edge mRNA-based treatments specifically for HIV. By investing in this technology, we are ensuring Victoria remains at the absolute forefront of this fight. We cannot ignore a key part of our response – that is, harm reduction. The plan highlights that every single dollar invested in needle and syringe programs saves our community $27 in healthcare costs.

I will take a moment to reflect on a recent visit I had to Thorne Harbour Health. I had the good fortune of joining the new Minister for Equality there. Whilst there I did get to see firsthand and meet with some of the clinicians working in that space. I want to draw attention to their outreach work with our First Nations communities, particularly through their centre, I believe in Prahran, where they work with First Nations communities living with HIV. To Peter Waples-Crowe and the entire team there at Thorne Harbour Health, I acknowledge you and your many, many years of leadership and work in this area as well as the Aboriginal community controlled health organisations that work in partnership with Thorne Harbour so well. I want to reaffirm my absolute commitment to Thorne Harbour Health and thank them for all that they do. Of course there are other organisations that I named like Living Positive Victoria and Positive Women Victoria. They are incredibly valued, and I just want to thank them.

We want the sector, our clinicians and the community to have the tools and information they need so we can finish what generations of health workers started and virtually eliminate HIV in Victoria once and for all, so, as I said, the government will not oppose this motion.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:39): I rise to speak in support of motion 1643 in Mr Puglielli's name, and I want to just make some comments regarding some of the points that he has raised in the house today, particularly in relation to what I was speaking to in the last motion. The Premier says integrity is not optional, but without transparency, you do not have that integrity. And for the life of me I do not know why the government is delaying the release of this midpoint review that was due out, the 2025–26 midpoint review of the *Victorian HIV Plan 2022–30*. Mr Puglielli outlined some very good points around what the state has been doing, and I want to turn to that too, and he also acknowledged the late Dr Tim Read. I did not get an opportunity to speak to Tim's contribution to this very important area in public health, and I want to put on record, in the short time that I have, an acknowledgement of that and the tremendous discussions that I had with him over a number of issues relating to the health portfolio. I do recognise the work that he undertook in this very important area.

I want to go back to my own time as a young nurse in the 1980s when I was at the Alfred; that is where the AIDS patients came. AIDS was a death sentence. Nobody survived AIDS then. It was horrendous. There were so many unknowns. We have moved on over the last 40 years in such a tremendous way. There has been so much work done, and there needs to be much more work done. I am concerned about the rise in HIV now around some of our Pacific Island neighbours, where there is an increasing rate. The work that we do in this state can assist those communities, and we must be doing that.

I want to place on record the efforts of my colleague Mr Davis, who was the health minister in 2014 when we had the biggest medical conference here in Melbourne, the AIDS conference. It was tremendous. It was at a very tragic time, when MH17 went down and delegates did not come. It was just awful. But that was an incredible conference, with 12,000 delegates from over 170 countries, and really high profile speakers like Bill Clinton and Bob Geldof came. It was just extraordinary. The work we were doing at that time was really elevated, Melbourne's and Victoria's work in this area, with Dr Sharon Lewin, who was leading the charge and is an extraordinary scientist in this area.

Let us not forget what a Liberal government did. The Pronto! rapid testing site was launched under David Davis as health minister under a Liberal government, as were the Looking 4 Cure research and the pre-exposure prophylaxis, PrEP, treatment and prevention programs. All of those initiatives were started under Mr Davis, and I think not enough credit is given to the work that we did around a number of things, including this really important area. It was also Mr Davis who announced that the coalition

government would amend section 19A of the Crimes Act 1958 to remove its HIV-specific discriminatory character. That work went on, and it was followed up by the Andrews Labor government when they followed on with that initiative that we said we would do. It is very important to reduce the stigma and understand that this is a very serious health condition. People do live with HIV very, very successfully. I have known people, friends of mine, who have had HIV who, sadly, lost their lives. But there is a lot of good work being done, and we need to continue on that. I do note that New South Wales have released their plan, and they are looking at the very issues around strengthening testing and improving access to care and support for those that are living with HIV.

I go back to the start of my contribution: I do not know what the delay is. Why is the government not releasing this report? What are they hiding? What are they doing, actually, more to the point? What is this government actually doing in this really important area? I say so much work has been done, but we have seen a failure by Labor to deliver on some very basic and fundamental initiatives. Mr Puglielli mentioned the cuts to community health and where a lot of these programs are delivered. This is a Labor government that is making cuts in health care that are going to have a direct impact on patient outcomes. Again, I say well done for bringing this motion to the house today.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:44): I am pleased to also rise to speak on Mr Puglielli's motion and to thank him for bringing this to the house's attention. In doing so I want to briefly acknowledge the gaping hole in our Parliament with the loss of the immense contribution that we were blessed to have over eight years from Dr Tim Read, the late member for Brunswick, and his incredible expertise and passion in this area.

This is a very important subject, and it is worth us having some time in the Parliament today to discuss it. HIV continues to be a major health issue facing many communities in our state and nation, including to a largely more pronounced degree the LGBTIQA+ community. I acknowledge contributions in a bipartisan way across a long time and from both sides of politics in leading that fight and leading Victoria to be at the forefront of that work. We have seen the national conversation pick up, and the launch two years ago of a federal LGBTIQA+ health strategy for the very first time, coming in the wake of the Victorian strategy which has been there for some time, was a big step towards that. The then assistant minister Ged Kearney worked very hard on that, as have successive health ministers and equality ministers here in the only jurisdiction in Australia that has a dedicated Minister for Equality.

The midpoint review, which this motion discusses, is currently underway. While I am fully supportive of this motion – the government will not be opposing it and is supportive of the opportunity to talk about and to apply that positive pressure to this conversation, because it needs to be discussed – it would be folly for the government to release a review before it is completed. That work is continuing, that work is underway, and it would not be appropriate for the government to be releasing a review before that review is complete.

The review forms a part of a number of other initiatives that this government has continued to focus on, including support for the community health sector, including support for remarkable organisations such as Thorne Harbour Health, which Ms Watt referred to in her contribution today. I acknowledge them and all the very many other groups who have worked so hard in this space to bring to the forefront promotion and better health outcomes for members of Victoria's LGBTIQA+ community. In a small way I have been really privileged to join in the efforts through the minister's LGBTIQA+ taskforce over the past few years, including co-chairing the health and wellbeing working group, alongside the incredible Alex Potter and a number of other dedicated people who have brought their passion and their lived experience to that issue.

Ms Crozier referenced the incredible forum in 2014, and I do acknowledge that too. It was a landmark time for us to bring together the real, pre-eminent experts across the world on this issue, and it was sadly marred by the tragedy of MH17. We say 'tragedy', but it was the actions of a terrorist state in shooting down a plane that had so many people coming to this country, to this conference, some of the world's leading experts on this issue – the cure could have been on that plane. It is a tragedy for

the loss of what we had. It was a criminal, vile act from a despicable regime. It did really mar that conference, but despite that it was still very significant. Victoria does continue to proudly work fiercely on HIV prevention and cure, and we will continue to do so. This government, with its continued focus on support for the community health sector, including Thorne Harbour and others, as well as advanced medical research, will very much continue to do that. I am very much looking forward to talking to the midpoint review once it is completed.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Road maintenance

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:48): I move:

> That this house notes:
>
> (1) that the Auditor-General's report titled *Maintaining State Roads* found that 'the overall condition of Victoria's state roads is deteriorating', with 48 per cent of state roads in poor or very poor condition in 2024, up from 39 per cent in 2021;
>
> (2) the Auditor-General's finding that Victoria's road maintenance backlog is large and growing, funding is insufficient, the Department of Transport and Planning has no meaningful targets and limited assurance over the quality of works, and one in eight inspected works were defective and needed rework;
>
> (3) that the Honourable Ben Carroll MP served as Minister for Roads and Road Safety from June 2020 to December 2022, during which time road asset management funding fell from $953.8 million in 2020–21 to $760.1 million in 2021–22;
>
> and calls on the government to publish road condition, backlog and repair data and regional maintenance allocations and timetables and explain how it will arrest the deterioration of roads identified by the Auditor-General.

I could not think of a more fitting general business motion to move on this last non-government business day of the 60th Parliament. Roads and road safety is a subject that my community raises with me and my colleagues year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day. Over eight years I have mentioned roads more than 2100 times across 329 contributions in this place. I take no pride in that number; it is a measure of how long the road crisis has gone unaddressed. I spent over two years as the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Road Safety, where I prosecuted the case against wire rope barriers and have since been proven right as they disintegrate on every road. I was deputy chair of the inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll and sat on the inquiry into local government funding and services while witnesses across the state rang the warning bells about the shocking state of our road network. I also served on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee when Tim Pallas, then Treasurer, was asked why Ben Carroll, the then minister, had cut road funding given our roads were no longer filled with potholes but craters. The Treasurer replied:

> … potholes that look like craters only occur in Liberal Party propaganda.

Well, who was right, Tim or the opposition? On 9 September the Auditor-General's office handed down their report into the maintenance of state roads and answered that same question. It was the first audit of its kind since 2017, and it confirmed everything regional Victorians have been saying and everything this government has spent a decade denying. Forty-eight per cent of Victoria's state roads are in poor or very poor condition. In 2021 it was 39 per cent. Between January last year and June this year the number of identified defects on the network went from 80,000 to more than 225,000, while repairs reached about 180,000. We are falling behind faster than we are catching up. Deferred maintenance now sits at $1.34 billion. Four years ago it was $774 million. The department told the government it needs more than $3 billion a year to maintain these roads properly. It gets $900 million and $1 billion. The department has advised the government that funding is insufficient to maintain or improve the condition of state roads. The department reports that 95.3 per cent of regional roads meet the roughness standard, while its own surveys show 23.31 per cent of regional state roads are poor or very poor for roughness.

What were Labor's members saying while all this was going on? Member for Western Victoria Ms Ermacora managed 380 contributions in this Parliament without once raising potholes. It took my own constituency question before she raised the subject at all, asking the minister how much of the $352 million investment in road maintenance will benefit constituents in Western Victoria. The Auditor-General has 48 per cent of the network in poor or very poor condition, and the member has to use the Parliament to ask her own colleague, 'How much will go into my region?' Her colleague Ms Terpstra, a member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, has gone further and told this chamber that some Victorians are quite happy to have roads full of potholes and are not on board with this pothole thing. You would think after being bagged from pillar to post in the media and in this chamber, she would stop defending the indefensible. But I am told she continues to post about it on social media – talk about propaganda. I invite Ms Terpstra to drive the Cobden-Warrnambool Road and ask the people who live along it which of them are happy with potholes. For a decade this government told this Parliament that 95 per cent of regional roads were meeting standard. You needed the Auditor-General to tell you the truth, because your own department had not. The government's answer was $352 million, announced the week before the report came out. A department that needs $3 billion a year was handed $352 million, once, days before the report dropped.

Let me bring this home to Western Victoria, where our roads have been reduced to goat tracks. The Cobden-Warrnambool Road in Corangamite shire is the worst road in the south-west: 97.6 per cent of it is rated poor or very poor, almost 90 per cent of it is very poor and just 2 per cent of that road is in good condition. Vehicles travel 31.4 million kilometres a year on it. Joe Tyres farms at Naringal and lives on it. He said they have not fixed it at all since 2024 other than filling the occasional pothole, which empties out again within days, and that a B-double lost control 130 metres from his driveway because of a hole in the road. On roads like these you cannot ride a bike, you cannot walk the verge and you take your life in your hands in a car. Ninety-seven per cent of the Penshurst-Port Fairy Road is poor or very poor, and 96 per cent of the Koroit-Port Fairy Road likewise. Across Moyne shire it is 56.1 per cent of the state road network and in Corangamite 55.8 per cent. On the Princes Highway between Geelong and Glenelg there are 115.6 kilometres rated very poor. That highway carries vehicles nearly 1 billion kilometres a year, and 120 kilometres of it needs replacing inside two years. This is not a maintenance problem anymore, it is a network on the brink of collapse.

The RACV's My Country Road campaign this year drew more than 6000 participants who logged 10,048 requests for road improvements in seven weeks. Road surfaces and potholes were the number one safety concern for 71 per cent of them, up from 64 per cent in 2024. It is getting worse, and people know it. Two of the three most dangerous roads in the state, as nominated by the Victorians who actually drive on them, are in my electorate: the Princes Highway West from Colac to Camperdown and the Princes Highway West from Portland to Port Fairy. Then there is the Henty Highway from Portland to Hamilton and the Midland Highway from Ballarat to Daylesford. They also cite the figure that matters most, which is that Transport Accident Commission data confirms 30 more lives are lost each year on regional roads than in metropolitan Melbourne. Thirty people a year is what it costs to treat road maintenance as optional.

A Liberal–Nationals government will do this properly. We will invest $5 billion to rebuild, repair and resurface roads across Victoria, and we will do it properly rather than patching over the top, as the member for Macedon suggested, and hoping nobody notices until the election or after it. We will eliminate 1 million potholes. We will fund preventative maintenance so that the potholes do not form in the first place, instead of the reactive patch and run the Auditor-General has just condemned. We will establish Better Roads Victoria to rebuild the technical and engineering expertise this government threw away when it abandoned VicRoads and axed Regional Roads Victoria. We will get the basics right: mowing roadsides, slashing grass, clearing drains, removing graffiti within 24 hours, all of it funded and done properly.

We will deliver a fair share guarantee. Twenty-five per cent of Victorians live in regional Victoria, and they will get at least 25 per cent of the infrastructure funding. At the moment they get 12 per cent.

Regional Victorians are not asking for special treatment, they are asking for the roads they already pay for with their taxes. Can I say also, as Shadow Minister for Local Government, we have allocated $1.5 million a year to the 48 rural and regional councils of Victoria so that they can fund their own road and bridge works without referring to a complicated and questionable grant process – untied funding of $1.5 million a year for four years for the 48 rural and regional councils. They had it once under a Liberal–National government previously. This government scrapped it. It is vitally important that local governments get assistance to maintain their roads and bridges, because they actually control over 60 per cent of the road network in Victoria.

It is vitally important that we have a change of government on 28 November, if for no other reason than to fix our roads and make it safe for Victorians to drive from A to B. Children in buses are under threat. It is impossible to get product from the farm gate to the city. We feed and clothe the city, yet we struggle on the roads. The cost of repairs to everybody every day who does an axle or does a tyre is massive. It is a cost-of-living issue as well as a safety issue. After eight years of raising this, we have had enough of asking Labor to fix the roads. With the support of the Victorian people, we will do it ourselves in government.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (11:01): I rise to speak in favour of this motion that has been brought forward by Mrs McArthur today, and I thank her for her continuous advocacy on this issue. As a fellow Western Victoria MP, I am very familiar with the state of our roads out there. Like many of my colleagues, I spend a lot of time out visiting different parts of the electorate. It is a very big electorate, and unfortunately there is a complete lack of decent public transport connections between even many of the bigger regional centres in Western Victoria, let alone some of the smaller towns, so we are very car dependent in that part of the world. Most people have to use some form of road vehicle to get around therefore the state of our roads is really, really important.

I regularly travel on certain routes – for example, from Geelong to Colac to Camperdown to Warrnambool and up to Melton and out to Ballarat – and I have experienced the appalling state of the roads. They are absolutely littered with potholes; it is incredibly stressful to drive on them. But sometimes I wonder if this is just normal and maybe my expectations are too high. I mean, the roads have been pretty bad for a long time, and you think, 'Okay, well, roads get potholes,' but the data backs up the experience that this is really terrible and it has been getting worse.

If we look at the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report, it shows that almost half of Victoria's roads are in poor or very poor condition. If look at RACV's My Country Road 2026 survey results, four out of the top five of Victoria's worst roads are in the Western Victoria Region and are on those same routes that I have spent a lot of time on, and I have that subjective experience of them being really dangerous and full of potholes. These things are not just a nuisance. This is not just something that becomes a bit of an annoying thing you have to put up with when you are driving. They damage cars, and fundamentally they are a safety issue. This is a safety issue for Victorians. They cause accidents, they cause injuries and tragically they have contributed to deaths on our roads. This is not some sort of inevitability. We hear a lot about our soils being volatile and how roads crumble and how we have got more vehicles on the roads so they do tend to fall apart, but this is not an inevitability – it is the result of deliberate decisions that have been made over decades by successive governments. It will not just be fixed by throwing more money at them and continuing on with business as usual. There needs to be a fundamental rethink of how we manage roads and a look at the root causes of some of the problems.

One of the first things we need to look at is how we have got to this place where millions and millions of dollars are being thrown at private contractors. As the VAGO report has made very clear, oversight of those contractors has been very poor. Standards have not been set properly, yet we continue to go along this line and in fact continue with the privatisation and outsourcing of road maintenance despite all the evidence showing that this is not working and our roads have been getting worse under that model. It was actually the Liberal Kennett government who started the privatisation journey of our

road maintenance in this state in the mid to late 1990s. Despite some of the recent statements from Labor, they continued that journey of privatisation, they continued to outsource road maintenance.

The reason I think this is such a key contributor to the current problems that we have is that, if you think about the incentives that drive many of these contractors, their job is to fill potholes. So in fact their business model benefits from there being more potholes. There is nothing in their business model that creates an incentive for them to think about preventing those potholes forming. There is nothing in their business model that gets them to think about some of the bigger systemic causes of the potholes in the first place. When we think, 'What are those systemic causes?' well, firstly there is the issue, as I talked about before, of just the volume of vehicles on our roads, which is partly a consequence of a lack of a broader integrated transport plan across our state that considers freight and how we can get more freight off our roads. More frequent heavy trucks cause more potholes – it is just a fact. If we could shift more of our freight, where possible, off our roads and onto rail, that would help. But you need a statewide integrated transport plan, a thought about how we are moving freight properly to do that and then investment in those freight systems.

We have incredible car dependence, as I said, and there has been minimal investment in public transport infrastructure in the regions. We have done some advocacy on potential solutions. There is a lot of low-hanging fruit out in the regions. As Mrs McArthur said, 25 per cent of our population lives there. Does 25 per cent of the public transport infrastructure spending go out to the regions? I do not think so. We see that reflected in the very high levels of car dependency. If we could get some more people out of their cars and onto trains and fewer cars on our roads, that would make a difference: less wear and tear, fewer potholes. But a privatised road maintenance system is not thinking about those things. If we silo off and carve out road maintenance and think of it as a discrete thing, not part of a more complex system, we are going to end up with more of the same and continuing deterioration of our roads.

Other systemic issues that I do not think have been addressed adequately are things like the impact of climate change. We know that increased rain and flooding events in particular cause significant damage to our roads. We have seen that time and again. We saw it after the 2022 floods. But we have seen further issues with our roads as a result of climate change with fires and heavy rainfall events again and again. This is only going to get worse. Unless we are looking at some of the structures and other things around our roads that can mitigate the impact of some of those extreme weather events on the roads themselves and then looking at the actual way we build, construct, resurface and fill those potholes with a mind to the increasing stress that will be put on our roads as a result of what we know will come with climate change, again we are going to end up with worsening roads and a failure to address the root causes of the problem here.

That is why, from the Greens' perspective, we believe that road maintenance does need to come back in house. We need to move away from this privatised model, because if it comes back into government there is a greater opportunity to look at this from a whole-of-government perspective and look at some of these root causes. The incentive to look at prevention, I think, is much greater from a government's perspective, because in the end the incentives are about 'How do we not have to spend more money on fixing our roads?', so that prevention question becomes a primary one, unlike the situation where you have got privatised road maintenance.

I will leave my comments there, but I would just like to reiterate that this has come up as a really big election issue not because of some funny post that someone has done, not because a few loud voices are talking about this but because this is a real problem. It is a real problem for people out in the regions. It is causing real safety issues. It is terrible that it has got to this state and that there have been tragic incidents that have really, I think, highlighted how dangerous the situation currently is. What I am pleased to see is that it has finally become a focus of all parties for this upcoming election. What I do hope is that it will not just mean a bit more money thrown at the situation and that we all move on. What we need to do is take this opportunity to have a look at the system as a whole and think about

how we can do this better and fix the systemic problems that have led to this problem that we have in the first place.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:11): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion in relation to roads maintenance. I will be making some comments about the Auditor-General's recent report *Maintaining State Roads* and also some other matters. I think it is clear to anyone who has been out and about in regional Victoria or in parts of metropolitan Melbourne that there are issues on our roads. There are potholes that need to be fixed, and there are roads that need some more fundamental road maintenance. Labor absolutely acknowledges that road maintenance is an incredibly important issue for Victoria and for Victorians. Our road network is the lifeblood of so many, whether they are in industry, whether they are in agriculture or whether they are just people going about their daily lives and commuting or getting out on the roads for the long weekend that is about to land here. There will be many people from Melbourne heading out across regional Victoria this grand final long weekend, taking advantage of this public holiday that we have still got – for this year at least – in Victoria. You never know what is going to happen if big business get their way and get a Liberal–One Nation government. They might get rid of this public holiday – we do not know.

What we do know is that on public holiday long weekends people get in their cars and they go out to regional Victoria – they go and support regional economies, and they drive on regional roads. Labor understand that we have got to do more as a state to improve the condition of our roads. That is why this government is making significant investment in road maintenance here in Victoria, investing another $352 million right now to double the amount of potholes it is fixing and double the length of road repair that it is going to complete right now. In fact the crews are out fixing the roads already, and more work continues as the weather gets warmer. This is part of an investment that is going to help address some of the issues that were rightly identified in the Auditor-General's report, and we absolutely want that to continue to occur. That is why it has been made a priority by the Premier. Getting out and fixing our roads is an important priority for the Premier. The additional investment right now and the crews out right now are part of an immediate response. But that is not the totality of the long-term solution. We absolutely need to do the immediate investment, but we have also got to think about how we improve things for the future and how we change things for the better. That is why Labor, if re-elected, are going to change the way we fix roads and deliver better roads for Victorians.

What we have seen, I think quite considerably, is both the changing nature of the way much of the road network is used and the changing conditions that are impacting them. The impact of things like the devastating flood event in 2022 –

Nick McGowan interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Mr McGowan interjects and says, 'Water, water'. I think Mr McGowan might understand basic physics and that, yes, water does play a role in undermining road conditions. Those of us who participated in the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the 2022 flood event heard stories directly in that inquiry about the impact that that flood event had on Victorian roads. It is a disgrace that the Liberal Party today is denying the evidence of people from regional Victoria who came forward and gave evidence to that inquiry. I think it is a disgrace that Mr McGowan is denying the evidence.

Jacinta Ermacora: On a point of order, President, it is very difficult to hear my colleague here, Mr Batchelor, and it feels a bit like badgering from Mr McGowan. We deserve to be able to hear what is being said.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mr Batchelor to continue without assistance.

Ryan BATCHELOR: If Mr McGowan is scared of a response to his interjections, he should not make them. And if he is scared of being called out for denying the evidence of regional Victorians about the impact that devastating floods had on our roads, then he will be hoist on his own words.

This government is changing the way we deal with road maintenance here in the state of Victoria. We are taking back control and we are taking back responsibility. We are going to work with experts and local authorities and develop a plan to put the government back in charge of state road maintenance programs. We will develop new statewide standards for road quality and road safety to lift the bar everywhere and for everyone. We will empower our five road maintenance regions, because the best road maintenance decisions will be made by people who drive on them most, and we will work actively and constructively with local councils. We will develop a simple reporting system where you can report problems to see the repairs that we are making. That is exactly what I think communities expect in a modern Victoria.

The Liberals want to come into this place and tell us that they have got a solution and that they can be trusted to fix Victoria's roads. But you cannot trust the Liberals on roads, because the last time they were in government they cut $160 million from the road maintenance budget and sacked 450 people from VicRoads. They cut it before and they will cut it again, because the Liberals have already said that the cuts are coming for Victorian services. The Liberals have already promised to cut services here in Victoria, and we know that once again road maintenance is going to be on the chopping block. They have already promised it. They have already promised their economic –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: On a point of order, Acting President, the Leader of the Opposition in this place has just called me a liar, and I ask that she withdraw.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mrs McArthur, I ask you to withdraw.

Bev McArthur: I withdraw.

Ryan BATCHELOR: The Liberals are promising cuts, and road maintenance is on the chopping block, because that is what they did last time.

Bev McArthur: I have a point of order, Acting President. You have got to be factual, Mr Batchelor, and that is not factual. We have actually promised increased funding, way more than you have, and we have promised to fix the roads, so keep to the facts, Mr Batchelor – don't tell mistruths.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Mrs McArthur, that is a point of debate, it is not a point of order. There is no point of order.

Ryan BATCHELOR: If Mrs McArthur has not read her leader's economic plan, then that is not my fault. But that economic plan lays out very clearly that there is going to be $40 billion of cuts to the state budget here in Victoria, and you cannot cut that much money out of the state budget in Victoria without cutting things like road maintenance. We know they will do it again, because they have done it before. You can always trust the Liberals to make cuts. You can always trust the Liberals to cut services. Last time they were in power they cut road maintenance. They sacked 450 people out of VicRoads. They will absolutely do it again because cuts are what Liberals do, and you cannot trust them on road maintenance.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:20): There must be some school that people on that side go to where there is training about having total, complete and utter ignorance of the facts. You insert the talking points from the Labor government, and you just rearrange life. You rearrange the facts. As I was sitting here listening, what came to me was a strange topic – I am totally in support of this motion, and thank you very much, Mrs McArthur, for bringing it – about *Pride and Prejudice*. I know that is an interesting topic, but let me go there. Our people who live in rural and regional Victoria are very proud people. They create our food and our fibre. They create resilience. They create the nourishment

that fills our plates and supplies not only the state and the nation but overseas. We create that generation of assets and produce – world class. And I have heard these people sitting opposite us talk about it. We hear it all the time, how wonderful our farmers are, how wonderful their produce is. They are wonderful and it is wonderful. Our people are proud and stoic and do the right thing and produce for our nation. And then what we have seen over time in this government is a total prejudice against rural and regional people. This government have turned their back on these people, and they have done it in a variety of ways. They have shut down industry in my Eastern Victoria Region, the native timber industry. They have turned their back on the CFA – again, a proud bunch of people who serve us when there is fire coming over the hill. They have disregarded us again and again. What they do is prejudice against us by cutting funding to the very lifeblood, the very network, that keeps our communities connected, our roads.

You only have to look at the RACV. Do not listen to Melina Bath, read the RACV report. It was fed into by thousands of people – 6143 respondents who submitted 10,000 requests for road improvement. It found 71 per cent of respondents identified potholes and rough surfaces as their biggest road safety concern. So when we talk about pride – and I want to talk about pride in our regions – I also want to talk about the prejudice that this government, under Allan, Andrews and now Carroll as Premier, has overseen. This is not fair, and we certainly have a plan, which I will go into. I thank Mrs McArthur for alluding to it.

The Premier the other day – what a faux pas again. How do they stare at people in a press conference? How do they actually lie straight? Premier Carroll on one hand said integrity is not optional, and when challenged about the poor state of the roads in Victoria he said, 'Well, I'm not the roads minister.' Do you forget, Premier, that you were the roads minister for 2½ years? You were in control of our road maintenance funding, and you cut it by $214 million in that small space of time. You were the architect of some of those potholes – of many, many, many potholes.

Now let me go to some of the regional road results from the My Country Road campaign of the RACV. I thank the RACV for explaining to this government what country people know. And I take up Mr Batchelor's point that the poor people in the city – and I love our state and I love Melbourne as well – on public holidays get to travel out to the regions. Thanks for coming. We need your money. We need your tourism dollars. But those poor people have to drive over potholes. Well, every single bus driver has to drive through potholes or dodge them and every single truck and transport taking beautiful Bulmer products from East Gippsland or milk from Leongatha dairy farmers every single day has to cope with potholes.

I happened to be out in Maryborough the other day talking with our fantastic candidate for Ripon Jo Armstrong, and I was at Connewarre down near Geelong with my colleagues Danny O'Brien and Mrs McArthur, and then I travelled up that road and I thought, 'Yep, it's got to be one of the worst roads.' It is in a shocking state. The jury is in from the My Country Road survey for the top three most dangerous roads – and I will get to that point in a minute, dangerous roads: Princes Highway West, Colac to Camperdown; Princes Highway West, Portland to Port Fairy; and Loddon Valley Highway, Bendigo to Kerang. Those good people up there and my colleague Gaelle Broad would know all about that.

Let us look at some of them in Eastern Victoria Region. This is a road I travel on daily, because I actually live in my electorate as well, which is always good. I love my electorate and I live in it. Strzelecki Highway, Leongatha to Mirboo North, I know very well. We hear from community members – and thank you, Craig Young, the Mirboo North butcher, who does a fantastic job. He is often telling me the table drains are not cleaned out, there are depressions, the road edges are deteriorating and there are potholes there, and we raise it through the right channels, through the minister, because it is a state-owned road, and we get this superfluous answer back saying, 'Well, you mentioned a council road, so you should talk to your council.' No-one is taking that responsibility. Ultimately, it is the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and this Allan government that are responsible. So Strzelecki Highway and then Princes Highway East, Bairnsdale to Lakes Entrance. I

was down there the other day in beautiful East Gippsland talking with the candidate for the Nationals for the upcoming election Gemma Rendell, a fantastic local girl. Again, I drove on those roads, and they are shocking. South Gippsland Highway, Loch to Leongatha, is an example. Anyone who drives on the South Gippsland Highway will tell you that every bit along that road, right down to Wilsons Prom, is in a shocking state, and you really have to watch those potholes to save your life.

Years ago we used to have a slogan, back in 2010, 'Fix country roads, save country lives', and that is what we are about right now. We do have a plan. Our plan is building better and building safer roads. Again, we have got $5 billion over four years, that is a 25 per cent uplift in funding for our roads to eliminate 1 billion potholes. We will also establish Better Roads Victoria. It is not just about putting something in the pothole, it is about ensuring that when that work is done it stays fixed. And that is what establishing Better Roads Victoria will do, making sure that there is that technical expertise in our road building and maintenance capability. Of course the contractors can only make to standard. They get the contract and do the work. But it is about making sure that that contract work is done properly, and we have not seen it for the last decade, and also making sure that there are tough standards that hold the construction companies accountable.

I thank Danny O'Brien. He has been the pothole man. He has been everywhere. We had a 'Potholes for all seasons' calendar, and it went very well. Why? Because country people are incredibly tolerant, but we also have to have a sense of humour. Sometimes you have got to laugh or you would cry. And there are many people who have wrecked the rims of their cars and wrecked their whole system because of those roads. I also just want to put on record my sincere condolences to the family of the gentleman who lost his life, the motorcyclist, only recently. They must feel so devastated.

When I first came in in 2015 the government and Premier Andrews at the time removed the country roads and bridges program, and all of our local councils were so frustrated with that and came out and spoke to us. We are going to reintroduce a country roads and bridges program – that is $288 million over four years; that is $1.5 million annually to 48 local councils. I know they are all rejoicing. These are our local roads and our local bridges, because when you make that fantastic product at Bulmer Farms, for example, or on a dairy farm in South Gippsland, you have got to get it to market and you often have got to go over those local bridges. I fully endorse this motion, and I thank wholeheartedly Mrs McArthur for bringing it forward. We are not going to be proud or prejudiced against Victorians; we are going to be sense and sensibility – *(Time expired)*

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (11:31): I rise to support Mrs McArthur's motion and to acknowledge the Auditor-General's very serious findings about the state of Victoria's roads. The Auditor-General has confirmed what regional Victorians have been saying for years: our roads are getting worse. In 2021, 39 per cent of Victoria's state roads were classified as being in poor or very poor condition. By 2024 that figure had risen to 48 per cent. That is not a minor deterioration; it is a clear warning that the government's approach to road maintenance is not working. The Auditor-General also found that the road maintenance backlog is large and growing, that funding is insufficient, that the department lacks meaningful targets and that there are shortcomings in the quality assurance of roadworks. One in eight inspected works were defective and required rework, and Victorian motorists are paying the price.

Recent data obtained via FOI shows that over two financial years 1809 motorists lodged claims for damage allegedly caused by road conditions, yet only 23 claims were successful, with a combined $223,833 paid in compensation. That does not mean the other motorists did not suffer damage; it means they did not receive compensation. The government's own rules currently require motorists to absorb the first $1681 of eligible property damage before a claim can even be considered. This is particularly concerning in regional Victoria, where people often have no choice but to travel long distances on state roads for work, education, health care and freight.

This motion is therefore about transparency and accountability. Victorians deserve to know where the road maintenance money is going, which roads are deteriorating, how large the backlog is and when

those roads will actually be repaired. The government must publish road condition data, maintenance backlogs, repair data, regional allocations and realistic repair timetables. Victorians do not need more excuses; they need roads that are safe, maintained and fit for purpose. For those reasons, One Nation Victoria supports this motion.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:33): I welcome this opportunity to speak on the new direction that Ben Carroll is taking our state and in particular in relation to roads. I want to thank Ben Carroll for taking action on roads, for listening to our regional communities and for his acknowledgement that our roads – I think he said they have not been good enough. Regional Victorians have been expressing concern about roads, and there has definitely been frustration. Certainly the previous contribution acknowledged that. We now have Ben Carroll in charge, and actions are being taken straightaway as a result. As my colleague Mr Batchelor mentioned, immediately redirecting money from city projects into regional pothole repairs is the number one action that is being taken.

I think that it is really important that we get on with those pothole repairs. But of course there are some bigger problems than that, and I will cover off on that. We are investing another $352 million, in addition to our record investment, to double the amount of potholes we are fixing in this road repair period. Our road crews are already out there. I think if you have been on regional roads, you cannot say you have not passed a road crew. I have passed many. The extra $352 million will be invested straight into doubling the amount of potholes that we are fixing. This money is purposely being redirected to regional Victoria from Melbourne projects, as the Carroll Labor government recognises and acts on regional roads immediately. There is a plan and there is an acknowledgement that, as our Premier said, our Victorian roads are simply not good enough.

We also know that we cannot trust the Liberals on investing money in any particular area – cuts is more the theme than anything. Our list of actions actually heads towards getting to the bottom of this roads challenge which we acknowledge. A re-elected Carroll Labor government will deliver a comprehensive plan to improve the quality of our roads – yes, act on the potholes immediately, but let us fix the problem once and for all. There is no doubt there have been challenges responding to climate change events like flooding, but there is also no doubt that contracting out to private sector construction, profit-taking from public money, has been ineffective in the quality. That is why we are going to bring road maintenance accountability back in house. The government will be implementing the road maintenance, and it will be accountable for doing that. Contracting out road maintenance has failed our state – another example of where private contracting has failed our community. I am aware of people who formerly worked for VicRoads who no longer work for VicRoads because of their frustration at the quality of the work being undertaken. Certainly the informal feedback I get from some locals is extremely positive in that space.

I know those opposite do not like that we have got a plan now, but we do. And it is nothing like what you would do. You would just throw more money into –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ERMACORA: We are going to do things differently, and that is what Ben Carroll is offering. We are going to provide a higher level of accountability and an app for people to lodge their potholes, and the government will be accountable for the repairs that happen. People will be able to look up that pothole that they lodged and see whether it has been fixed or not or what the journey is for that. We will deliver a simple website to do that. We will be increasing the standards of road construction, making improvements in that space which will reflect the local knowledge. We will listen to what regional communities say about the roads that are important to them. Engineering is important, technical knowledge is important and lifting the quality is important, but listening to what communities are saying ought to be a part of that decision-making as well.

We are going to use minimum security prisoners to work on the roadside so that the technical experts can focus on the road surface – more hands on deck. We will work with Corrections Victoria to pilot having minimum security prisoners helping with basic roadside management like mowing and graffiti removal. This will give the experts much more of a focus on the actual road surface, as I said. Labor will develop a plan alongside experts and local workforces to put government back in charge of road maintenance. We will establish one simple website where you can report on road issues that need attention and see for yourself where we are planning repairs and when. Labor will give our five road maintenance regions a local say, and Labor will work with Corrections Victoria on a pilot program, as I said, for prisoners to play a role. That will be to assess whether or not that works.

There is no doubt that contracting out has been less than successful – absolutely. We are bringing road maintenance in this state back in house under government accountability where all of the money goes into road repairs, none of the money goes to private sector profit-taking and the standards are lifted and monitored for exactly that. As I close, I want to say a thankyou to Ben Carroll, our Premier, for taking us in a new direction in this space, for acknowledging the challenges that we face in regional Victoria on our roads and for responding in an effective and sustainable way. It is really important to know that if you just keep doing the same thing, you will get the same outcome. You are proposing to just keep throwing money. Ben Carroll is going to do things differently, and that will solve the problem once and for all.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (11:43): It gives me great delight to stand and speak on this motion. I congratulate Mrs McArthur for bringing it before the house. I was going to do a lot of talking about the Auditor-General's report that shows the poor condition of the roads in regional Victoria and how more than half of them are in very poor condition and go through a lot of the roads in Northern Victoria, but first of all I want to rebut some of the tripe that has been put about by Labor Party members this morning.

We had Mr Batchelor claiming that Mr McGowan had ignored the evidence that northern Victorians had given about the state of the roads in the floods. The floods were four years ago. The flood inquiry, we heard that evidence about the state of the roads after the floods two years ago. Surely those roads should have been fixed in four years, Mr Batchelor. But what we are talking about now is the condition of the roads in Northern Victoria, which is worse than it was even straight after the floods. While Mr Batchelor accused Mr McGowan of ignoring evidence, what I would say is that Mr Batchelor was twisting the evidence. The potholes in Northern Victoria have increased tenfold from what they were in 2022.

Now I move on to Ms Ermacora's bizarre contribution. She talked about the government having a plan to fix potholes and doubling the number of potholes they fixed last year. Again, the trouble is that the potholes have increased tenfold, so doubling what they did last year will not go anywhere near fixing the potholes that we have in regional Victoria. We even had Minister Erdogan tell us that he has been seeing potholes as he has been visiting his new region down in eastern Victoria. But we also had Ms Ermacora admit that the government has been too busy rorting the public purse to hold contractors to account. What a poor reflection on her government that was. She then went on to blame the VicRoads privatisation for the standard of the repairs and said people were leaving VicRoads because they were embarrassed about the standard of repairs. There are two problems with what she was saying. The first problem is that it was Labor that privatised VicRoads. But the second and main problem is that VicRoads are not responsible for the repair of the roads. Labor changed that when they privatised it. VicRoads are responsible for licensing. The Department of Transport and Planning is responsible for fixing potholes, which it does very poorly. I am told by people in regional offices that part of that is because the government have not negotiated contracts correctly and there are loopholes in the contracts that let these contractors go and do a shoddy repair and then go back and repair it again a couple of weeks later – and they keep getting paid for repair after repair after repair. I remember on the Katamatite-Nathalia Road there was a pothole that must have been fixed 15 times before they actually did it properly.

The government have said that almost half of Victoria's roads are in poor condition. The proportion of the road network that is in poor or very poor condition has gone from 39 per cent in 2021 – yes, Mr Batchelor, just prior to the floods – to 48 per cent in 2024, and it would be worse again by 2026. The report concluded that the government has a growing road maintenance backlog, resulting in the number of defects recorded and the number of defects repaired having more than doubled from January 2025 to January 2026. The report concluded that Labor's funding is insufficient to maintain or improve the condition of state roads. Labor's inadequate funding means that maintenance is focused on reactive repairs rather than preventative works to stop potholes and other road pavement defects from emerging. Often the repairs, as I have already said, are of very poor quality and the road starts falling apart very soon after. The report confirms that the Department of Transport and Planning does not have effective oversight of contractors and cannot be sure that repair work is meeting the department's defined standards.

The dire condition of state roads particularly affects rural and regional Victoria, where 82 per cent of the state road network is located. The state's worst roads are concentrated in northern Victoria, with Hume region having 57 per cent of roads rated as being in poor or very poor condition, and Loddon Mallee region having 69 per cent in poor or very poor condition. Thirty-seven per cent of all state roads are classed as being in very poor condition, with less than five years of remaining useful life, and must be rehabilitated within two years. The report reveals that if re-elected, Labor intends to reduce its investment in roads by over 50 per cent after the 2026 state election. That is an appalling admission of the Labor government – that they are going to actually reduce that funding again. Ms Ermacora can talk about doubling the number of potholes fixed this year, but next year they are going to halve it again.

The RACV recently released their roads survey. The RACV asked road users to provide feedback on the state of country roads, and the results were damning for a Labor government that has neglected regional Victoria for 12 years. According to the report, 10 of the 20 worst roads are in my electorate of Northern Victoria. The third-worst road is the Loddon Valley Highway from Bendigo to Kerang; the sixth-worst road is the Melba Highway from Yea to Dixons Creek; the seventh-worst is the Goulburn Valley Highway from Maroondah Highway, Yea to Mansfield; the ninth-worst is the Murray Valley Highway from Wodonga to Tallangatta; the 10th-worst is the Northern Highway from Echuca to Heathcote; the 13th-worst is the Northern Highway and McIvor Highway, Wallan to Bendigo; the 14th-worst is the Midland Highway from Benalla to Mansfield; the 16th-worst is the Murray Valley Highway from Corryong to Tallangatta; the 18th-worst is the Murray Valley Highway from Swan Hill to Robinvale; and the 19th-worst is the Calder Highway from Ouyen to Charlton. But I tell you what, it is not limited to those roads in Northern Victoria that are poor. Our roads are in a disgraceful state because Labor has neglected road maintenance and has put Victorian road users at risk because of the state of Victoria's roads.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (11:51): I rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion 1644 about the perilous state of our roads in this state. Obviously I am a country member and I drive around, but being the only member from my party I do not just drive around the east of Victoria, I drive around the west. I have got family out west; a lot of them used to live even further out west. Anyway, I get around here and there, and the one thing that cannot be disputed is that the state of the roads is dire out in the country. It is funny, and at the risk of getting a little political, there is a sticker going around that says 'I'm not drunk, I'm just avoiding potholes'. I actually appreciate that, because as you are driving around – pick any part of the state, even the major freeways – you have got to pay attention to the road ahead, not just to the cars, because some of the potholes are getting big enough that they are causing a lot of damage. Even in my great big Tonka truck four-wheel drive I have still got to drive around some of them – the tyres cost more to fix.

The question is: how did we get here, and more to the point, what do we do about it? The next election will be what the next election will be. I know people are promising all sorts of things on both sides of the chamber. What we need, though, is a concentrated attack on fixing the major ones. Obviously we had the tragic incident where a motorcyclist died. In a car you have a measure of safety, but if you

come off a motorbike, well, there is not a lot between you and the ground – some clothes, basically. I have fallen off enough motorbikes; I am never getting on another one. They are probably the most vulnerable road users. Sometimes they ride in a manner which does not help them. When you have got someone just minding their own business riding down the road and they hit a pothole that is bad enough for them to come off and be killed, that is a warning flag. To be fair, it should not be a political issue, it should be a road safety issue. The road safety issue is an issue where people need to be able to get on the road and drive safely. There are enough problems as it is with so many cars on the road, and of course more cars mean more wear and tear, but that is the nature of the beast. We can have more trains if we want; we can have this, we can have that. The nature of our country is such that we are so geographically spread out for our small population that vehicles of all sorts will always be a feature.

The freeways I have noticed over the years have suffered mightily. Having said that, for many, many years I used to travel out to Portland to visit family. I have got to say that on the road between Geelong and Portland in some places you do need a four-wheel drive, because you have got to drive into the potholes, down the bottom and then out the other end. It was just appalling. I also am kind of critical about the way we build roads in this state. We build them out of asphalt only – a road base and then we compact it down, then we build it on asphalt. What that means is that with the constant driving on it you are slowly spreading it out, and there is not a solid base underneath it, like concrete. It means the roads need to be fixed. In those times when we get more wet weather, what you get is effectively a water hammer. Every time a vehicle goes over, it pushes water into the little faults or fissures or whatever and starts spreading it out. This ends up in a situation where even on the major freeways you need to have a lot of upkeep. The Western Freeway to Ballarat is a case in point – we spend so much time driving at 40 kilometres an hour for kilometres where lanes are blocked off because it is too dangerous, but no-one is fixing them.

We are in a state. We need to move forward. We need to get it done. But I also think it is time that we as a state, and possibly as a country, look at how we are building our roads and our major arterials. I look at the Americans with their interstates and Germany with their autobahn. They do not just build them the way we build them. They build them with a much more solid base so that they last longer and are safer. It is more expense now. Obviously if you want to do a concrete road between here and Sydney, for instance, it would be a lot more expensive, but the longer term pay-off is that you do not have to continually dig it up and fix it. When you look at world's best practice on interstate roads, none of them do roads the way we do. Perhaps it is an employment thing, perhaps it is a someone-making-money thing, I do not know, or perhaps we just have not thought that far forward. But what we have got now really is not working. We can spend billions of dollars on a road now, and what will happen is that in 10 or 20 years we will probably be back at it.

I thank Mrs McArthur for raising this. The whole state is suffering. I think in the parts of northern Victoria where we had the floods was when it started going backwards because we sent all the stuff up to fix that, and in the meantime – Mr Batchelor, I am not taking sides in this; I am giving everyone a serve – and that ended up with not enough work being done on the rest of it. I have the luxury of never wanting to be in government, but as a government, whether it is the opposition or the government gets returned, we need to stop making a political football out of this, we need to put a decent amount of funding into it and we need to make sure the roads are safe. I have heard it in here before, but I will say it: our cars have to be roadworthy, but our roads are not car worthy, and that is just a really bad place to be. The longer we wait, the harder it will get. Whether or not I am in here, I will be watching you two guys, and I will be critical of whoever does not do the job right.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:58): The debate during this motion – if anyone had any doubt about the division that the Liberals, the Nationals and One Nation are going to take to Victorians over the next 70-odd days, or whatever it is we have until the election, this is a great example. We have seen it historically: they want to divide people in our state. They do not want to see one Victoria,

they want to divide people into groups. They want to divide people into groups and separate them, because that is what they do.

There are many things Victorians need, many things that I am incredibly proud to be a member of the Labor Party delivering – early education, our schools, our healthcare system, aged care investment, our public transport, rebuilding V/Line, investment in trains throughout metropolitan Melbourne. But we have acknowledged that our roads are not up to scratch. But that is the Victorian road network from one end of our state to the other, like the services we deliver. We heard Ms Bath make her contribution. She said, 'Every part of the South Gippy highway is falling apart.' What about the $115 million on the Black Spur upgrade, the Strzelecki upgrades? There are upgrades going on.

Members interjecting.

Tom McINTOSH: That is not the takeaway that we have got. We have got to fix the roads, but to just sit there and say the entire stretch of road –

The PRESIDENT: Sorry, Mr McIntosh. It is time to interrupt debate for questions and ministers statements.

Business interrupted pursuant to resolution of Council of 22 September.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Firearms regulation

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:00): (1493) My question is for the Premier. In my first question in this place in 2015, I asked what the Victorian government intended to do about further restrictions on the state's licensed law-abiding firearms owners. I then asked whether the government accepted that those people should not be punished for the actions of criminals. Eleven and a bit years later, after successive rounds of additional regulation and most recently legislation imposing new citizenship requirements and costly national security checks on people who have already been licensed and vetted, I find myself compelled to ask essentially the same question. Will the Premier acknowledge that continually imposing new restrictions, costs and uncertainty on licensed firearms owners does not address the criminal misuse of firearms and commit his government to targeting criminals rather than again punishing those that obey the law?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:01): I thank Mr Bourman for his question to the Premier and his consistency. I have got images of firearms bookends in my head. I am very happy to pass on your question to Premier Carroll.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:01): I thank the minister for her bookends comment – actually it was pretty good. After 11 years, can the Premier identify a single instance in which imposing further restrictions on Victoria's licensed law-abiding firearm owners has prevented a criminal from obtaining or misusing an illicit firearm?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:01): Thank you, Mr Bourman, for your supplementary question. I will pass it on.

Ballarat Base Hospital

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:01): (1494) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a few weeks ago I raised concerns from a former nurse, Laura, who worked at the Ballarat Base ED. She wrote to you asking for you to (1) have an open, independent investigation into Ballarat Base ED, (2) publicly acknowledge the severity of the crisis at the Ballarat Base ED, (3) implement corrective actions immediately and (4) engage directly with frontline staff. Minister, I know you have replied – I have read your response – and you did not commit to any of those things to Laura. Why not?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:02): I thank Mr McCracken for his question, and I want to thank Laura for writing to me. I have written back to her, as the member has indicated. I want to extend my thanks to all of the healthcare workers at Ballarat Base Hospital – our incredible doctors, nurses, paramedics and everyone who works so hard to provide care to Victorians. We know that some patients have experienced long waits, and I have gone to these matters in the chamber recently and indicated that we are seeing record demand right across the hospital system, particularly in emergency departments. We are seeing sustained demand, with patients presenting with increasingly complex medical needs. The sickest and most critically ill patients obviously continue to be treated first, as our teams in our EDs triage the most urgent cases, as you would expect.

I take the concerns raised by frontline healthcare workers, including Laura, extremely seriously. I have been in discussions with my department about the matters at Grampians Health and indeed have been discussing it with my colleagues in the lower house in the other place, and we are already working together to address some of these pressures. I have asked my department to convene a regional round table in Ballarat, bringing together Grampians Health, clinicians, representatives of the workforce and other relevant stakeholders, and the round table will have a strong focus on practical improvements to patient flow, access to beds and workforce safety. It is incredibly important that we all work collaboratively to support the workforce up there in Ballarat, and that is what I am committed to doing.

I also want to just indicate that the $58 million that supports our hospitals to improve patient flow in this year's budget is making a difference, including the ability for work to happen and to continue at Grampians Health, Bendigo Health and –

Joe McCracken: On a point of order, President, I have been waiting patiently and listening carefully to the minister's response. I ask that the President bring the minister back to the question on relevance: of the four points that I raised on Laura's behalf the minister has not addressed one of them.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister has been relevant to the question. In between, Mr McCracken, with your colleagues continually interjecting it has been hard to hear her, but I do believe she has been relevant to the question.

Ingrid STITT: As I was saying, I do take the issues that have been brought to my attention by Laura and others at Grampians Health incredibly seriously, which is why I am acting and talking with my department about what needs to occur at Grampians Health, the first step being getting all of the key stakeholders together. But that is already work that we are strongly focused on in the health department around patient flow. The $58 million in the budget is all about making sure that we are on the ground supporting care outside of emergency departments as well as within emergency departments when it comes to patient flow. We will continue our strong focus on supporting the workforce.

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:06): Minister, in your response to Laura you said, and I quote directly from the letter:

> I appreciate that statistics alone cannot capture the experience of every patient or staff member. Performance data is important, but so too are the experiences and concerns raised by patients, staff and health services themselves.

Last sitting week I raised concerns from doctors, the week before I raised concerns from nurses, and your written response to Laura was noncommittal. All I am trying to do is give voice to the people that are suffering through the experiences they have had at Ballarat Base Hospital. You have said repeatedly that you are working with Grampians Health and how that is the appropriate way to deal with these concerns. My question is: what specific actions and outcomes are you working with Grampians Health on?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:07): I have been addressing these questions in

my answer to Mr McCracken's substantive question, which I am happy to go through again. It is very important that I, as minister, and the health department continue to listen to the very valid issues that are being brought to us by staff at Grampians Health. That is why I have asked my department to convene round tables of key stakeholders, including representatives of the workforce, to make sure that we are focused on supporting patient flow through the ED. It is also important and highly relevant to again point out that we are very aware that the redevelopment of the Ballarat Base Hospital is a key component to unlocking patient flow. We will be delivering that new project. It is a $655 million redevelopment, and a big part of that is that the capacity of the ED will be expanded.

Ministers statements: toy libraries

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:08): I rise to update the house on how the Carroll Labor government is continuing to support toy libraries with grants to purchase new toys and attract new members. Last week I joined the member for Sunbury for a visit to the Toy Well library in Tullamarine and the Sunbury Toy Library. Both have recently received grants from our government through the $1.9 million toy library grants program. Toy libraries and their volunteers support families in a number of ways, including sourcing the right toys and tools for children, putting links in the community together and creating spaces for families to come together. To borrow a phrase from my visit, it is about the fun of playing.

Toy libraries also provide the kind of community-based capacity-building support that is central to thriving kids and supporting children of all abilities to grow and learn through play. While at Sunbury Toy Library, Kirsten and the team spoke to me about the important role that sensory toys play in a child's development, and we had the chance to test out a Hoberman sphere. It is great for regulating emotions. In other words, it helps with staying calm when things do not go quite according to plan. Those opposite might like a demonstration: we breathe in and out, in and out –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, that is quite clearly a prop.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, it is a prop. I ask the minister if she can breathe in and out without assistance.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I can, but sometimes I am just not sure that those opposite can. There are a few lessons to learn. One is sharing is caring: we do not just snatch, take or rip away; we think about others. Lesson 2: how to play nicely with our friends. I am told this one can still be learned at any age. Lesson 3, which those opposite will need to keep in mind for November: you do not always get the toy that you want. Toy libraries teach children to share, to take turns and to regulate their emotions and feelings, and they are important skills to learn in childhood and throughout life. But as I am frequently reminded by those opposite, not everyone masters them the first time around.

Illicit tobacco

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:10): (1495) My question is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. The government's tobacco licensing scheme revolves around licences and shutdown orders for physical stores, but as was alluded to by the minister I think yesterday, it would appear that organised crime is already one step ahead of the government and is shifting its distribution model. I have previously made light of the fact that only metres from Parliament you can buy illegal tobacco and vapes. That is no longer the case, and it is not because the government has shut the stores down. My question to the minister is this: is it not the case that the government is not actually stopping illegal tobacco distribution in Victoria, because organised crime has already shifted to an online model?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:11): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question and his longstanding interest in this matter. It is clear that the goal of government is to make it harder to sell and to profit from – and easier to shut down these illegal operators that are selling –

these illicit products and dangerous products on our streets. That is why we have set up the first-ever tobacco regulator in the state's history, and that is why we have made record arrests in relation to tobacco crime through Victoria Police and federal agencies.

Mr Limbrick does point out that with this issue there are multiple factors for the growth of this sector, which we have talked about before – whether it be the price differential, the federal tax settings, or whether it be the fact that record volumes are entering into our country in the first place. Some of these issues cross jurisdictions and cross borders. There is a concern that with such tough local enforcement – many stores are being closed down across our city as we speak – they may shift their model, and some of those models shift to areas that will be more difficult for the Victorian jurisdiction or state and territory jurisdictions to take action on. Especially when we are talking about models that involve the internet, we know that communication is a federal responsibility, and that does pose different challenges for state legislature and the state government. Nonetheless we will continue to coordinate with the Commonwealth on an approach to take action. As the business model will change because we are closing down more stores, we will see that we will need to change the way we operate. This is constantly catching up, but the underlying causes are there for everyone to see. There are multiple factors, but from a state perspective we will continue to work with the Commonwealth to see greater action in this area.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): I thank the minister for that answer. What can the state actually do if illegal tobacco has moved to an online distribution model that is being shipped from interstate? What can the state actually do?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:13): The sale or production of this illicit product is illegal in our state, so Victoria Police can make arrests. But more importantly, there is a federal approach, a national approach, that is needed, because a lot of it is cross-jurisdictional. A lot of it is international organised crime, and therefore we need to work together with federal agencies. I know Victoria Police and Tobacco Licensing Victoria are part of a national disruption group that involves the federal police and customs. We need to continue that approach to make sure that it is stopped at the border, that it is stopped wherever it is occurring and that those people that are responsible are brought to justice.

Royal Children's Hospital

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:14): (1496) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, 20 new emergency department beds at the Royal Children's Hospital cannot be staffed. The hospital made a funding request to the government to enable these beds to open and operate, but the government rejected the request. Why?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:14): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. She is simply incorrect. I am very proud of the fact that our government has supported over $15.5 billion worth of health infrastructure projects since coming to government. That is transformational for our health system. That is right across the state. In fact we have built or upgraded nearly every emergency department in every major hospital in the state. I am very proud that we are investing $56.4 million to expand the Royal Children's Hospital emergency department. We have already opened 30 beds in the inpatient ward as part of that project, and the next stage of the project is 20 additional points of care in the emergency department. We are working very closely with the Royal Children's Hospital, through the Department of Health, on work to commission this when the project is completed towards the end of this year. That is the normal way in which these commissioning proposals and projects commence.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the incredible team at the Royal Children's Hospital, who provide care to some of the state's sickest children. We will always back their calls for additional support, which we have done and are proud to do through this particular infrastructure project. We know that the demand is there, and that is why we are supporting this project, and that is why we will

get on and continue the work with them to make sure that these beds are operationalised at the conclusion of the construction project.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): I am intrigued with the minister's answer – the very rehearsed answer – but I actually understand that there was a request. The minister's response was quite curious. Minister, the government rejected the pleas from the Royal Children's Hospital. Can you guarantee that all 20 beds will be open and fully staffed in November?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:17): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. She is misinformed about this project. This project is on track. It will be completed before the end of the year, and we are already doing the work through the Department of Health, which is the normal process, for the particular needs of the workforce to operationalise this very important project. I am proud that that work is continuing, and I am looking forward to those additional beds being opened because of the investments that the Labor government continues to make in the health system.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:17): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: maternal and child health services

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:17): I rise to update the house on the Carroll Labor government's Parent Portal, a new digital service available through Service Victoria. The portal is another way the Carroll Labor government is making government services simpler and more accessible for Victorian families. Having a baby is one of the most exciting and overwhelming times in a parent's life. There are sleepless nights, feeding schedules, nappy changes and often a revolving door of family and friends that want to meet the newest member of the clan. In the middle of all that, there is a long list of government- and health-related tasks that need to be done. In the first two months alone, parents are tasked with organising newborn vaccinations, a hearing test and blood screening; establishing feeding; registering the birth; enrolling the baby in Medicare and navigating hospital and maternal and child health visits. For new parents, keeping track of all this can be a lot to take in. That is why the Carroll Labor government has launched the Parent Portal, a trusted, personalised place for Victorian families and carers with children under eight. Available through Service Victoria, the Parent Portal brings together government services, support and information in one simple place, helping families find what they need, when they need it. The Parent Portal was launched on 11 June this year, and already more than 12,000 child profiles have been added. This means thousands of Victorian families are already using the portal to help manage the many tasks and milestones that come with raising a young child. For new parents in particular, the last thing they need is another complicated process to navigate. They need simple, timely and trusted information in one place, and the Parent Portal is delivering exactly that.

Data centres

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:19): (1497) My question is to the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, represented by Mr Erdogan. Yesterday's announcement of some modest potential data centre regulations is at least an acknowledgement of some of the issues and the risks posed by this industry, issues which Legalise Cannabis has been ridiculed by the government for raising over the last 16 months. But these measures are too little, too late for many of my constituents in the west. In the west alone, 19 data centres are apparently already assessed or in the process of being assessed and will likely go ahead – environmental vampires untouched by these proposed regulations. I ask the minister: until the proposed state and federal regulations are in place, why won't you place a moratorium on new data centre approvals?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:20): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and his longstanding interest in these matters. I will ensure that that is passed on to the minister for AI in the other place for a response in line with the standing orders.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:20): Thank you, Minister, for passing that on. By way of supplementary, residents of West Footscray, Spotswood and indeed many communities around Victoria have worked tirelessly to raise issues that *The Sustainable Data Centre Action Plan* largely glosses over. The plan makes it abundantly clear that the government has not listened to affected communities or our previous request that the plan be released as an exposure draft in the first instance. The lack of any retrospectivity or requirement on existing data centres or ones under consideration is galling. Considering that facilities like West Footscray's NEXTDC M3 would no longer be approved under the new framework, will the Victorian government commit to working with other levels of government as well as communities to develop an appropriate amelioration and compensation framework for adversely affected residents and community services?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:21): I thank Mr Ettershank for his supplementary question, and I will make sure that that is passed on to the minister in the other place for an appropriate response in line with the standing orders.

Royal Children's Hospital

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): (1498) My question is again to the Minister for Health. Minister, a leaked memo from the Royal Children's Hospital says that they applied for funding. Is the minister saying that this is incorrect – that they never applied for such funding?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:22): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. As I have already indicated very clearly, this is an important project, and the way in which we commission our important infrastructure projects – and we have done many, so we are well versed at how this occurs with health services – is that the health department works very closely with the health service concerned and VIDA. Once the construction is completed, we have already had lead time in order to discuss in detail what the operationalisation of the project looks like in terms of workforce needs and standing up and operationalising those additional points of care. That is the process that is being undertaken right now. It is no different to any other project that our government has delivered – $15.5 billion worth of investment across the health portfolios, something that we are incredibly proud to continue.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): An interesting answer, yet again. Also from the leaked memo, Minister:

> But we can be honest with each other and accept that despite our best efforts, the standard of care we would like to deliver and believe our patients deserve was being compromised.

Minister, why does independent benchmarking show the Royal Children's Hospital having the lowest nursing and medical staffing levels of any Australian children's hospital ED?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:23): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. What she fails to understand is that we are absolutely mindful of the additional demands that are on our hospital services right across the state right now, and the Royal Children's Hospital is no different. That is why we are investing in additional capacity. We know that the emergency department is experiencing a significant uptick in demand. It is one of the reasons why we have been proud to support the investment to build out and supply additional capacity in the emergency department. Our government has a strong track record of not just investing in the capital projects that we need for a growing state but also backing in the workforce. We have put on 17,000 additional nurses since

coming to government – 40,000 additional healthcare workers across the system. We are proud of that, and we will continue that work.

Ministers statements: mental health and wellbeing locals

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Special Minister of State) (12:24): President, I would like to indicate how thrilled I was to be able to join you and the excellent candidate for Ringwood Rachel Halse to officially open the Maroondah mental health and wellbeing local.

Members interjecting.

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, President, seriously, if Mr McGowan wants to talk about Ringwood, maybe he can go next door and do it over there, or he can sit and listen to the minister's ministers statement.

Lizzie Blandthorn: Further to the point of order, President, I would be pleased to offer Mr McGowan the breathing ball – in and out.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know how to address the point of order other than to ask that people keep their interjections down so the minister can continue talking about me. It does not happen very often, so please.

Ingrid STITT: We were out in Ringwood last week to open our flagship initiative in Ringwood, the Maroondah mental health and wellbeing local. Locals are the front door to the mental health system, offering support and treatment for Victorians who are experiencing mental health or psychological distress, including co-occurring substance use or addiction. Care is delivered by a multidisciplinary team of experienced mental health professionals, wellbeing staff and peer support workers. I want to give a shout-out to the amazing team out in Ringwood delivering this local. It is all part of our 2025–26 budget, where we invested $34.4 million to strengthen the network of established locals across the state with an additional seven, including the new service in Ringwood. This investment means that Maroondah locals can now get the free support they need close to home without a GP referral or even a Medicare card.

I am proud to be part of a government that is building a mental health system that is all about supporting the community. It is person centred, and it is always guided by lived experience. Our network of locals is transforming access to care for Victorians right across the state, and I am so proud that we have been able to support over 50,000 Victorians with free, stigma-free, easy-to-access mental health supports in their communities. Thank you to the team at the local in Ringwood for showing us around and for the work that they are doing every day to create a safe and welcoming space for the whole community in Maroondah.

Gambling harm

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:28): (1499) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Minister, the latest figures show that Victorians lost a record $3.318 billion on poker machines in 2025–26, an increase of $173 million in just one year. Minister, with gambling losses continuing to climb to record levels, it seems that across your tenure as minister the main outcome you have achieved is not to reduce gambling harm but to preside over a regime that is delivering record profits to gambling companies and inflicting record amounts of gambling harm. Given the rise in losses, what additional action will your government be taking to reduce the amount being lost by Victorians to poker machines?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:28): I reject the premise of Ms Copsey's question. As the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, I am proud of my record in taking tough action on gambling harm reduction. No state has done more to reduce gambling

harm than the Carroll Labor government: we have lowered spin rates on pokie machines, we have brought load-up limits from $1000 down to $100 and we have implemented closures from 4 am to 10 am across the state. No state has taken more action on gambling harm than the Carroll Labor government, and we will always do more if needed. In terms of our government, we have made record changes. We have made sure that these reforms go across the board in terms of their impact, and we will continue to do more, as I have stated. What I will say is that we have strengthened protections, we have introduced evidence-based warnings like 'Chances are you're about to lose', we have fully implemented the national consumer protection framework for online wagering and we have banned static betting ads near schools, roads and public transport. We will continue to monitor the sector closely to keep Victoria's framework strong, fair and fit for purpose.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): Minister, when your government announced reforms in 2023 you told Parliament that the trial of universal carded play would be rolled out to every poker machine in Victoria by the end of 2025. In May last year you conceded that that timetable had slipped. The eventual trial ran from September to November 2025, and now, nearly a year later, I still have not seen the results from that and Victorians still have no date for statewide implementation. Minister, when will you release the trial results and when will universal carded play finally be rolled out across Victoria, or is this just another broken Labor promise?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:30): As I stated in my answer to the substantive, no government in the nation has done more to tackle gambling harm than the Carroll Labor government. We are the only state that has already implemented a statewide precommitment system on electronic gaming machines, and we are leading the nation when it comes to these reforms at our casino, which has already implemented carded play on electronic gaming machines. These reforms are about giving control back to Victorians so they can now determine how much time they want to spend and they can minimise their losses. A lot has been achieved already in this term of government. We did have a trial at 43 venues across our state, which has concluded. We want these reforms to stand the test of time. That is why we are closely observing the findings of that trial, and we will have more to say.

Illicit tobacco

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:31): (1500) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Minister, Tobacco Licensing Victoria has around 40 inspectors to cover the entire state. How many inspections have been conducted since the closure powers commenced on 9 September?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:31): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question and his interest in relation to our tough new tobacco regulator in Victoria. The first time ever we have had a tobacco regulator in this state was last year, and now we have got more inspectors than ever going around closing stores across the state. We do know that this is a problem that requires a national approach. We have seen the proliferation of these dangerous and illegal products in every state and territory in the nation, and that is why we are taking more action. In relation to the criminal element, we know that law enforcement agencies both national and local are working together. In terms of store inspections, I have talked about the 22 store closures that happened in the first week alone. There have been over 200 arrests that have been conducted by Victoria Police over the last two years. We have toughened the penalties, and we will continue to do more. In relation to the specifics about the number of inspections, you would understand that is a high level of detail, and because inspections are ongoing on a day-to-day basis I do not have that level of operational detail, as you would appreciate, with me at hand today. But I will see what I can provide post this meeting. We are committed to transparent information in this regard. That is why we have the store closures up on the website. In relation to inspections, as I said, Mr Mulholland, I am happy to take that on board and see

what I can provide. It is a high level of detail, and every day as we speak more inspections are taking place.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:33): Minister, as you acknowledged, only 22 closures have taken place since the closure powers have commenced, although none in regional Victoria. How many inspections have taken place in regional Victoria?

The PRESIDENT: I expect that there is a high level of detail in that question as well, but I will let you answer as you see fit.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (12:33): I thank Mr Mulholland for his supplementary question. It is Tobacco Licensing Victoria, so there will be regulation across the state. But when it relates to operational matters, I am reluctant to interfere in that work, because they are working together with Victoria Police. It is an intelligence-led enforcement approach. Therefore we will see them across the state. We will not be releasing data based on location, because that is the intelligence that we will be keeping. But post the closures happening – we are talking about the first two weeks of the closure powers – they will be updated progressively. Watch this space. But I am not going to give insights of the criminal elements. Illicit tobacco is widespread, affecting communities in inner suburbs, in the inner city, but also in our regions. That information will be published in the appropriate way that does not compromise ongoing investigation and enforcement activities. I will not be disclosing those operational activities in this chamber.

Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Environment, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:34): Today I would like to update the house on the latest SEC project, the Baranduda electrical energy reserve, one of the largest batteries in the country. Once completed, it will power over 200,000 homes during peak times. This project is nation leading – one of the first superannuation fund investments in a renewable project – all enabled by the SEC's involvement.

The SEC is unlocking private market investment. This project involves Birdwood and Aware Super and will create around 150 jobs for the local Wodonga community, part of the 68,000 jobs that the energy transition is creating across our state. The project also includes a $3 million fund that will contribute yearly to the local community over the lifetime of the battery. It will of course collect and store cheap, abundant renewable electricity during the day and push it back into the grid during the evening peak, putting downward pressure on electricity prices. The SEC has now delivered more than 1 gigawatt of renewable energy storage for Victorians. That is over 40 per cent of our statewide target of 2.6 gigawatts by 2030.

This government's energy plan is working. Our policies over the last 12 years have driven investment in generation and storage, and it is why we have the lowest power prices in the nation. We cannot afford not to build projects like these. We cannot afford not to build the new transition to connect them to the grid. The Liberal–One Nation coalition will stop energy transition, scrap the SEC and rip $18 billion in wages from the regional energy workers. They will leave Victorians with skyrocketing bills and unreliable power. It is only Labor who will keep the lights on and the bills down for Victorians.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, it is true that in ministers statements ministers are allowed to attack the opposition, but they are not allowed to be untruthful and lie.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, Mr Davis should withdraw that comment. It is unparliamentary.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, it was not a point of order. Minister, do you want to –

Jaclyn Symes: No, I'm immune to him.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order that you should not say someone has lied, but it should be the person that has taken offence. The minister has said she is immune to you.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:37): I thank Minister Symes, who will get answers for Mr Bourman from the Premier, both the substantive and supplementary, and also Minister Erdogan, for answers to both of Mr Ettershank's questions to the Minister for Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy.

Questions on notice

Answers

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:37): I am just standing up in regard to answers to questions. I have about 25 all up that have not been answered between the numbers 2236 and 2824. I can give you all of the numbers of them, but there is such a variety in there: health, planning, the Premier, the Attorney-General, emergency services, roads and road safety, artificial intelligence. Do you want me to give you all the numbers?

The PRESIDENT: I will get the minister to respond if you can pass that on.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Yes, there are at least 25 just within a short bracket.

The PRESIDENT: Can I ask if the minister is prepared to do that?

Jaclyn Symes: Yes, I will follow it up.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:38): I similarly want to follow up on unanswered question 2817, if an explanation could be provided. I have no idea who it was.

The PRESIDENT: Was it to one of these ministers' portfolios or was it an Assembly minister?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I do not have the information to hand.

The PRESIDENT: I will call on Minister Erdogan. Can you commit to following that up?

Enver Erdogan: Yes, I will commit to that. If you could just pass me that number, I will follow that up.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:39): (2639) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it is on behalf of many people I have spoken to, both residents and business owners, on the south side of Berwick, concerning some of the major road upgrades currently occurring in the area. I have spoken to several traders in the Eden Rise shopping centre who are thrilled that the Clyde Road upgrade – a major upgrade to an essential road in the south-east of Melbourne, upgrading the interchange with the Princes Freeway – is to be finished ahead of time, with the project now to be completed in October, seven months ahead of schedule. This is going to be a great boon for the traders in the Eden Rise and surrounding areas. They will also be very pleased to know that the Thompsons Road intersection upgrade is also well on track, with the lights to be switched on in just two days time. The question that I ask the minister is: how will these important and vital upgrades being delivered by the Labor government support my constituents in Berwick and surrounding areas?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): (2640) My question is for the Minister for Environment. I have been alerted to what is occurring at Albert Park Lake. Over the past six weeks or so, five swans have been killed by dogs that have been off leash. Local residents and community

groups, including Lake Alive!, have been raising concerns about off-leash dogs at the lake since 25 January, yet the attacks have continued. I love having the dog off the lead and running around, so I am not saying that we should be absolutely over the top on this, but we do need to have an awareness of these swans on the lake. Albert Park requires dogs to be on a lead outside designated off-leash areas. There was an assurance to Lake Alive! from Parks Victoria that there would be an increased compliance focus on park users who breach the rules. Will the minister advise what immediate action Parks Victoria will take to address the community's concerns on this important matter, on keeping these swans protected?

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:41): (2641) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. Coastal communities in the far south-west in places like Moyne and Glenelg shires are facing confronting impacts of the H5N1 bird flu, with growing numbers of sick, dying and dead bird species and now marine mammals washing up on beaches and beyond. These communities so far have received no assistance from the state government, and councils are really struggling to try and manage as best they can for these communities. Across the border, however, in South Australia, it is a different story, where they have deployed dedicated teams to undertake surveillance, humane euthanasia of suffering animals, carcass removal and pest control to limit viral vectors and scavenging risks. Minister, why is Victoria's response to the wildlife impacts of H5N1 so inadequate, and will you commit to strengthening habitat intervention, as South Australia has done?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:42): (2642) My question is to the Minister for Children. How are the children of Southern Metropolitan Region benefiting from Labor's investment in free kinder? Labor is transforming early learning through our $14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms, which are delivering bigger, better and fairer kinder for children across Victoria. A key aspect of free kinder is getting two years of high-quality early learning. It was great to see how some of the nearly 50,000 kids in the Southern Metropolitan Region have benefited from free kinder at Fawkner Park Children's Centre. Last week I visited with the minister and Labor's candidate for Prahran Meghan Hopper. Across Victoria more than 500,000 children have received the benefits of free kinder. But it is not just kids benefiting educationally; families benefit financially, saving up to $5400 per child across two years. It helps parents get back to work or study if they wish to. Labor is investing in the early years, where it matters most.

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (2643) My matter is for the minister for industry in the first instance, but it is a matter of very great interest to the Minister for Energy and Resources. I am in possession of correspondence between a firm that is very closely aligned with my electorate and the Eco Pacific group and correspondence from the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. The government's changes of policy on gas appliances mean this gas appliance manufacturer – which services the southern suburbs of Melbourne, including through my electorate in particular, and is a major manufacturer in our state – has been clobbered and now has business debts that actually do not deal with the outcomes of the government's own decisions, which have left it and its investments high and dry, as the government has put in place gas bans that mean people cannot supply the appliances that this firm makes. I would seek an intervention from the minister to ensure that they get a proper hearing for a loan.

Northern Victoria Region

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:44): (2644) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and my constituents ask: Minister, will you commit to replacing every firefighting appliance that has reached or exceeded its service of life to ensure the safety of both our career and volunteer firefighters? The minister has previously spoken on the importance of safety

standards and the continued efforts to increase the safety standards for both our career and volunteer firefighters. He remarked that it is not just the firefighters' safety that unions fight for, it is the community's safety as well. Firefighters have spent years warning about ageing appliances, and we have just seen the summer bushfire inquiry recommend immediate funding for replacement trucks and a rolling replacement program. Far too often we see reports of yet another broken-down fire truck unable to respond to what could possibly be the worst day of someone's life. Frustrated firefighters just want to do the work they signed up for and protect their communities. Minister, it is time to commit to replacing the ageing fleet of firefighting appliances to ensure the safety of those who protect us.

The PRESIDENT: That is within your region?

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Yes.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:46): (2645) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. Last week I had the absolute pleasure of joining the Deputy Premier at Melbourne Zoo to announce that the incredible Smile Squad program has arrived at the zoo for the school holidays; in fact it is running there today. Our Labor government is proud of this program, which is supporting kids to get free dental health care directly in their schools. It means that they have healthy smiles while easing the cost-of-living pressures on hardworking parents. If re-elected, we are committed to opening 10 new completely free dental clinics so every Victorian can access these basic check-ups. My constituents are eager to see this rollout continue. On behalf of parents with school-aged children in the Northern Metropolitan Region, I ask: what schools have benefited from the Smile Squad program to date?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:47): (2646) Boral's proposed Montrose quarry expansion seeks to extend operations 30-plus years beyond current life expectancy and to increase its extraction area by approximately 12 hectares, significantly encroaching upon homes, schools, businesses, childcare and aged care facilities and the surrounding land users. The Minister for Planning determined that an environment effects statement, or EES, is required due to the significant environmental and community impact potential. Human health impacts, however, have not been identified within the minister's statement of decision or reason for decision. Clare Fitzmaurice, the Liberal candidate for Monbulk, has worked very closely with local advocacy group Stop Montrose Quarry Expansion to put together a lower house parliamentary petition calling on the government to ensure that health is included in the scoping requirements. The question for the Minister for Planning is: why haven't you listened to the community's concerns and acted to ensure human health risks are considered?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (2647) My question today is to the Minister for Seniors. The north-eastern suburbs of Melbourne are home to the largest Chinese diaspora community in the country. I am incredibly proud to represent such a vibrant and diverse part of the world and to have had the opportunity to connect over the last few years with so many members of the Chinese Australian diaspora community here in this state. What I have heard from many older Chinese diaspora residents of Box Hill, Glen Waverley, Ringwood and Doncaster, for example, and beyond is that they want to see more culturally specific services in their communities as they age. By far the most popular issue that they have raised with me is that they would like to see a dedicated Chinese community aged care centre that is run by the state. Minister, will you commit to opening a state-run aged care centre for the Chinese community in my electorate?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:49): (2648) My question is to the Minister for Health, and it follows a conversation I had with Merryn, a resident of Benalla, about her experience during cancer

treatment and the significant costs incurred. Merryn needed to travel long distances and to stay away from home to access life-saving cancer treatment for sometimes months at a time, and her experience is shared by many across northern Victoria. In comparison with patient travel assistance schemes in other states, Victoria offers the lowest subsidy rates for accommodation and travel. I have met with organisations that understand the impact on those undertaking treatment, including the Cancer Council Victoria, Diabetes Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Heart Foundation and the Leukaemia Foundation. There have been no substantial changes to Victorian patient transport assistance scheme rates since 2015 and subsidies have not kept pace with costs incurred by patients and families. I ask the minister to urgently increase financial support for regional patients travelling long distances for medical care. We need better access to specialist care in regional Victoria, but many people do not have any option but to travel long distances for treatment.

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (2649) My constituency question is for the Minister for Major Events in the other place, Minister Carbines. Later this week over 100,000 fans will head to the MCG for the grand final to see Freo stare down the Lions. It is going to be a big one. Melbourne is the sporting capital for a reason. While in my view the grand final is the crown jewel in the large slate of sporting events, it is important to remember just how many of these massive events go on every year. Just recently we had the NFL down here, with over 100,000 fans packing into the MCG to have a look. Victoria is well and truly booming, and I expect these sorts of things to grow even more as the years come and go. My question to the minister is: how much economic activity is estimated to have been generated by major sporting events so far this year?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2650) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children. A constituent from my electorate has written to me regarding the exclusion of permanent carers from paid parental leave arrangements in Victoria. They highlighted that permanent carers take on full responsibility for children who cannot live with their birth families and that they should have access to the same support afforded to other parents during this important period. My constituent noted from experience that permanent carers often support children who have experienced trauma, disruption and loss and that the early stages of placement are critical for building stability, attachment and trust. They believe that access to paid leave would provide permanent carers with the time and financial security to focus on the child's wellbeing, establish stable routines and attend appointments and services as may be required. Minister, will you advocate to your federal colleagues for the inclusion of permanent carers in paid parental leave? In the meantime, what support is the government providing to permanent carers who are excluded from paid parental leave?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:52): (2651) My constituency question is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Distressingly, despite the fact that Labor's youth crime prevention program operates in the Latrobe Valley, Latrobe Valley youth crime is continuing to rise. Car theft, retail theft and antisocial behaviour are causing great distress to all of the area. The Victorian Auditor-General's report out today says that the government has spent over $40 million in a decade and yet 70 per cent of youth participants reoffend within six months. That is a shocking track record. The Liberals and Nationals have a restart program to redirect youth before they enter a life of crime. My question is to the minister: will he acknowledge that this system has failed and it is time for a fresh start for the Latrobe Valley under the Liberals and Nationals?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (2652) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Established in 2024 the Woodend Eagles Soccer Club has rapidly become a thriving and inclusive regional club, supporting over 200 kids. The club has reached capacity at its

shared football and cricket oval and is now turning away children. Without access to a safe full-sized pitch, current players will also be forced to leave next season. Neighbouring clubs are also at capacity. Meanwhile, the historic 50-acre Woodend Racecourse Reserve, which hosted its last horse race in 1982, remains largely derelict, with regeneration plans years away; that is also years of children being turned away. The Eagles have a community-driven proposal to raise the funds and transform abandoned sand arenas into a sporting pitch, meeting all relevant standards. Will the minister work with the council to streamline approvals, enabling this first chapter to start, turning an underused piece of Crown land into a facility for my community?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2653) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Constituents living in the City of Casey are horrified, though not surprised, by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report findings that the City of Casey recorded the highest number of potholes in metro Melbourne. The state of our roads in Victoria, especially in the south-east, has become so bad that Victorians are worried about the fatalities it could cause. Unfortunately, the fatality on the Western Highway between Ballarat and Trawalla shows that this is a very real concern. My thoughts and prayers go out to Peter 'Tiki' Mason's family, friends and loved ones. I am so sorry for your loss. This should never have happened. Due to the lack of infrastructure in the outer suburbs of the south-east, my constituents rely heavily on getting around by car. Their daily trips to work, school drop-offs and other errands should not be plagued by aggressive swerving to avoid potholes and the fear that this will result in a car crash. Minister, why did the Carroll Labor government waste $15 billion on infrastructure corruption instead of looking after Victorian roads, leaving Victorians to live in daily fear?

Sitting suspended 12:55 pm until 2:02 pm.

Motions

Road maintenance

Debate resumed.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:02): It is good to be able to get back to speaking on this motion. Premier Carroll has identified a number of areas of investment and policy to improve the conditions of our roads. The amount of potholes we will repair will go from 250,000 to 500,000, and we will complete double the length of road repair. Alongside doubling the number of potholes being fixed to half a million, we will clear and manage more than 1.7 million metres of vegetation also.

There are a number of things that Premier Carroll has outlined that are important to improving the conditions of our roads. It is not just about fixing the roads, it is about the way we repair our roads and doing that better. That involves putting government back in charge of state road maintenance programs. We have got a number of things that sit within the way we go about repairing our roads, and we have got to get them all right. Another important thing is for people to be able to identify, report and keep an eye on what is going on with potholes and other repairs that need to be done on their roads. That is why the government is going to establish a website where people can submit problems on the roads and monitor the works to repair them. New statewide standards for road quality and road safety will lift the bar for everyone, everywhere, and will make it easier for Victorians to get compensation if something occurs on the roads.

We are going to use local knowledge. We will empower our five road maintenance regions – Barwon South West, Loddon Mallee, Hume, Gippsland, inner metro and greater metro – because the best road maintenance decisions are made by people who drive on them most. We will work closely and constructively with councils. I am really passionate on that point. You want people closest to the things that matter to them making the decisions. It is also about entrusting people with the skills locally to make decisions and to roll out works across a variety of portfolios in government, and roads are an absolutely obvious area where we are going to get better outcomes by doing that.

As part of getting more hands on deck, we will work with Corrections Victoria to pilot minimum-security prisoners helping with basic roadside maintenance like mowing and graffiti removal. These supervised offenders will supplement existing workforces and allow skilled crews to get on and fix more potholes. But we did not need a Victorian Auditor-General's Office report to tell us this. Victorians already knew it, and the condition of the roads needs to improve. That is why these announcements have been made, and this work is getting on with it right now.

I just want to add some information around freight and what is moving on our roads. Obviously we have got a variety of big users on our roads, agriculture being one. There are all the materials involved in our construction and infrastructure sector. Obviously we have got people using the roads day in, day out. We have got tourists using the roads, which somehow those opposite were trying to weaponise before. I do not know what they have got against tourists, particularly local tourists, in our state. I am a passionate believer in money being spent in our own economy. Why would you fly to the other side of the world, spend hours in airports and sitting on aeroplanes jet-lagged, when you can jump in a car and get out and experience Victoria? Of course with oil over a hundred bucks a barrel at the moment, why not do it in an electric vehicle with all the charging infrastructure that the state government has invested in as well, Mrs McArthur?

The government has invested almost $600 million in rail freight maintenance. I think Ms Bath talked before about what school this side goes to, with the things we talk about. When I was at school, I remember Kennett shutting down schools. If you want to talk about our school of thought, it was actually the Liberals and the Nationals that helped inform that school of thought when schools were being shut down, when hospitals were being privatised and when V/Line and train services were being ripped apart. That is why I am really proud to be part of a government that is investing in freight. In the last financial year we saw a 44 per cent boost in grain volumes on rail compared to the previous year, moving almost 2.14 million gross tonnes of bulk grain. We saw an increase in container freight, up 13 per cent, and crushed rock, up 11 per cent, on rail, with a total of 3.4 million gross tonnes of commodities transported on the V/Line freight network. What that means, for those opposite, is fewer trucks on our roads. It actually means lower freight emissions as well, which is a good thing. And given the inflationary component of oil prices, it is a very good thing that we are consuming less oil and keeping inflationary pressures off our commodities and off our goods. The ability to do that across regional and rural Victoria with these freight hubs and to transform how freight moves across Melbourne with the port rail shuttle network is getting trucks off our roads, is reducing congestion, is keeping prices down on goods we move across this state and is taking pressure off our road network.

We know that the Liberals, in alliance with One Nation, want to drive down workers pay. We know that the Liberals, in alliance with One Nation, want to get rid of child care. They want to get rid of schools, they want to make cuts to health care and they want to drive the cost of living for Victorians up. Victorians should think very carefully about what the Liberals and One Nation will do. We know their feverish desire for Trumpian politics to cut and slash and leave Victorians without services, to leave Victorians with lower wages and to make it harder for Victorians to have the things they need, like education, like healthcare services and like public transport. We know the Liberals and One Nation will cut and cut and cut, because that is in their DNA. We know that. We see Trump politics playing out. We know that the Liberals and One Nation look to and idolise Trumpian politics. They idolise it. Victorians will do well to remember what the Liberals have done in the past and remember what they will do if they get half a chance in the future.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:10): I am following on from Mr McIntosh's interesting diatribe. I think in the alternate universe, which is the Labor propaganda unit, they like to set out the agenda of what it is we will do, so I am going to start strong by setting out exactly what it is that the Liberals and Nationals will do and what we will invest in if we have the honour of being elected to government in Victoria.

The first thing that we are going to do, regardless of what Mr McIntosh says, is we will invest $5 billion straightaway into road maintenance. What we are going to start with straightaway is

investing that $5 billion into road maintenance, which is not a cut like Mr McIntosh would say. In fact it was Premier Carroll that cut from the roads budget, which I will get to soon. What we will do is we will invest $5 billion, a 25 per cent increase on the current spend. We will establish Better Roads Victoria as a standalone division within the department of transport and infrastructure, rebuilding the technical and engineering expertise lost when the Allan Labor government abandoned VicRoads and axed Regional Roads Victoria. We will boost roadside maintenance such as grass slashing, graffiti removal and drainage clearance. That has been spoken about a little bit. Completely opposite to reality from what we have heard here, this is what our plan is and this is what our team will deliver. We will lift departmental and contractor accountability through a review of construction standards and maintenance contracts. Let me just say that it must be embarrassing at the end of a 12-year relationship to come and say, 'Oh, but we're going to change.' That is what the Allan and Carroll Labor governments have really focused on.

I rise to speak in support of Mrs McArthur's motion on roads and road safety, because it is vitally important. I will say that there is no more obvious sign of a crumbling government than its crumbling roads. It is really the physical evidence of a government that cannot manage the basics. It is the physical evidence of that. We have seen the Premier himself, Premier Ben Carroll, trying to distance himself from the issue. It was unbelievable footage we saw on the telly when he said, 'But I'm not the minister for roads.' It was literally the captain of the team abandoning his team and saying, 'That's got nothing to do with me,' when in fact he is the Premier. The buck stops with him. But also, he was the roads minister. He was challenged, and he straightaway backed away. When he was the minister, he cut $200 million from the budget, and it is that neglect that has led us to where we are now.

I have outlined our plan. That is what we are going to do. That is what we are going to deliver. But above and beyond that we have also got the country roads and bridges program, which will be a $288 million investment in country roads and bridges. That is what we will deliver. Under this commitment, each of the 48 rural and regional councils will receive $1.5 million of untied funding for local roads and bridges so that they will have the ability in their own hands to make the decisions to fix these issues without having to come begging.

Recent RACV data shows – and in the interests of time I am just going to flick to the back of it – that essentially road surface conditions and potholes were the number one safety issue for 71 per cent of respondents, and that is an increase from 64 per cent. That is saying that the people that are using the roads – Victorians, not the people within these walls but the road users themselves, the people that put us here – are saying, that things have got worse. It has increased, that number, from 64 per cent to 71 per cent. The report states:

> … with 71 per cent of respondents identifying potholes and rough surfaces as the number one issue – an increase from 64 per cent in 2024.

That is why we are going to eliminate a million potholes. The RACV had to shortlist, which is unbelievable, the 52 most hazardous roads based on design, features and narrow lanes. It says:

> While each region raised distinct local concerns, the results show consistent demand for practical investment that improves the condition, capacity and safety of Victoria's regional road network.

That is exactly what we will do. Over 7000 people responded about improving specific roads. Nearly three-quarters of respondents nominated road resurfacing as the highest priority. This is a government that is really trying to reverse the narrative.

While I have time I will quickly mention a few of the things that are quite funny that these guys have said. Mr Batchelor said they are taking back responsibility and control. From whom? You have been the government for 12 years. Taking it back from whom? Ms Ermacora said, 'Those opposite don't like that we now have a plan and we're going to do things differently.' You have had 12 years to do things differently. You did not. I commend this motion to the house.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:16): I am very pleased to sum up the debate on this motion, which apart from anything else, notes that the Honourable Ben Carroll served as the Minister for Roads and Road Safety from June 2020 to December 2022, during which time road asset management funding fell from $958.8 million to $760.1 million in 2021–22. It also calls on the government to publish road condition, backlog and repair data and regional maintenance allocations and timetables and to explain how it will arrest the deterioration of roads identified by the Auditor-General.

I want to thank those that participated in the debate: Dr Mansfield – my colleague from Western Victoria Region – Mr Batchelor, Ms Bath, Ms Tyrrell, Ms Ermacora, Ms Lovell, Mr Bourman, Mr McIntosh and Dr Heath.

Michael Galea: I did want to speak; I got timed out.

Bev McARTHUR: And all those that did not get a chance, Mr Galea. Fantastic. I am sure you would have all liked to have spoken on the appalling state of the roads that you have been in charge of for 12 years. Now, at 5 minutes to midnight, when there is an election 5 minutes away, you think you have got a plan to fix the roads. Well, good luck with that. Victorians have got way more sense than you are giving them credit for. You say you are going to have a portal where we can register bad roads. Hang on a minute, they have been telling you for years how bad your roads are. You have been denying it. Ms Ermacora only came to the realisation there were bad roads very recently, and Ms Terpstra thinks potholes are wonderful. Seriously, you people think you have got a plan to fix the roads when you are about to go into caretaker mode. You have got no hope in the world of convincing Victorians that you are going to do anything decent.

I want to give a shout-out to the people that really work hard and care about roads. Regional Cities Victoria is a great group of councils. They are led by Mayor Blain from Warrnambool. He is a terrific advocate for everything that is rural and regional. There is also Rural Councils of Victoria, led by Cr Rob Amos, with deputy chair Kate Makin, who is the mayor of my municipality. I was so pleased to go to Swan Hill recently and announce the funding for the 48 rural and regional councils so that they can have untied funding – $1.5 million a year for four years – to fix their roads and bridges. That is what is important, and they have been advocating for it. We will deliver it, along with our massive investment in roads that will do something serious, apart from having a system that will provide better road infrastructure so that we do not need to continually repair roads.

I could not believe what I was hearing from the other side. You have said that you are going to ask people what they expect. I can tell you what they expect. They have expected for the last 12 years that the roads be of good condition. At the moment they are absolutely shocking. They are actually, as Mr Bourman said, a major safety issue. People are dying on these roads because of the lack of maintenance. I was on a road toll inquiry with some sorts of experts from inner-city Melbourne telling us, 'We'll just lower the speed limit.' Let me tell you, lowering the speed limit out in the country does not cut the mustard when you have got to get children to school and products to market. Your solution is prisoner-led road gangs. Well, spare me. This is going to be the solution to fixing the roads in Victoria – a portal where people can tell you how bad the road is and a prisoner-led road gang out on the side of a road. There is just no limit to your hopelessness when it comes to roads and road safety. As Mr Bourman said, roads need to be car-safe, because you demand that cars are roadworthy. You have never lifted your game for the entire period you have been in office. Our roads are shocking. Our cars are very good, but you have let the side down. Victorians will give you a message on 28 November because they want real work done.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026

Council's amendments

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora) (14:21): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Local Government Legislation Amendment (Stronger Communities) Bill 2026:

> The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Local Government Act 2020** to enhance the integrity and governance standards of Councils, to enable the prescription of a Fair Jobs Code and to make provision for the appointment of a Local Government Fair Jobs Code Regulator and to amend the **City of Melbourne Act 2001** to remove group voting tickets from the election of Councillors, to increase the permitted ratio between the lowest and highest differential rates if the Melbourne City Council uses the net annual value system of valuation, to enable a vacancy in the office of Deputy Lord Mayor to be filled by appointment, to reduce entitlement to be enrolled on the voters' roll without application and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

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

Clerk's corrections

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora) (14:23): Under standing order 14.34, I have received a report from the Clerk of the Legislative Council informing the house that he has made a correction in the schedule of amendments made by this house to the Workplace Legislation Amendment (Accident Compensation and Other Matters) Bill 2026. The report states that in amendment 21, which inserts a new section 620C into a principal act, there are two subsections numbered '(3)'. The second '(3)' and the remaining subsections in that new section have been renumbered accordingly. In amendment 30, which inserts a new part, a single quote has been inserted at the end of the inserted part 17.3A heading to ensure the text from that amendment is inserted in the correct place.

Production of documents

Production of documents

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:24): I move:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes that the Council has afforded the government substantial time to comply with production of documents orders, and as at Tuesday 22 September 2026:
>
> (a) 46 orders for the production of documents remain outstanding past their due date without any substantive response, other than claims of insufficient time;
>
> (b) of the 1535 documents identified, 630 have been withheld in full;
>
> (2) requires the Leader of the Government to cause all documents required by the resolutions identified in paragraph (1), together with any returns required by standing orders 10.02 and 10.03, to be delivered to the Clerk by 9:30 am on Thursday 24 September 2026;
>
> (3) permits that, in the event that paragraph (2) is not complied with, the Council will, at the conclusion of formal business on Thursday 24 September 2026:
>
> (a) give precedence for a non-government member to move, without leave, '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.'; and
>
> (b) the question will be put forthwith and decided without amendment, adjournment or debate.

At the outset I would like to thank my crossbench colleagues for their work on this motion, which for reasons I will come to later, unites us as members of this chamber and Victorians privileged by our peers with the role of scrutinising our government. That is a role, a responsibility, which should go beyond our political differences, and I am grateful that we have acted in this spirit on the subject of this motion. I move this motion today because there comes a point when patience ceases to be a virtue. On the matter of this government's attitude to documents motions, we have got to that point. This Council has been extremely patient, perhaps too patient. This is not the first time we have asked the government to respect orders for the production of documents, nor is it the second time. We have debated this problem repeatedly. We have issued orders, extended deadlines, considered sanctions and, importantly, we have given the government the opportunity to put its own house in order. Where has that patience got us?

As at Tuesday of this week, 46 orders for the production of documents remained outstanding beyond their due date without any substantive responses other than claims of insufficient time. The government itself has identified 1535 documents relevant to orders of this Council. Of those, 630 have been withheld in full. Extracting information from this government has become frustratingly like getting blood out of the proverbial stone. Importantly, this is not some administrative disagreement between the opposition and the government. These are not purely Liberal Party requests which the Labor Party has chosen for political reasons to ignore. They are specific, properly made orders of this Council.

Members across this chamber have different politics, different priorities and very different ideas about what documents ought to be produced, but once this house has resolved that documents should be produced, the order belongs to the Council. The government should not get to decide that a resolution of this house is merely an invitation – that is a disgraceful contempt – nor should it get to decide that an inconvenient order can be put at the bottom of some overflowing departmental in-tray until Parliament gives up and goes away. This is not us freelancing to fill time on Wednesdays. Scrutiny is the essential constitutional function of this chamber. We have real powers in this area. To let the government ride roughshod without passing a motion like today's would, I think, be a dereliction of our duty.

We have been here before, as members may remember. In 2024 this Council dealt directly with the government's continuing failure to comply with document orders. The house asserted its right to require production and contemplated serious sanctions. Rather than immediately imposing the harshest sanction available, we gave the government further opportunities to comply. We have done it again more recently. Earlier this year the house agreed to new procedures allowing the Department of Premier and Cabinet to seek variations to the scope and timing of document orders. That was another attempt to operate reasonably and practically. It recognised that genuinely large requests can create difficulties and gave the government a mechanism to raise those difficulties properly. Let nobody opposite pretend this motion has appeared from nowhere. We have listened, waited, compromised and extended deadlines, and still we have 46 overdue orders and countless more simply kicked into the long grass.

More than five years ago, during COVID, I stood in this chamber and spoke about this government's addiction to secrecy. I said then that if you sow secrecy, you reap suspicion. It was true in 2021; it is even more true today. In my view, the way the Andrews government operated during COVID was a disgrace, and in important ways the attitude to scrutiny developed during that admittedly challenging time appears still to be with us. During the pandemic I made the point that transparency is not some optional extra to be dispensed with when the government finds it inconvenient. The more power government exercises, the greater its obligation to explain itself. The principle did not expire with the state of emergency. It is a very basic principle of democratic government. Government has enormous power. It taxes people and spends their money. It makes laws. It signs contracts. It employs armies of officials, acquires land and regulates businesses. It can profoundly alter people's lives. The bargain is that government must answer for what it does, and Parliament, as we learn at school, is where the

answering is supposed to happen. But under this Labor government, accountability has increasingly been treated not as an essential part of government but as an irritating obstacle to it.

Earlier this year I argued here that of all Labor's failures, the failure of integrity matters most, because it poisons trust in everything else. I described the pattern then, and I make no apology for repeating it now, because the pattern has not changed. There is the systematic abuse of Parliament, treated as an administrative inconvenience; the contempt for parliamentary questions – the dodging, the deflecting and the non-answers; the failure to supply documents when they are properly ordered; the weaponisation of urgency procedures to ram major legislation through this place with the minimum possible scrutiny; an estimates process too often used to protect ministers instead of properly examining them; the collective amnesia and obfuscation we have seen at inquiries; the freedom-of-information system too often delaying, redacting and frustrating rather than informing; the politicisation of what should be a fearless and impartial public service; and over it all an extraordinary apparatus of media advisers and spin doctors whose job seems increasingly to be to manage the headline rather than reveal the truth.

This is not a collection of unrelated complaints, it is a style of governing. It is ingrained attitudes and essential beliefs. It is a culture of Labor and the government apparatus that they have shaped in their image. When scrutiny becomes uncomfortable, minimise it. If information is embarrassing, withhold it. Should Parliament ask questions, answer something else. When Parliament asks for documents, delay. When an inquiry asks who is responsible, suddenly nobody can remember. When legislation is politically urgent, compress scrutiny. When the facts are too awful, manage the message – or in other words, just lie about it – then tell Victorians, 'There's nothing to see here.' We saw that approach again this year when extraordinary changes to electoral law were rushed through this Parliament with minimal scrutiny. I said at the time that the government wanted the legislation to suffer the minimum scrutiny possible.

Many of us on this side have also spoken repeatedly about grey corruption or soft corruption. I am not using that phrase here to allege that every withheld document contains evidence of criminality. That is not the point. Grey corruption is also about a culture in which power is exercised without proper accountability; where the lines between party, government and state become blurred; where institutions become less independent; where transparency is treated as a threat; and where the public is expected to simply trust those exercising power. That culture is corrosive even before anyone proves a criminal offence. As we all know, and as many of us have said, corruption does not begin and end with money in a suitcase or a brown paper bag. When standards are walked past often enough, tolerances change. What once would have been unacceptable becomes normal, and what once would have reliably caused outrage becomes another Friday afternoon media release. That is why these documents orders matter. Documents strip away the spin. They allow this Parliament, journalists, experts and ultimately the public to see the contemporaneous advice, the correspondence, the modelling, the warnings and the decisions – not a press release written six months later or a carefully selected talking point or the minister's coached reconstruction of events. The documents are just facts.

This motion is also deliberately measured. We could have proposed an immediate suspension of the Leader of the Government from the service of this Council. That sanction has been contemplated before. Instead, once again, the government is being given another chance to at least show willingness to deliver the documents, and the sanction proposed is modest. We are not proposing to expel anyone. We are not even proposing to suspend the leader from the service of the house. We propose to suspend ministers statements for the remainder of the sitting days – that is, tomorrow. Frankly, there is a certain justice in that. In fact I am sure those opposite might welcome the relief from ministers statements. We certainly would. A government which will not provide information demanded by this house should not expect an uninterrupted platform in question time to tell this house only the information it would prefer us to hear. If ministers will not submit to scrutiny, they should not assume an automatic right to use parliamentary time for government promotion. And because this problem is bigger than one sitting day, the motion would refer the Leader of the Government to the Privileges Committee to consider

what further sanctions are appropriate. That is responsible, and for the reasons outlined above it is our duty not to let the situation pass without taking action, however symbolic.

Every member of this chamber should defend the powers of this chamber. If we allow one executive to ignore Parliament when it is inconvenient, we weaken Parliament for every government that follows. The standing orders are not decorations and the resolutions of this Council are not suggestions. Parliamentary scrutiny is not a favour bestowed on us by the executive, it is one of the fundamental safeguards of responsible government. The Labor government has been given every opportunity to recognise that. It has been warned, it has been given time, it has been given new procedures and it has even been given extensions. To return to what I said in this chamber in 2021, if you sow secrecy, you reap suspicion. Five years later Labor has sown secrecy on an industrial scale. It should hardly be surprised at the harvest. This motion says something very simple: enough is enough. Produce the documents, respect the Council and submit to scrutiny, or this Council must finally defend its own authority. I commend the motion to the house.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:40): I rise to speak on this motion, and the Greens will be supporting the motion today. I have contributed to debates on this topic I think more than any other during the last four years in Parliament – 14 times. That is not the number of times I have mentioned the failure to produce documents. There have been 14 different occasions when I have spoken on this issue, so I think there is a very high risk that I will repeat myself or plagiarise myself, because very little has changed over the last four years. Every time we debate this issue it is the same things that come up. The only thing that has changed is the length of the list of documents that we have outstanding, and that has continued to grow. Mrs McArthur has highlighted the number of outstanding documents that there currently are.

This is an issue that is clearly not going to be completely resolved this week. It is one that, unfortunately, has not been adequately addressed this term of Parliament. But I think this motion today is really important because we need to recognise that it has been a problem and indicate that there will need to be more work done on this and there will need to be a change in the next Parliament if we want to restore a little bit of faith in democracy and the functioning of the Parliament, which is what the Victorian people deserve.

As Mrs McArthur said, it is the right of the Parliament and the duty of the Parliament to apply scrutiny to the government of the day. One of the ways that we do that is by requesting documents that we believe are in the public interest. With these requests that we have put forward, we have tried to be very reasonable in most instances. We have been told time and again, 'The scope is too wide. You've requested too many documents. It's thousands, millions of documents that the departments would have to sift through, costing far too much money and wasting too much time.' We repeatedly get told that there has not been enough time to source the documents that have been requested. We had another letter tabled yesterday saying they just had insufficient time for the last two documents. We were told time and time again that this was the problem, so we worked in good faith with the government – faith that they probably did not deserve to be given. But we went, 'Okay. Look, you've said this is the problem. Let's work together to find a solution.' We amended the sessional orders – now it has been incorporated into the standing orders – to allow the government to come back to the mover of the motion and say, 'Look, the scope is too wide. The timeline is too short. Can we discuss something more appropriate?' That power has been there now for months – I am not aware of whether it has been used at all – yet we are still being met with responses that are exactly the same: 'Sorry, there has been insufficient time.' The government have not come to us and said, 'No, we didn't have enough time.' They have got the power to do that now; that is what they asked for. They are not using that.

We really gave a lot of time and a lot of grace to the government on this issue, and I think there is very little reason, given the response that we have seen, that we can really continue to accept those excuses anymore. There is no excuse left. There is an option there to negotiate with parties about the nature of their documents and ask for something more reasonable, so I cannot help but think that that actually is not the reason, that there is not a good excuse for not wanting to release them. I think the government

think, 'If we just don't produce them, no-one will notice, no-one will care.' I do not know that that is true. We notice and we care, and I think the public has begun to notice and the public very much cares about this. Every person I raise this with is astounded that this is the case. They are outraged when they hear that this is what happens.

I think one of the further issues, though, that compounds this is the issue of the claims of executive privilege. Again, this is something we have debated many times in this place, but effectively the way the government use claims of privilege and their failure to follow standing orders effectively amounts to a continuation of the failure to produce documents, because almost every document that is eventually tabled here has extensive claims of privilege made over it. I can already anticipate the debate we are going to have in here from government members. We are going to get lectures about principles of the Westminster system and all sorts of fancy rhetorical pressure –

Members interjecting.

Sarah MANSFIELD: No, no, no – and I can anticipate the heckling in response. No-one has ever, ever questioned your right to claim privilege. What we have questioned is our ability to get some sort of independent assessment of whether that claim is appropriate. Claims of privilege started with this government; there is a lovely history of it in the first interim report on the Commonwealth Games inquiry. It is excellent. There is a whole chapter on executive privilege. The Attorney-General at the time, Martin Pakula, wrote back to this Parliament in response, I think, to a request for documents. They provided this extensive definition of 'executive privilege', and honestly, when you read it, it covers just about anything you could ever want. They say, 'Everything is executive privilege if we want it to be.' We compare this to New South Wales, where there is a very narrow definition of 'executive privilege', and it effectively just covers things that are essentially very much cabinet in confidence, not everything else.

Let us have a look at some of the examples of documents that have had privilege claimed over them: noise and dust and odour reports on some very obscure site that was considered for some part of the Commonwealth Games. That is admittedly a document I do not think anyone cared about, because it was not relevant to the request, but really? It was every single document – hundreds of documents. It was like it had just been put through a machine printing 'Privilege' over everything. It was absolutely ridiculous. New South Wales, though, has a very narrow definition of 'privilege'. But let us put aside the definition of 'privilege'; let us accept that the government's definition is right, that they are always claiming it correctly and it is not too broad. The other problem is the failure to follow the standing orders of this place. I have read these standing orders so often I could almost recite them. It is in 10.03 –

Members interjecting.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I am short on time. I am not going to read these out, but I would really encourage every government member to actually read this, because I do not think, based on the arguments you have brought to this place on this subject every time, that you have actually read and understood this part of the –

Michael Galea interjected.

Sarah MANSFIELD: You have not read and understood. Well, these are the standing orders that this Parliament has agreed to. These are the rules of this place that we have agreed to follow. It works in New South Wales. They follow these rules. The mover of a motion is entitled, in the event that executive privilege claims are made, to view the documents and make a decision, 'Is this reasonable or not?' If there is a dispute, the Clerks can request that an independent legal expert, an arbiter, comes and assesses that claim about privilege, and a decision is made. Sometimes the application of privilege will be upheld, other times it will not. This happens all the time in New South Wales, and it works by and large. It seems the government's New South Wales counterparts have started to pick up on the bad habits of their Victorian colleagues and have stopped playing ball and are now facing the consequences of that repeatedly, but by and large it has worked there.

At the heart of it, the reason why that needs to be there is that it is another check and balance on the government of the day. If you can just claim privilege – privilege that you have defined yourselves as well, you have created your own definition of 'privilege' – you can make your own claims and those claims can never be challenged. That just says to the Parliament and says to the people, 'We don't care. We get to make the rules. We get to decide everything.' Ultimately, it is the public that loses out. Mrs McArthur spoke very well about why transparency is so important. I have said many times when this issue has come up that the government's failure to act on these core integrity issues will eventually catch up with them, and I think what we have seen in recent times is exactly that. Ultimately, it is the Victorian people who lose out, but ultimately it is the Victorian people who will get to decide this November whether they think this is good enough.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:50): We are back again talking about motions for the production of documents and the standing orders that support them in action. What we have from Mrs McArthur and the Liberal Party is a motion that amounts to a heartfelt determination to stop ministers making ministers statements on the last sitting day of the Parliament. I think there are some serious issues that we need to address in the course of the debate, but we are here in the Liberal Party's last slot of general business before the state election, and the issue that is the most significant for the Liberal Party is facilitating a process to stop ministers making statements in the chamber tomorrow. That is what it is all about. It is not about more than that. This is all designed to set up a procedural mechanism to stop four ministers spending what – how long are ministers statements? Two minutes? So it will save us 8 minutes of debate. The blistering attack of Labor's frontbench has scared the Liberal Party into retreat, and they have decided on a strategy that puts at the forefront of their political agenda stopping that blistering attack. We have got them on the run now, and they must be so glad that it is the last sitting week of Parliament if they are going to these lengths to stop these fantastic ministers.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): Order! I would ask for a reduction in volume. I have to say my right ear is hearing a bit more than it would like to hear in terms of volume, so please just lower it.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am an enthusiast for the words of the ministers of the Crown of this government, and I would like all of those ministers to have ample opportunity to say those words in the chamber. The Liberal Party clearly are too scared to hear from them. That is what this motion is about. I mean, we do accept that Minister Erdogan at the moment has a hoarse throat, but even with his reduced volume, you are running scared from him. The ministers will, we assume, as a result of the motion – we assume it is going to get support today, because if they had support for anything else, I am sure they would have moved something else. But they did not, so they cannot. So we have got this procedural wet lettuce that is being put in front of us.

It does come down to a substantive point, though, that what we are seeing from the opposition is an exercise in either, at best, cognitive dissonance in how they view and treat the public sector or breathtaking hypocrisy – one of the two. It is either cognitive dissonance or it is breathtaking hypocrisy, because on the one hand the Liberal Party criticise hardworking public servants trying to do their jobs. They say there are too many public servants. There are too many people employed in the Victorian public service, and they want to start sacking them. We know they want to start sacking them, because they have released a document that proposes $40 billion of cuts, and one of the things that is on their cuts list is the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, the VGSO. They think there are too many lawyers working for the state government, that there are too many people working in the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, and that is on the chopping block. I think they might privatise it, which probably speaks to the heart of what the Liberals are about, and that is cutting public services and privatising them.

What they do on the one hand is say, 'We want to sack those public servants,' but on the other hand they say, 'They're not doing enough work. They need to be doing more work.' On the one hand they want to sack them all and on the other hand they want to get them to do more work. You cannot have it both ways. What we have are hardworking public servants whose task it is to review the requests for the production of documents made with stunning regularity by this chamber in volumes that in some instances have gone into the millions of documents, continually moved by the opposition – vast nets cast which would receive millions of documents. They then criticise those public servants whose job it is to work through them. They criticise those public servants doing their jobs, and they want to sack them. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot make all the requests that are detailed and voluminous and then criticise the public servants whose job it is to try and go through them all, because those public servants are doing a reasonable job, and that is to make sure that there is not material in those documents that have been requested and that would get produced to this chamber that contains things like personal information, that would do things like breach confidentiality, reveal legal advice, prejudice national security, prejudice public safety or prejudice law enforcement or legal proceedings.

Maybe the Liberal Party does not care about doing any of those things. Maybe the Liberal Party does not care about revealing confidential information, prejudicing public safety, prejudicing national security or putting at risk legal proceedings that are on foot. Maybe they do not care about that at all, because that is the natural consequence of what they are saying should be occurring here, which is that troves of documents should be handed over without anyone casting their eye over them to make sure that they do not contain information that could disrupt a police investigation, for example, or reveal someone's personal information or reveal the deliberative processes of cabinet.

Dr Mansfield did make an impassioned contribution out of perhaps a sense of frustration with her perspective on the process, and I do acknowledge that. There is at the core of the argument here a fundamental tension between whether this Parliament, the government and the community think that the standing orders of the Legislative Council or the constitution of the state of Victoria has primacy in terms of a document. Quite clearly it is the contention of the executive that matters of executive privilege are to be determined by the executive, not under the standing orders of the Parliament and by the Parliament. That is a fundamental principle of the separation of powers that has existed as a bedrock feature of our democracy since it was established. That separation of powers is a cornerstone principle of democracy. What our constitution does is set out in very clear terms that it accepts the principles that existed in the House of Commons. I know Dr Mansfield does not like us talking about history, but it is incredibly important. Claims of Crown privilege and claims of executive privilege were determined by the executive. The standing orders are a product of the legislature, and they do not bind the executive. You cannot have an argument that undermines a basic tenet of our democracy and claim you are upholding our democracy; it does not work.

I have just one last thing, because Mr Galea can keep going. There are a lot of references to what goes on in New South Wales, and I have got to say that some of my good friends are from New South Wales and some of them are even members of the New South Wales Legislative Council. But not for one moment do I take their existence and their practice as being something that we should slavishly endorse in all circumstances. This motion is not really about the substance. It is just a stunt. On the last opportunity the Liberals have to do something of substance before the state election, they have chosen to do a stunt that is all about stopping our ministers from spending 8 minutes in the chamber tomorrow talking about the achievements of this government. I mean, really, could they not have come up with something better?

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:00): I rise to speak on this excellent motion by my colleague Mrs McArthur on documents motions and the way they have operated in this place. I was fortunate enough to be on a Council inquiry into this very topic where we examined all of these issues regarding documents motions. We certainly looked at the New South Wales experience regarding documents motions which seems to have worked a lot better. I agree with Dr Mansfield in

that I believe executive privilege is being claimed to the nth degree as a blocker for any sensitive information that the government wants to cover up.

Think of it this way: an individual Victorian citizen has more power through the information commissioner, VCAT and the courts to appeal a claim of executive privilege than this chamber of Parliament. I know, because I have had claims of executive privilege for certain sections of documents that have ended up being overturned through a 12-month or 1½-year process through the information commissioner. The information commissioner orders the release of the documents in full. Then what happens is that I get served a notice as a respondent to appear in VCAT because the government wants to continue to block those documents. Then I am forced to front up to VCAT while the government tries to, at a directions hearing, delay and delay and delay until I am finally successful. Sometimes we even have to go to a higher court. I know my colleague Mr Davis has dealt with this on many occasions. Individual citizens can also do that and have. They currently have more avenues for appeal on sensitive documents than the Legislative Council. I am not sure we have got the balance right there.

The approach of this government, and we have all seen it in this chamber, is to send a letter from the Attorney-General saying, 'There's quite a few documents here' or 'We need more time to process this,' and then we never hear back. They never come back to the chamber saying, 'We've had more time and we've followed up and we've found these documents.' List after list after list, as far back as 2023. Ms Crozier has a motion on staff shortages in the public health system – very topical today, as we saw from question time. It would be good to get that document from 2023. Dr Mansfield had a production of documents motion on the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project in April 2023. We have got Mr Davis on gas and electricity supplies. We even have a former member, Dr Ratnam, on the redevelopment of high-rise public housing sites. Ms Purcell is still waiting, and is going to be waiting quite a while, for the kangaroo harvest management plan. Document after document after document.

Of course we have several others. Dr Ratnam's successor, Ms Gray-Barberio, has one on the Upfield rail line study, a study that they completed in about 2017, I believe. Then they went and did another study, or another study is in progress, this year. Surely the public should be informed of what the previous study says before you go out and announce, 'Hey, look, we're being seen to do something again about the Upfield line. We're not going to release the previous study but we are funding a new study, which we are under no obligation to ever release to you, ever.' It is treating the chamber with contempt, and that is why this motion calls out the Leader of the Government, as the representative of the government, as being guilty of contempt of the Council for failing on behalf of the government to comply with resolutions of the Council.

There is just a ridiculous amount of motions for documents that have not been provided, from members from across the chamber too, including Mr Davis, Dr Mansfield and me. I had one on the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. Those documents might have uncovered that this government had been charging a secret tax on all Victorians and that they had known about it since 2024. They probably claimed privilege on that. In fact I think that is one of those ones where we got a letter from the Attorney-General saying, 'The government needs more time to consider this and couldn't possibly give it to you within the timeframe,' and that is the end of the message, and then we just never hear anything again. They just set and forget. That is treating this chamber with absolute and utter contempt.

There are documents motions from Ms Purcell on the Great Outdoors Taskforce and from Ms Gray-Barberio on early childhood education – a very important topic at that time in which the childcare sector was seeing some horrific things going on, and it made national news. Mrs McArthur had a production of documents motion on a four-bin waste and recycling system. I do not believe those documents were ever received. Mr Davis had one on corruption in the construction industry. I hope that all those documents are being sent over to the royal commission as we speak. Mrs McArthur had one on the container deposit scheme. Mr Ettershank had one on his favourite topic – not cannabis but waste-to-energy cap licences. Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell had one on Victorian roads. Ms Purcell had another one on proposed animal care and protection legislation. Mr Limbrick had one on market research for

a machete prohibition campaign. I had one on ISIS brides, which we never saw. Ms Crozier had one on pharmacy-initiated supply of the contraceptive pill. Mr Puglielli had one on rental controls. There is another one for Mr Ettershank, and I know this is his very, very favourite topic: a sustainable data centre action plan. Have we received that one? I am willing to bet that we have not received that one at all. They are countless.

I am not going to forget my friend Mr Welch, who of course is still waiting on his Box Hill brickworks site documents; they have not been received, nor have Mrs McArthur's western Victoria business bushfire recovery grant program documents. I do not think we have ever received those. I had another one on the rail improvement charge for the Suburban Rail Loop. Do you reckon the government is going to release that one? Do we think – maybe? We know the *Australian Financial Review* had some documents, because the *Australian Financial Review* revealed it had viewed a cabinet minute that noted the rail improvement charge – noted the secret tax. I will give you a bit of a peek behind the curtain. What happens with cabinet minutes like that is that the department or an adviser or a secretary will walk through the department's view on a particular cabinet minute and make them aware of it, so they were all aware of it and did not say a thing. So not only did they hold this chamber in contempt, they held each and every Victorian in contempt by applying a secret tax on public transport fares and not telling them about it. I almost forgot that Mr Bourman also had a production of documents motion on seasonal changes to the 2023 duck-hunting season – an important topic. I wonder if they will release it. I very much doubt it.

So I am supporting this motion. I am calling on all members to respect the rights and privileges of this chamber to hold the government of the day, regardless of party, to account, to support this motion and to actually stand up for accountability. The Premier says integrity is not optional. They have got an opportunity right now to show that it is not optional, because for the three and a half years that these documents motions have been in place, this government has treated integrity as very much optional.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:10): What a pleasure it is to get up and speak in support of Mrs McArthur's motion relating to the government's non-production of documents and confirm that – surprise, surprise – we will be supporting this motion, albeit the punishment to be meted out to the government is, I believe, the parliamentary equivalent of being hit with a limp lettuce leaf. But it is better than nothing.

Over the course of the Parliament, as has been said by multiple speakers, we have seen so many frustrated production of documents requests. Mr Mulholland, I thank you for your encyclopedic listing of the multiple offences against democracy and transparency. I think we have got a situation at this point in time where only Mr Limbrick has been successful in getting one out. I think that is pretty much where we are at. Isn't that in and of itself just an utter condemnation of the democratic process? This is a house of review – you know this better than me, as most of you have been here a lot longer than I have – and that is based on transparency, which apparently is now no longer optional. This is just absolutely – and I do not want to confuse people with legal terminology – flipping the bird at democracy. This is just utter disrespect for this chamber and for these processes.

As we have discussed already, we have had arguments about cabinet in confidence, which kind of reminded me of an episode of *The Hollowmen*, or it might have been *Utopia*, where he is showing school students through the Parliament and he says, 'This is the cabinet room.' And a woman walks through and she has got a big cart full of documents, and he says, 'So, tell us, what are you doing?' And she says, 'Oh, I don't think I want to.' He says, 'No, come on, tell us. The students all want to know.' And she says, 'Well, I'm wheeling it through the cabinet room so that we can claim cabinet in confidence.' There is that moment where comedy and reality meet each other, and it is far more insightful, I think, than any of us can actually say in this place, but this is what it is like. There is this sense of surrealism. On the one hand they are saying, 'Trust us. We're the government. We're doing the right thing.' Then on the other hand, we say, 'Well, perhaps you could just substantiate that and then we'd all be in our comfort zone' – and I want to come back to that theme. We have had cabinet in confidence, and we have had executive privilege. I am still not quite sure what that is, but I know it

got thrown at us in the context of the housing towers. I will come back to that one as well. And then of course we have had commercial in confidence. It is a sort of multilayered approach to obfuscation that has proven largely impenetrable.

I do not know about you, but I really, really enjoyed Ms Shing's contribution last night. I thought it was brilliant. I was so glad that I was not speaking the same night she was, because she is so articulate. I appreciate that happened because of sad circumstances, but it was so good. She talked about all the good things the government has done. I think that was probably really good advice to the Premier about not walking away from the history of the party, but I am not going to go into that space, because obviously that is a fight within Labor that I do not need to buy into. If we think back to some very memorable moments with Ms Shing – and I know we are not meant to have props here – I seem to recall that we saw that green book of the Suburban Rail Loop so many times, and I must admit she would wave it around and I would wonder, 'One slip and it's going to take out Mr Mulholland.' And she would say, 'It's $35 billion. It's $35 billion. What's wrong with people? Can you not understand it?' So we asked for the substantiation of that, didn't we? We said, 'Can we get some current cost plans, because that's premised on something that is almost seven years old.' Now what we know is that the reason they are not going to release it is because in 2020 they were advised by the Department of Treasury and Finance that in fact it was – even then, pre COVID – already $2.5 billion over budget. So you start to understand why maybe these things are best, from a government's perspective, not put into the light. Of course we did not need to see that business plan, but that SRL thing is a perfect example of obfuscation. I mean, yes, infrastructure is great, but it says a lot about priorities; it says 'opportunity cost'. And when you actually expose the truth and you know the real cost, then that argument becomes all the more compelling. I can understand why the government would not want to have that.

We also made a document request for the most basic information on housing. I know there were people that put in other documents motions and the government said there were thousands of documents. We only asked the government, in the case of either Flemington or North Melbourne, to give us the cost plan, give us the building conditions report and give us the decanting schedule – in other words, how residents would be moved out and how they would be relocated or brought back. That is very simple, with minimal photocopying; we would even accept it in electronic form, for Ms Terpstra, who seems to think we need to have it on paper – but I will come back to that. That was rejected.

What was very interesting was that the business case was rejected as being cabinet in confidence. Then we saw the inner Melbourne legal service, in litigation to protect the residents, ask for that document in the court, and the government said, 'We don't have a business case.' Putting aside the extraordinary proposition that you would be entering into multimillion-dollar transactions to demolish and rebuild housing without a business case, it made a lie of what we were told through that documents motion. I guess that, to my mind, was a pretty good indication of the lack of respect.

I would, having been invited by Mr Mulholland, just like to talk briefly about the history of *The Sustainable Data Centre Action Plan*. We asked for this informally in October of last year – a year ago – and we were told, 'Be with you in a couple of weeks.' We did not get it and asked for it of the minister in November: 'Oh, just buffing it. We'll get back to you' – nothing. We came to February and, 'Oh, it's not going to be a public document. It's only now for internal use.' That is despite the fact that it has been advertised as, 'This is so that everyone can have confidence in how the system's going to work.' Then we had the documents motion in May, and we were told that it was too big a document and that there was not time to prepare it. Then the night before last I read about it in the *Age*. It has been bloody well released, and it was not even tabled in this chamber, it was tabled to the *Age*. I think that might be instructive, because this was too big a document to be able to prepare in time: it is 17 pages.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

David ETTERSHANK: Can I say, Mr McIntosh, it is a very generous layout, with plenty of white space. I think the point was made that it may not have been so small had the government not contracted out the editing task to Belinda Dennett and the Data Centres Australia organisation – putting that aside. I mean, can you get much more bankrupt politically when that is the sort of thing we are dealing with?

I can still remember Ms Terpstra vividly telling this chamber – she was the only person to respond to that documents motion – 'You should be using recycled bong water to cool the data centres.' It caused enormous entertainment amongst my members. But I mean, seriously, talk about – I will not use the expression that is coming to my mind. But it is pretty poor. We have reached that point in the democratic cycle where you cannot just say, 'Trust me,' because that has evaporated. You need to put up the documents. And here we are, with a day and a half left in school and a huge number of unmet requests for the provision of documents. I just have to say it is really, really disappointing that this is what it has come to. And with that, I will leave it.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:21): Well, it is indeed the last sitting week of the year, and I am delighted to be in a position where I am rising to make a contribution on a motion that has been put forward by Mrs McArthur once again. Ridiculous motion though it is, I am still pleased to speak on it. Reflecting back, I do believe that in the first full week of this parliamentary term I responded to one of your motions, and I believe in that motion you invited me to the races. It is an invitation that I am yet to take up, but I look forward to doing so sometime once we get a bit busier, perhaps after the end of November.

This motion does go to a fair few important topics, but they are topics that, as Dr Mansfield mentioned, we have discussed, frankly, ad nauseam in this chamber. We can trace its origin all the way back to the inclusion of short-form documents motions in our parliamentary debate earlier in the term. This as-usual shambolic flourish of Mr Davis led to a deeply dysfunctional model, using the chamber's time. He did not do as we recommended – take it to the Procedure Committee first so it could actually be a functional and effective part of the way we do things – instead ramming these short-form documents motions in despite our recommendation to do it in a proper and considered way. And what did that do? It led to various issues. The third debate slot was being cut off on an almost weekly basis. Then he tried to fix it, and that had another error, and then he tried to fix it again. The conclusion of this debate will make a grand, whopping total of 6 hours that the Liberals have spent on these types of things, fixing up their own issues and, frankly, wasting their time on pathetic stunts – like, seriously, 8 minutes less of ministers statements on a single parliamentary sitting day – wow. It is, frankly, a joke that they seek to use what precious time we all have in this place to debate such things and propose such a ludicrous sanction.

There are a few things to go through here. Indeed, at a previous time when we had to discuss these sessional and standing orders, the government put forward very sensible reforms and variations to those standing orders. We have seen in some cases short-form requests for documents that have been anything but short and have seen in some cases thousands or tens of thousands – and in at least one case more than a million – documents subject to those requests. We have got that variation in now, but surprisingly we have not seen it actually used once by the Liberal Party. We have not seen any sort of engagement from them on getting the documents, because as Mr Batchelor said, it is not about getting documents for them. I agree that for some of the crossbenchers it may well be, but for the Liberal Party, who have put these things in place, we have a system in place, and they do not even use that system for the variations. All they want to do is come in here and complain and complain and complain.

It is all the more staggering and all the more belies what they are saying that these documents have to go through a process that is appropriate and proper – and I will come back to executive privilege in a moment – and that is done through the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (VGSO), which is one of the many dozens of agencies that the Victorian Liberal Party have explicitly said they will cut back if they are elected to government. I believe there were, in the last term that the Liberals were in government, around six documents motions, of which they could not even acquit more than three. We

now have two every single sitting week, and the Liberal Party are going into the election saying they are going to cut from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office. That shows that they have no intention of honouring what they are saying if they are elected. They would actually be cutting back on the resources that could provide any of this work. So when they come in and scream about this, we know that they are hollow words. If they are going to cut from the very body whose job it is to process these requests, we know that their words are worth two-fifths of bugger-all. That is exactly what we would get from the Liberal Party and that is exactly what would happen if they were in a position of power or even in a One Nation coalition come the end of the year, because that is what they have said they would cut from. You do not get to cut from the agency whose job it is to actually process these claims and say that you would do it better, because the actions that you have proposed – no doubt to fill the $40 billion black hole in your estimates – would mean seeing even less of these claims processed. Never mind the number of documents, never mind anything of the millions or thousands, you would not be able to process any if you were to cut back essential work from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office.

Executive privilege has been discussed. Again, this does feel rather like deja vu. As I have spoken about extensively before in this place and indeed as is very well articulated and put out in the report that Mr Mulholland referred to and the minority report of government members on the select committee into the Commonwealth Games, there is a very, very clear constitutional basis for the exercise of executive privilege in the state of Victoria. The constitution outlines that the powers to determine any sort of privilege are based on those of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom as they were on 21 July 1855. In those privileges in the House of Commons at that time it is very explicitly clear that – they then referred to it as Crown privilege and not executive privilege – Crown privilege is to be determined by the Crown. That is, executive privilege is to be determined by the executive. That is the constitutional position. Any parliament, any chamber, can come and set its own standing orders. We had a debate just a couple of weeks ago about the new standing and sessional orders for the next term. That is our role, but it is not our right just to simply vote to avoid the constitution, not without going through a proper change to the constitution itself. We are not free as parliamentarians to simply disregard the constitution because it is not convenient or it does not suit our argument on any given day. It is entirely disingenuous to say that any sort of standing order that this house chooses to apply from time to time should override that most fundamental, basic document, which sets out governance and democracy in this state.

Dr Mansfield raised the New South Wales equivalent as well. We have had this argument raised. I am not sure where he is today, but Mr Davis has several times talked about the *Egan v Chadwick* and the *Egan v Willis* cases in New South Wales, saying that the decisions of the Supreme Court of New South Wales should therefore have a direct impact on Victoria, never mind – and I appreciate the comments of Mr Batchelor noting this – that we are our own state and we should not necessarily blindly follow what happens in another jurisdiction. More so than that, it is actually explicitly different, because the constitutional basis under which *Egan v Chadwick* was applied in New South Wales is completely different. We do have the authoritative text of the constitution of this state, which has been written by Mr Greg Taylor. It is a document that is available to members in this place. I have got a copy in my office. It is something I consult from time to time. This is not my copy, but it is a very well worn, used one, and it outlines this specifically and in detail. On page 277 Mr Taylor, the acknowledged expert on constitutional law in Victoria, says:

> In *Egan v Chadwick* the Supreme Court of New South Wales held that public interest immunity would permit the non-production of Cabinet documents, but this was under the law of privilege applicable in New South Wales, which is materially different –

materially different –

> from that applicable in Victoria as the Parliament of New South Wales does not have the powers of the House of Commons as at 1855 (or any other date).

The widely acknowledged expert on our state's constitution has explicitly said in the definitive work on our constitution that the New South Wales equivalent is not a relevant principle in Victoria because the fundamental basis of the New South Wales constitution does not rely on the same thing that the Victorian one does. To dismiss that and say 'Oh, well, that should apply to Victoria too' just shows the intellectual vacuity of those opposite. Indeed when they are going to cut from that very important body, from the VGSO, we know that they have no intention of honouring documents requests if they are elected.

Whilst I have got a far better source today, this is nothing that we have not discussed before. As Dr Mansfield said and as I said earlier in my contribution today, we have had this discussion many, many times. In fact it is in the minority report that Mr McIntosh, Ms Ermacora and I put forward 18 months ago on the Commonwealth Games inquiry. It is a very good report, and I certainly commend it to members, including the sections on executive privilege. Flicking through it before I saw discussion – again, more Liberal lies and propaganda and rubbish – saying that Victoria's international reputation as a major events host had been irreparably damaged. We noted in this minority report that Victoria had, since that time, acquired the NFL rights, and indeed we saw just a few weeks ago what a profound thing that is. The Liberal Party could not even simply speak in favour of that.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:31): I rise to support this motion. It has been a very, very interesting debate. There have been a few speakers talk about how they can wriggle their way out of this accountability, but not many have spoken about why it is that a Parliament can demand documents. The reason that they can is because it is a fundamental constitutional principle of executive accountability about making sure that the government is accountable to the people and that the Parliament actually represents the people. When you are failing to give the honest truth to parliamentarians and the Parliament in here, by extension you are failing the people of Victoria that put us here. This is an extremely important principle. Under the Westminster system of democracy – and I notice Mr Galea did not mention this at all – the government does not rule with absolute power. That is why we have the right to request these documents, because the government answers directly to the Parliament, which represents the people. In other words, when the government fails the Parliament, the government fails the people. That is as simple as it is. But the Andrews, Allan and now Carroll Labor governments have slowly chipped away at the bedrock of our democracy. They have slowly chipped away at that. They are slowly undermining the values that underpin our democracy, and one of those is accountability and another one is transparency.

You can make light of it all you want, you really can, but these values of democracy are values that people all over the world die for. If you come in here and you think you can just cover up things, I am telling you that is an absolute contempt of not only the people of Victoria but democracies in general.

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, sorry, it is an outrageous assertion to say that by following the laws of this state we are undermining democracy. I ask Dr Heath to reconsider that before she continues her contribution.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): It is not a point of order, but I will take that as a comment, thank you, Mr Galea.

Renee HEATH: The government is funded by public money, and the laws that we create in this place affect everyone in the Victorian population – everyone. This Parliament has an inherent right, not only a right but also a responsibility, to request those documents, because do you know what, that is where scrutiny happens. That is where we get to scrutinise how money is spent and how people are treated. This is because truth actually matters and transparency matters. In Westminster systems, like these are based off, a government usually controls the lower house, like they do here. The government has an absolute majority in the lower house. That is why every single private members bill that goes in gets treated with complete contempt and just gets chucked out, because this government has the numbers and does not even have to consider what the Parliament brings to it. That is the reality. But

in the upper house – in the Senate or the Legislative Council – things are generally a little bit different. You do not have the absolute power, so therefore what happens is – and it is by design; it is an important check and balance which keeps Western democracies and civilisations accountable and safe – it is the Parliament that is requesting those documents. To undermine that is quite frankly extremely dangerous.

Under this government we have seen secret taxes. We have seen issues referred to inquiries. I was on one, the housing inquiry. The question was whether we should demolish 44 housing towers. In order to get to the bottom of this and get to the answer this house – not the opposition, because it is not the opposition that can request documents, because we do not have the numbers; it is the whole chamber – requested 158 documents. Do you know how many this government gave? Twelve documents. It was eye-opening for me. I sat there as we spent thousands and thousands and thousands of taxpayer dollars to try to get to the bottom of why we were demolishing thousands and thousands of Victorian homes. Do you know what we got? 'Sorry, that's under executive privilege.' 'Sorry, we can't answer that question.' I tell you what, it is not democracies that operate in secrecy, dictatorships do. There are other abusive forms of governments that do. They operate in secrecy. I am not saying you are that, but I am saying you are flirting very closely with the line on a lot of these principles.

It is not the opposition that can just go and say, 'We want these documents.' We have to convince the house. It has to be the crossbench, and it has to be the opposition. There are some very important reasons as to why this happens, why this is allowed and why this is encouraged. The first is to check against an abuse of power. That is an underlying principle of democracies. The fact that this Premier was one of the people that just slipped in a secret tax that nobody knew about on public transport – never told the Victorian people that they were being taxed – I believe is an abuse of power. I really do. Another reason is to challenge policy claims. There are different ways you can get information. One is requesting documents in here; we have all seen how well that goes. Another one is inquiries. We all saw how well that went with the housing inquiry. Another is freedom-of-information requests. Years ago, when I heard that violent and high-risk offenders were getting over a year off their sentences because they were inconvenienced during COVID, I requested some freedom-of-information documents. This is why we need the truth, not just to take the word of people, because the Minister for Corrections at the time said in this letter, dated 16 October 2024, in relation to emergency management days:

> Pandemic related rules for the application of EMD's ended in … 2023. EMDs are now being used very rarely …

I thought, 'Well, that's good. They ended in 2023.' However, when I finally, after 18 months of fighting, got the freedom-of-information request approved and got the document, that was completely false. He could have made a mistake and got it wrong. If he did, he made the mistake 17,579 times, because that is how many were granted since that date that we know of. I said, 'You said they stopped in 2023.' That is what we were hearing. This is on official government letterhead. It is literally the response to the petition. It is literally there. Yet guess what, the documents, when I received them, told a completely different story. We went back again. After the latest lot of documents I thought maybe it was a mistake. Did they finish doing it in 2023 and, oops, slipped up over 17,000 times? That would raise some questions there, but regardless – so I kept asking about it. Then I got this other one, which took me over 18 months to get. The last lot of documents showed in the last 16-month period, for that reason that they said ended in 2023, there were 512 days.

We need to know the truth, because that is an underpinning of democracy. Another reason that we need these documents, which is a bedrock of the foundation of accountability and transparency, is to form a functional alternate government. One thing we are worried about is we keep finding more and more debt, we keep finding more and more alleged corruption, we keep finding out about more and more taxes. When we come to government, it is going to be worrying what we find. There has to be some honesty that comes back into Spring Street, if you ask me. The first thing that you can do is at least honour the standing orders and produce documents when you are given orders.

Mr Batchelor, unbelievably, gave us a sort of a sermon about what we think and what we feel. I am not too interested in that. What I am interested in is facts. What I am interested in is how much debt people are in, why their houses are being demolished and what information the government has that it is hiding. To close, when a government becomes so arrogant that they believe they are above the rules, they are not just withholding information from us and the Parliament and they are not just failing the Parliament, they are failing the Victorian people.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:41): I am going to keep this brief and straight to the point. This Parliament makes the laws of the state, and the Parliament itself has its own rules in the standing orders. I think that if we are going to be making the rules of the state, then we should at least follow our own standing orders. Unfortunately, the government is simply ignoring the standing orders of the Parliament in relation to the production of documents.

The government has a right to claim executive privilege, and I do not dispute that. The government has a right to claim executive privilege, and as has been pointed out by the government, this is a longstanding tradition imported from the UK. But this house has rules for dealing with that claim of executive privilege if it is to be disputed. What is meant to happen is that if the government claims executive privilege on documents, they are meant to be given in confidence to the mover of the documents motion, and then that person who moved the motion has the ability to challenge the government's claim of executive privilege. If that challenge is to go ahead, then the Parliament can appoint an arbiter, and that arbiter will decide whether or not the claim of executive privilege is valid or not. That is how it is meant to work. I have been here almost eight years now, and I have never once seen an arbiter appointed despite many claims of executive privilege. It is not because this mechanism does not work. If we look at the New South Wales Parliament, we know they routinely have this sort of thing happen, and they appoint an arbiter and they go through this challenge process in the New South Wales Parliament. But we do not do that here: the government simply say, 'We claim executive privilege,' and then the whole process dies. This is not how our Parliament is meant to work. This is not how the standing orders are meant to work.

I have been concerned for some time that there are no consequences for the government when they do this. What the motion today is doing is providing some consequence. Personally, I think that the consequence is a very mild little tap on the wrist, but nevertheless what this motion is really saying is that when the government chooses to ignore the standing orders of Parliament, Parliament is saying that this is wrong and there is a consequence for that. I think that that is important, and that is why I am supporting this motion.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:44): I am going to have to be brief, because I only have about 5 minutes on the clock. I want to quickly address some points. I rise to speak on this motion in regard to documents. The thing I want to point out is that we have reprised this debate before in this Parliament; the only difference with this motion is there is a consequence for the Leader of the Government. The chamber would do well to remember that when we debated this matter before it was agreed by the chamber that the Procedure Committee would review the process around documents motions. The Procedure Committee met; members of the Procedure Committee include Dr Mansfield and Mr Mulholland. In any event, the committee unanimously agreed to adopt a process, and the process was that if a documents motion was made in this chamber and the government said, 'Look, there's heaps of documents,' there could be an interactive process between the government and that member to try and narrow down the scope of the documents motion so they could actually get the documents that they were after.

I am advised that nobody on the opposition benches has actually made use of that new process – nobody. I believe there might have been one attempt to access that process, perhaps by a crossbencher, but that was abandoned. For all the work and the inquiry that the Procedures Committee did in regard to this matter, nobody has used it. So it is quite a trite thing to hear those opposite then criticise and attack this government about how we are not allowing documents motions. Again, it is not us that sit

there and view documents, it is the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, which we know those opposite have said they will cut.

So again, it is quite hypocritical to hear those opposite continue to condemn the government. We acted in good faith. We had a Procedures Committee meeting, we heard from representatives of the New South Wales government and their clerks about how they deal with documents motions and we arrived at an agreed process that – again, I will reiterate – nobody has used. It really is disappointing that those opposite want to criticise the government. Make use of that process, and if the process does not work, then by all means bring it back to the house and let us have a debate around that. I am not sure what the Procedures Committee was bothering to meet for and unanimously agree upon if the process was not going to be used.

The government will oppose this motion, because the thing about suspending Minister Symes for the remainder of the sitting day and then referring her to the Privileges Committee is really just an eleventh-hour political stunt and a waste of this chamber's time. I put it back onto the chamber and those in this chamber, particularly those, like I said, who were on that committee. Dr Mansfield was on that committee and so was Mr Mulholland. It was a unanimous approach that was taken to arrive at a process where people could say, 'All right. Well, you've got a million documents in scope. Do you really want a million documents?' and 'No, I don't. I'm actually particularly after these documents.' So it is very disappointing that nobody has used this.

I will just reiterate the points that Mr Galea made around Westminster tradition. Those opposite do not want to acknowledge that. It would be very interesting to see what their response would be if they were ever to win government. I am sure it would automatically reverse straightaway. But again, this is just a pathetic attack on the government for no good purpose. We went in good faith, had a conversation and those opposite agreed, as did the crossbench, about a process. Why has it not been used? That would be my point to those in this chamber. If you have used the process and it has not delivered to you what you were after, sure, then criticise that process. So that is why –

Richard Welch interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: No, but there was an iterative process where you all agreed to this. It is something that the Procedures Committee then tabled in this house. Again, criticise the process if you have used it and it has not worked, but you have not used it. There has been no attempt to use that process. That is why this shows that this is nothing more than a stunt, and again, it is just disappointing.

I have got 44 seconds on the clock. Again, I will just reiterate that the government will be opposing this motion, because it is simply a pathetic stunt. Like I said, use the process that everyone agreed to. Do not come in here and say we are not doing anything and we are hiding stuff, because it is simply untrue, particularly when we have delivered a process that none of you have used. With that, I will conclude my remarks.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:49): I am sure everybody should absolutely be supporting this motion, because if you believe that transparency in government and accountability in government are important, then clearly you should provide the information that this Parliament, this chamber, has asked for on numerous occasions. I thank Dr Mansfield, Mr Batchelor, Mr Mulholland, Mr Ettershank, Mr Galea, Dr Heath, Mr Limbrick and Ms Terpstra for their contributions. I am struck by one thing that Mr Batchelor said when he referred to how we now treat the public sector. I say to Mr Batchelor: your treatment of the public of Victoria, the people of Victoria, is absolutely contemptuous.

You have no regard for the democratic process, you have no regard for proper due process, and not only have you treated this chamber with contempt, but in doing so you have treated the people of Victoria with contempt. You come up with ridiculous excuses every time: cabinet in confidence, commercial in confidence, too much information required, not enough time – every excuse under the sun to obfuscate and to not assist the process of this chamber. When documents motions are properly

asked for, properly dealt with, properly debated, you fail to deliver them. It is a bit like the COVID Coate inquiry, in which we constantly heard in the evidence from the government, 'I do not recall' or 'I don't do emails.' This is the same thing. We have heard the story about how we have not engaged in the process; well, until you tell us you are not going to give us a document, we cannot engage in the process. It takes forever to find out that you are not even going to deliver a document, and there are so many documents that you have not delivered. The Liberal–National parties had 28; the AJP, the Animal Justice Party, six; the Greens, six; Legalise Cannabis Victoria, six; the Libertarian Party, four; and One Nation, one. It is extraordinary that on no occasion are you prepared to deliver the documents that are properly called for. One particular document that I called for was the John Merritt review of infrastructure worksites. It is a hidden document that goes completely to the proposition that $15 billion has gone down the gurgler here in Victoria, courtesy of the CFMEU corruption. But that is an important document, and you cannot even deliver it.

The mind boggles at the fact that this government can treat everybody with such disdain. It beggars belief that you think you can get away with this and that the people of Victoria will not hold you accountable. Well, I am very confident that they will hold you accountable on 28 November, because they have had enough of the lack of truth and honesty in this government, the lack of proper process, the waste, the corruption and the totally inappropriate way you deal with how you deliver government. We have legislation coming into this house where we are asked to pass it when most of the detail of the legislation comes forth in regulation at some later stage, which is often found to be totally egregious and not anything that anybody could have agreed to in the chamber when the debate on a bill was occurring. In the committee stages of dealing with bills in this house, the inability of ministers to answer questions in detail about the legislation is next level, but the production of documents is the most important issue that we can deal with – other than going to the Supreme Court or VCAT to get them, and that takes, as Dr Heath and Mr Mullholland have said, months, if not years. So the sanction is against the Leader of the House to be referred to the Privileges Committee, and the sanction is against the ministers who are not going to be able to deliver their statements for tomorrow. Yes, it may be insufficient, but it does send a message –

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Your time has expired.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

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.

Motions

Sex work regulation

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:01): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) a child cannot consent to commercial sexual exploitation;

(b) the Crimes Act 1958 describes a child as a 'provider' or 'client' of commercial sexual services;

(c) Victoria no longer has a clear rule that a child must not be present where those services are taking place;

(2) calls on the government to amend legislation so that:

(a) a child is described as a victim of commercial sexual exploitation, not as a participant in the sex industry;

(b) any purported consent or willingness of the child is irrelevant; and

(c) it is an offence to conduct in-person commercial sexual services where a child is present, including in a private home.

It is with pleasure that I rise to move this motion in the house about the most basic of child safeguards. I want to begin with a simple question, one that every member in this chamber can answer without having to ask an adviser and without having to wait for a review: should a child be allowed to be at a premises while strangers are coming through the door to pay for sex? Not in the room, just on the premises – in the next bedroom, in the kitchen, in the hallway – all as clients walk in and out. Every parent in Victoria knows that the answer to that question, without hesitation, is no. Most of them would be horrified to learn that Victoria's laws do not agree with them, and that is why I have brought this motion.

In my very first speech to Parliament I called on the government to make sure that no child could be taken inside a brothel of any kind in Victoria, and today I am asking the house to back me on that call. The request is very simple: in-person commercial sexual services should never take place while a child is present on the premises, including when that premises is a private home. We all know that Victorians vote for MPs to represent them and their interests in Parliament.

Members interjecting.

Moira DEEMING: Excuse me, Acting President, I cannot hear myself. Could you please ask for a bit of quiet?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Could I ask members in the chamber to keep their conversations down, please. If you are having them, could you have them outside.

Moira DEEMING: We know that Victorians ask us to write laws that protect them and, above all, protect those who cannot protect themselves. Most parents and grandparents that I have spoken to – everywhere, not just in Western Metro – do not vote just on self-interest. They vote for the future version of Victoria that their children and grandchildren will inherit. The trust that voters give to us is the whole point of democracy. We know that childhood is not just the waiting room before you grow up into adulthood. There is a clear boundary. Being a child is different to being an adult. A child depends on adults to draw boundaries that they cannot, to recognise dangers that they cannot and to carry responsibilities that they just cannot. That is what adults are for. That is our whole entire job.

Most people in this chamber are parents, as I understand it, so most of us know what it is like. Even if you are not a parent, I think we all understand that as a parent we sacrifice everything for our children. We do not mind changing our shifts and cancelling plans and losing sleep and bearing any cost at all for our children. And in Parliament that is what many strive to do for their constituents – for other families, for other children and for other parents. Most parents would crawl over broken glass or run into a burning building for their kids. Asking adults not to run a paid sex booking while a child is on the premises is not actually a big ask. It is not a big sacrifice; it is the bare minimum in fact.

A child cannot consent to sex. A child cannot consent to commercial sexual exploitation. A child cannot be a sex worker. A child cannot be the client of a sex worker. A child cannot be a party to a commercial sexual agreement. Our Crimes Act 1958 describes a child taking part in commercial sexual services as:

… the person providing the services, as the client …

Provider, client – that is the language of a voluntary transaction. It places the child inside the deal instead of just naming what the adult has done to that child. A child in that situation is never providing a service. A child in that situation is never a participant. That child is being exploited, that child is being raped, that child is being pimped out, and only people of the lowest character on earth would make excuses for that. Only institutions of the very worst kind would make excuses for them. I am only asking that, out of respect for the victims of child rape and being pimped out and being exploited for commercial sexual purposes, that is what the law should say. Those are the words the law should use, not 'client', not 'participant'.

The law should make clear that no money in a child's hand, no request and no purported willingness or agreement can ever turn exploitation into a commercial transaction. Payments cannot purchase away a child's protection, even if they purchased away and stole that child's childhood. This leads me to the gap in the law as it stands. Victorian law does accept in principle that children and commercial home-based brothels should be kept apart. It is already an offence for someone running or managing a commercial brothel to allow children above 18 months of age to enter or remain on the premises. But what line does that really draw? It does not protect a baby aged 18 months or younger – the type of child whose age means they are least able to leave, to defend themselves, to speak or to ever tell anybody what happened. But that does not mean that there is no trauma, and it does not apply at all to a child of any age in home-based brothels. The most defenceless children in Victoria are left completely unprotected, especially in the one place where every child should be the safest, their own home. That is the one place that this law does not even try to reach.

Victoria's planning rules highlight just how dangerous this is. They allow sex work to be run from home while children are there. The home owner can be a prostitute and run a business, and they can hire up to two other prostitutes who do not live there but can work out of that home as prostitutes. You can get three or more if you want to get a permit, but there is no express cap on the number of prostitutes if they also live there. It just sounds like a commercial brothel, but in a home. Picture it. Just say you have got five sex workers, several rooms in an average house, a steady succession of paying clients coming and going, and down the hall, perhaps sharing the use of a bathroom or a toilet with these clients, is a child, maybe more than one. It gets worse. The regulations do not even stop a sex offender from working as a prostitute in the homes where those children live. The offender does not have to tell the owner of the home that they are a sex offender. Did you hear that? They do not have to tell the owner of the home, who is running a home-based brothel, that they are a sex offender. They do have to tell the police what work they are doing, but when they use multiple locations like hotels, clients' homes or home-based brothels with children inside, they do not have to provide the address that they are working from, only the suburb – no specifics. I mean, that is a catastrophic failure of safeguarding. But let us compare that sex worker's home to a shopfront with the same sex workers, even the same sex offender providing the same service. When that same operation is running from a shopfront, a child over 18 months cannot lawfully be there. But if you run it from a home, suddenly the law says it is okay, that you can have a child in the next room over the age of 18 months, or under – it does not matter, it is a free for all. All I am asking for is a rule that says a child cannot be there while sex work is actually being provided.

I have left all of the other controversial issues out. This is such an easy, easy thing to support. It is a massive child safeguarding gap, and this government left it there. Those who voted for the 2022 reforms left it there. But today this chamber can do the right thing and commit, no matter who gets into government, to closing that gap. People have tried to argue that I am being hysterical. Why does this matter so much? It is because if you know about child predators, you know that really the two things they need most are some kind of access or relationship or scenario where they can get access to a child and a place – a place in which to do what they want to that child. Ironically, the government themselves have produced material which affirms this, and I will go into that more near the end of my contribution. They themselves have provided sensible, simple steps to avoid increasing the dangers to children. But this motion does exactly what the government's own guide tells practitioners to do.

I have also heard from people with long experience in and around this industry some things that should chill every member of this chamber. They have told me – not that we needed to be told, because it is just logical – that paedophiles deliberately seek out female sex workers who have children, not for access to the woman, obviously, but for access to her children, so that they can groom those children, so that they can rape those children, so that they can coerce those children into sex work or into what can only be called, rightly, rape. Think about what home-based bookings give a man like that – or a woman like that. I honestly do not care – if you are a paedophile, I do not want you near children. Home-based sex work without any safeguards regarding children being on the premises provides child predators with a legitimate reason to be at the address; a reason to come back; and a chance to see the child, learn the child's name, learn the routine, learn when the mum is busy and think about who is there to stop them.

A commercial brothel will often have CCTV, a panic button, a receptionist, security, other staff that are there not for providing sexual services but to look after the people and the women doing it. But a woman working from her own home very frequently has none of those safeguards for herself or her children. If a client turns violent towards her or towards her child, she is not in a position to do anything about it in time to stop the harm from happening – at least to her child. We also know that calling an industry 'adult only' is not any kind of safeguard at all. If you need a case study, recently in *DPP v Li* it was found that a vulnerable 16-year-old girl in state care worked in a licensed Melbourne brothel. The court found that the manager had turned a blind eye to signs that she was a child. I am shocked. So if a licensed, regulated brothel could fail a child that badly, what protection is there behind a suburban front door, where no effective rules apply at all to block a child from being there?

There is more. Registered sex offenders report their employment and their contact with children to police, but there is no general duty requiring someone working in the sex industry to disclose their sex offender status to co-workers, to clients or to the other adults in a home-based brothel simply because children live there. You do not need a review to know that that is a terrible, terrible idea. My colleague Mr Limbrick recently brought forward an amendment to a bill so that registered sex offenders would not be permitted to take part in sex industry work. More than half of the people in this chamber voted against Mr Limbrick's amendment. If this Parliament is not going to keep sex offenders out of the sex industry, the very least that it should do is keep children out while that sex work is happening. To leave it as it is now is a disgrace. You do not need a review. You do not need a briefing. You do not need to ask anyone. You do not need to do a poll. You need to do your job and protect children.

Let me be clear about who this motion is not aimed at. It is not aimed at the mothers, it is aimed at you people, very clearly. From my time as a councillor and from conversations with community groups and survivors, I know that some mothers have had children on site while doing sex work. It is something that they do not want to do, but it does happen. Council officers told us in our capacity as council how incredibly difficult it would be to identify situations like this and investigate them under the new laws that allowed children inside home-based brothels. The point is not to condemn the women. The point is to protect their children and to give those women a clear line that supports them, rather than leaving them to carry the whole burden of safeguarding alone, to have to make a judgement, to have to negotiate maybe with a hostile client, who knows. If we draw the boundary for her, it is going to be easier for her to protect her children. We all know that is very difficult for these women. They often face financial pressure, insecure housing and violence, and I know that mothers in this industry do not even want their children exposed to it most of the time.

Linda Watson spent 18 years as a sex worker and brothel madam and then more than 20 years running Linda's House of Hope for women who wanted to leave the industry. She has given me permission to quote her:

> No madam I have known has ever wanted their daughters to do what their mothers did.

We need to stand with those mothers. We need to stand for child safeguards, because the obligation does not belong to children, as I have said many, many times in this chamber; it belongs to the adults,

every single one of them – the person running it, the person managing it, the person paying for it and the people who make the laws regulating it. The Parliament that allows a gap in the law is the Parliament that carries the responsibility, full stop. There is no good reason for children to be inside brothels or on premises where sex work is taking place. I am going to say that again to make sure you heard me: there is no good reason at all – not one – for children to be inside a brothel, let alone when that brothel is operating and sex work is happening. Not breastfeeding, not a lack of babysitters and not any kind of assurance that they are in another room or being babysat in another room in some creche. They are not good enough reasons. We all know this.

Child care is expensive and shift work is hard and babies need their mothers. These pressures are real. But we have other options, don't we? Nobody has the right to choose to leave children inside brothels rather than a better option for those children and for those mothers struggling. Nobody here has the right to negate child safeguards in this way. Obviously the answer is support, different timing or a different location. Adult work must be arranged around the child for the benefit of the child, not the child around the work. The government already accepts this. In his recent answer to my question on notice the current Premier Ben Carroll, who was at the time Minister for Education, said:

> The Sex Industry, (and therefore Sex Work) is specifically listed as a prohibited industry across the department's Work Based Learning policies, expressly prohibiting the promotion of work in the industry.

If this industry is too hazardous for a school to even promote to students on career days – because that is what I asked him: if he would come along to a school with me now that sex work is work and promote it on careers day to the students. I was delighted to find that that cannot even happen; that that is not even allowed to happen. I have respect for that, so well done for that. Of course the question is: if it is too hazardous to promote to children at school, then why is it not too hazardous to protect children from people who actually live in the home and who are just up the hallway while it is actually happening? It is not some radical conservative outrage or pearl-clutching reform that I am asking for, it is basic common sense and child safeguards.

Guess what, Tasmania already does it. Under Tasmania's Sex Industry Offences Act 2005, a self-employed sex worker must not without reasonable excuse – there is not one – permit a child or anyone under 18 to be on any premises used while sexual services are being provided. Clients carry a parallel obligation. Victoria does not need Tasmania's whole model or a review or any other time apart from today – we can commit today. We just need that one sensible rule: no children on any and all premises while sex work services are happening, and the responsibility is on the adults. I know what we will hear in response. First we will be told that there are already provisions and protections. I will read this in my closing.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:21): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mrs Deeming's name in regard to exploitation of children. Every child in Victoria deserves to be safe from sexual abuse, exploitation and coercion, and no child can consent to commercial sexual exploitation. On those fundamental principles there should be no disagreement in this house, but protecting children requires more than strong language in a political motion. It requires clear offences, serious penalties, effective enforcement and proper support for victim-survivors. Victoria already has all of those things.

This motion proceeds from a false premise that decriminalising consensual sex work between adults therefore somehow weakens protection for children. It does not and did not. Conduct involving the commercial sexual exploitation of a child remains a serious crime in Victoria. The Carroll Labor government will not tolerate false claims about the law to be dressed up as a concern for child safety. Children must be protected from commercial sexual exploitation. Every member of this chamber, I am sure, agrees on that, but the motion by Mrs Deeming is constructed entirely to mislead and to cause unnecessary worry in the Victorian community, and for that Mrs Deeming should strongly reflect on her own internal motivations for doing so. How can that be when her first action under her new brand of Family First is to mislead Victorian families about what the law actually does and says?

The motion identifies no failed Victorian prosecutions caused by the wording it attacks. It identifies no judicial decision finding that a child's consent excuses commercial exploitation. It identifies no case in which an offender escaped liability because a child was described by a technical term. It identifies no recommendation from Victoria Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions, child protection, the Victorian Law Reform Commission or victim-survivor organisations – none. It identifies no evidence that a blanket residential offence would make children safer. It offers assertion in place of evidence. If there is an allegation to be made, Mrs Deeming should direct it to the appropriate authorities, such as Victoria Police. Child protection legislation should be informed by police, prosecutors, experts and victim-survivors. It should not be designed around whichever produces the most provocative social media posts.

Labor's record on decriminalising sex work is very clear. The Labor government are proud of the work we have done to decriminalise sex work between consenting adults, and sex workers also deserve to be safe at work. They deserve to be able to report violence, seek support and exercise their rights without fearing that they themselves will be punished. Decriminalisation recognises that sex workers are people with agency, rights and lives beyond their work. Decriminalisation recognises that sex work is legitimate work and is regulated through standard business laws like all other industries in Victoria. It recognises the basic reality that driving an industry underground makes it harder for workers to speak up when something goes wrong. It also makes it harder for authorities to step in when they need to.

Destigmatising the sex work industry and reducing discrimination is essential for protecting people, and entrenched negative perceptions of the sex work industry, like those held by some in this chamber, impact sex workers' mental health, reinforce attitudes that drive violence against sex workers and only increase risk for those people that are working in those sectors. It is now regulated, just like any other industry, by agencies such as WorkSafe Victoria and the Department of Health. This ensures every worker in the industry is entitled to the same treatment and protections under the law, with rights that call out discrimination and unsafe work practices. It was this Labor government who listened to sex workers, health experts, community organisations and local government and acted following an independent review and extensive consultation.

Decriminalisation applies to consensual sex work between adults. Criminal laws protecting children and prohibiting coercion, trafficking, violence and exploitation remain firmly in place. Labor did not accept the false choice between respecting sex workers and protecting vulnerable people, and a fair system can and must do both. This reform reflects fundamental Labor values: safety at work, equality before the law, freedom from discrimination and stigma, and dignity for every worker. The government will be opposing this motion.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:26): I rise to speak to the motion moved by Mrs Deeming and inform the chamber that the Liberals and Nationals will not be opposing this motion.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (16:27): I too rise to speak to the motion moved by Mrs Deeming. I want to start by stating the obvious, as Ms Terpstra has also done. Children cannot consent to commercial sexual exploitation. Children must be protected from sexual exploitation, from coercion and of course from sexual abuse. There should be no ambiguity about that. That is why I have been so proud to support child safety reforms brought to this Parliament and have even been the first MP to champion some of them myself alongside survivors and advocates, including by calling for reforms to the working with children check before a crisis actually forced us to act and listen to those recommendations that were written by survivors. But I will be opposing this motion because it is misleading and it is stigmatising. Some of the language used in this motion risks conflating two very different things: protecting children from exploitation and regulating where an adult sex worker can work. These are not the same issues, and it is dangerous to suggest otherwise.

A few years ago Victoria made the historic decision to decriminalise sex work. It was meaningful to so many people in this state, more people than this chamber will ever know, including me. Someone you know and someone you love has probably engaged in sex work. It is the stigma and the

discrimination that exists behind it that makes it difficult for people to share that experience. As someone who has worked in a form of sex work, although not one that was criminalised, I know the stigma, I know that discrimination and I know the harmful attitudes expressed to workers across the industry. I know because I have experienced it myself, and I know because I continue to experience it. That reform that was so historic did so many things. It made sex workers safer, it reduced stigma, it reduced the fear of criminal repercussions and it improved sex workers' access to health and justice services so they are just like every other worker in this state.

That reform did not decriminalise sexual exploitation of children or remove offences or protections relating to children. It was actually pretty simple: when Victoria's sex work laws were reformed, offences relating to children and coercion were specifically re-enacted in other legislation so that they would continue to operate after the Sex Work Act 1994, which made sex work a crime, was repealed. The Victorian government itself described this as an explicit part of the decriminalisation reforms. That is why it is so important that we do not allow the debate around this motion to create the impression that decriminalisation somehow put children at risk. It did not, and this topic was actually canvassed extensively throughout the inquiry.

Laws concerning and preventing children being present on premises used specifically for commercial sexual services already exist. It is already a crime to have a child in a brothel. These laws are also not a new protection created by decriminalisation. It has always been a crime, and it was carried across from the repealed legislation and placed in the appropriate criminal legislation. In Victoria a person carrying on a business providing commercial sexual services or assisting in its management must not allow a child over 18 months to enter or remain on premises where that business is carried on unless those premises are primarily used as residential premises. That provision was deliberately re-enacted from the previous Sex Work Act, as I touched on, and the Victorian Parliament's Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee described the provision as being re-enacted with 'the same terms, with the same scope and effect', subject only to minor drafting changes. Any suggestion that Victoria somehow lost a clear rule protecting children when sex work was decriminalised is just wrong. The law continues to distinguish between premises that are specifically being used as commercial sexual services businesses and premises that are primarily residential. This distinction is really important, and it was sufficiently explored throughout the decriminalisation process.

Creating a blanket offence that applies whenever an adult provides a commercial sexual service while a child happens to be somewhere on the premises could have significant consequences. Just one example is a sex worker who visits a client at a hotel. This is a very common arrangement for sex workers. There may be families staying in that hotel, and those families may have children in rooms elsewhere in the building. Under the approach proposed by this motion we would potentially be creating an offence based simply on the presence of a child at a premises like a hotel, creating an enormous expansion of criminal liability that would be impossible to enforce, while there is no existing harm. It would instead make the physical presence of a child somewhere in a building not used specifically for sexual services, which as stated is already a crime, the basis for criminalising an otherwise lawful adult transaction. The same applies to private homes, and this is the part that is so important: being a sex worker does not make someone an irresponsible or unsafe parent. Even if this motion is well intentioned, the risk is that it creates that impression.

In preparing my notes for speaking today, I spoke to my friend Brea Dorsett. Brea is an incredible advocate for many different causes, and she is also the founder of Pink Leopard, an organisation committed to breaking down stigma and tackling systemic issues in the sex work industry by educating the public and fostering inclusivity. I want to share the words that she wrote to me, as she articulated the basis of all that is wrong with the proposal that is before us, and she said it far better than I ever could. She said:

> From my perspective, being a sex worker does not make someone an irresponsible or unsafe parent. Sex workers are parents like anyone else, and the assumption that simply being involved in sex work somehow makes someone a bad mother is incredibly stigmatising.

> I also personally believe there should be a distinction between someone doing sex work from their home and a child actually being present while the work is taking place.
>
> Children should not be exposed to adult sexual activity or the work itself – but that is very different from saying a sex worker shouldn't be allowed to work from home, or that their profession makes their home inherently unsafe.
>
> Working from home can also be a safer option for workers. It may allow someone to avoid unsafe workplaces, reduce reliance on third parties, and maintain greater control over who enters their private space and how the work is carried out.
>
> For some parents, working from home may also provide more flexibility and financial stability …

for their children.

> Of course, appropriate boundaries and arrangements still need to be in place so that children are not present –

when work is happening –

> or exposed to the work.
>
> It's also important to recognise that framing the issue this way can shift blame away from the perpetrator of violence and onto the sex worker or parent. Victim-blaming shifts the narrative away from the actual problem: the person who chose to perpetrate the violence.
>
> A person's occupation or the fact that they work from home does not cause someone else to harm them, and it shouldn't be used to imply that they are responsible for the violence committed against them.
>
> For me, the concern with approaches like this is when "child safety" becomes a justification for policing or punishing sex workers simply for being parents. It can disproportionately hurt people already doing survival sex work or experiencing financial hardship.
>
> It feels comparable to punishing someone for going to work because they couldn't afford the systems that make going to work easier. If someone is already struggling financially, further criminalisation, fines or barriers don't necessarily make a child safer – they can make that family more financially insecure …

or potentially actually unsafe.

> Pink Leopard's position is that sex workers deserve the same assumption afforded to other parents: that they are capable of making responsible decisions about their children's safety, rather than being automatically viewed as irresponsible –

or unsafe –

> because of the work they do.

Brea makes some really important points there. With decriminalisation came an increased assurance of sex worker safety. Something that I have not touched on until this point is that there were a lot of concerns within brothels, particularly for migrant workers, and having the ability to work from home, to work for yourself and to set the security, the standards and the clearance checks for whom enters your home is something that has protected sex workers from harm, from violence, from discrimination and from increased stigma.

I have looked into this issue extensively because of course I took it very seriously when it was put before me today as an advocate for the sex worker community and as someone who has stood alongside them to address the many different hardships that they continue to face. This is not an issue that has ever been raised as a concern to me. I looked for examples of sex workers who were operating with children within their home; I could not find any. I looked into investigations; I could not find any. This seems to be something that has been pulled out as a potential possibility, and that is harmful. We were just at the National Survivors' Day event, where we heard that this can happen anywhere. This is stigmatising of sex workers. It is dangerous to assume that sex work makes someone an incapable parent, and that is why I will be opposing the motion today.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:37): I will also say a few words on this motion put forward by Mrs Deeming. I will start by saying, as Ms Terpstra and others pointed out, that of course I do not think that anyone in this chamber wants children to be involved in sex work or

anything like that, and currently that is the law in Victoria. I will take the points in this motion one by one. Point (2)(a) says:

> a child is described as a victim of commercial sexual exploitation, not as a participant in the sex industry …

and (2)(b) says:

> any purported consent or willingness of the child is irrelevant …

I think that these are actually style issues in the law. It is my understanding that these do not affect the effect of the law and have not been a problem with the effect of the law, but nonetheless they are a style issue. I agree that maybe we should be looking at changing the style of language in this, as we have done for many other things in this place – we have updated the style, the way that things are expressed in the law. So I do not see that as substantive, but it is nevertheless symbolic.

For point (c), though, there actually is an issue. As has been pointed out, it is actually illegal for children to be in places, such as brothels, where the primary purpose of the place is to conduct these activities. But when these activities are carried out in a person's private residential home, there is quite a different situation. It is legal, since decriminalisation, for people to conduct sex work in their home. As was pointed out by Ms Purcell, the majority of the people that do this would actually make arrangements to make sure that the children were not in the home when this was occurring. Nevertheless, there is a gap in that there could be a situation where a child is in the home, and that is the gap that point (c) is seeking to address, I believe.

I am glad that this is not a prescriptive motion, because I do actually think that it would be quite difficult to craft in law. I think Mrs Deeming herself said that with the offence, she does not want to criminalise people – the parents – through this, but I think it would be remiss of Parliament to ignore this particular gap in the law. I think it should be clearly stated in the law that if sex work is going to be conducted in private residences, children should not be in the house. This is a pretty simple thing, and I think that all that (c) is really asking for is for that to be described in the law. I think that this is a reasonable thing despite the fact that, as has been pointed out by others, I am not sure that this is a common thing. I am not aware of any cases where this has been the case. If a child was in danger and was reported, that could be handled by existing child protection mechanisms. Nevertheless, I do not see any harm in the law saying clearly that at the time when you are conducting this type of business within your home children should not be in the home. I do not want to put words in Ms Purcell's mouth, but she even alluded to the fact that people who conduct this sort of work make arrangements to make sure that kids are not there and this sort of thing. I think that putting that in the law and making it clear is a sensible thing to do. Therefore I will not be opposing this motion.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:41): I am a bit blown away by this motion because it is a complete and utter misrepresentation of the Crimes Act 1958. For any of the scenarios referred to there are criminal responses. In fact if anybody in this chamber knows of any situation where any of the scenarios mentioned are happening, there are criminal remedies already, including some 10 years in prison. I am appalled that it twists around and misinterprets a piece of legislation that governs this state.

I have just two short points. The central suggestion in this motion is that Victoria's laws fail to recognise sexual exploitation of a child as a crime – absolutely wrong. That is not true. Mrs Deeming has also claimed that when Labor repealed the Sex Work Act 1994 we removed the rule about children being present and put nothing in its place. That claim is absolutely wrong. The former act was repealed, but child protection offences were placed in other –

Moira Deeming: On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Ermacora claimed that I said that Labor withdrew that part of the original act and put nothing in its place. I did not say that.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ERMACORA: This is a motion from Mrs Deeming. Mrs Deeming has also claimed that when Labor repealed the Sex Work Act we removed the rule about children being present and put nothing in its place. That claim is not true; it is wrong. The former act was repealed, but the child protection offences were placed in other legislation. I have nothing further to add other than what has already been said in this chamber, and it does not deserve further comment.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (16:44): I rise to support Mrs Deeming's motion. At its heart this motion is about one simple principle: a child cannot consent to commercial sexual exploitation. Children must be protected from exploitation regardless of the circumstances in which that exploitation occurs. It is deeply concerning that our legislation can describe a child as a provider or client of commercial sexual services. The language we use matters. A child who is being commercially sexually exploited should be recognised in law as a victim, not as a participant in an adult industry. There should be no ambiguity about consent. A child's apparent willingness, cooperation or lack of resistance must never be used to suggest that they have consented to commercial sexual exploitation.

This motion also addresses a very practical gap, ensuring that commercial sexual services cannot lawfully be conducted in person while a child is present, including in a private home. This is not about judging adults or regulating consenting adult behaviour. It is about drawing a clear line around children. Our laws should send an unequivocal message: children are not commodities, children are not participants in the sex industry and children cannot consent to their own commercial sexual exploitation. I therefore support this motion and call on the government to make these protections clear in Victorian law.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:46): That was a lot of straw manning. I did not argue about whether sex work was criminal or not. I did not argue for the repeal of anything like that. The Crimes Act 1958 asks: 'Has harm been done and can we prove it?' My suggestion asks a very different question: why are we allowing such an easy opportunity at all? Safeguarding is different to a criminal act in the sense of attacking a child. Safeguarding is about prevention. It has never required certainty that harm will or has occurred. We put fences around swimming pools not because every child is going to drown but because some will, and the fence costs almost nothing, and the inconvenience of a fence is worth it to save even just one child. In my opinion, I should have the right to call the police if I see any child being taken into an open and operating brothel. What kind of lunacy is it that you are not having the same reaction?

Also, I heard everybody that argued against my motion whingeing about the stigma against adults in the industry. I mean, toughen up. Children could be raped and pimped more easily because of this gap. Toughen up. Adulting is hard. We put children and their safeguarding before ourselves. And when have I ever spoken disrespectfully about sex workers? Never. That is when. Never. Not once – never. So don't you blame any stigma on me when advocating for child safeguards. Don't you tell me to reflect on National Survivors' Day, as I am a survivor. I was a victim of these crimes as a child. I do have your so precious and beloved lived experience – which you disregard whenever it is politically convenient. How could you vote against this basic child-safeguarding measure. There is absolutely no excuse. And yes, because I am a survivor, I have PTSD from it, and I have endured ridiculous smearing and stigma for having PTSD from my experiences. And on that note, may I thank the opposition for putting in so much effort to support my advocacy for child safeguards – astounding!

I do not want sex workers – prostitutes – to be treated badly. I do not want them to be looked down upon. In fact I am so grateful for the sex workers who have actually stood with me and my motion and put child safeguards above this whiny whingeing about some people who are probably going to be bigots anyway against sex workers. If you cannot convince them, just who cares about them. It is already illegal to discriminate. It is already illegal to harass. This is about a basic child safeguarding boundary. Also, it is ridiculous to say that I am asking for a whole hotel complex to be the premises. Clearly hotel rooms would require the child to be in the room. Yes, that is already a crime; I stated that. I am glad all these things are crimes – it is wonderful – so call them crimes everywhere. Do not

call the child a client. Do not call the child a participant. I will tell you from my lived experience how traumatic and retraumatising and offensive that is. You should fix that.

To finish my contribution, I will just leave you all with the government's Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's child protection guide. First, they tell us what increases the danger to a child, and first is access. They define it as 'access to a child'. It is one of the three necessary elements of exploitation, yet these laws allow a succession of unrelated, unscreened adults to enter a home where a child lives and, as mentioned, also allow registered sex offenders to work in the same house where those children are. It is a disgrace. I will put the rest on my video. I commend it to the house.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (17): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, 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 (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, 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

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:57): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Department of the Legislative Council

Report 2024–25

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:57): I rise to speak on the most recent annual report of the Department of the Legislative Council. In particular I wish to share a few comments on the very important role of parliamentary committees across a wide range of committees, be it across the joint committees that we partake in or the very extensively used Council committee process. It is a very fascinating and enjoyable part of the role to be able to engage with in-depth issues through a variety of different committees and different forums. I recall early on, four years ago, one of my political mentors who is a former MP in the other place said to me, 'Make sure that whatever you do, you don't put yourself on any more than one committee.' That did not quite work out. Being a member of Legislative Council, it is something that does not work out for many people. But it is a very enjoyable part of this role, to spend some time with virtually every member of this chamber I think on different committees.

We do get to explore issues that are of really critical importance to Victorian people. I can think of just a few recent ones, whether it is the inquiry into anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes in Victoria, where I got to work with Mr Puglielli, Mr McCracken and other members, including Ms Watt, of this chamber to really focus on an issue that has become, in a very short space of time, unfortunately very pertinent and very difficult for many. To be able to hear both that expert experience and that lived experience and platform the genuine feelings of people was a very special thing to be a part of.

It goes to matters of important public policy as well. I reflect on the select committee on Victoria's planning provisions last year, along with Mr Batchelor and Ms Watt, where we saw a scurrilous attack on the housing aspirations of young Victorians by the Liberal Party. They were trying to use the select committee as a pretence to abolish planning reforms which are so critical in providing that equality of opportunity for young people to get a chance to rent or buy into the housing market. We do have, and we continue to have, a very serious housing crisis in this country. It is not something that should go unremarked upon – the fact that our economy continues to boom, that we are attracting business investment from interstate and overseas, that we remain the largest domestic target of internal migration in this country and that more people are moving to Victoria than anywhere else. It is in that context a remarkable achievement that we have seen that rental prices in Melbourne are now the least expensive out of all eight Australian capital cities. That is something that happens when you invest in supply, when you provide those supply opportunities. The state government cannot do everything for that, but as many experts have said, including the Grattan Institute, the number one thing that you can do as a state government in Australia is to pull those planning levers. That is exactly what this government has done and continues to stand by through the housing plan, through the unlocking of activity centres across those dense inner-city suburbs and those middle-ring suburbs with train connections, tram connections and services.

Indeed as I reflect on another inquiry, this one conducted by the Legal and Social Issues Committee into public school funding in Victoria, often in areas where school enrolments have dropped, not due to the performance of those schools and not due to other factors but due to the very simple fact that young families cannot afford to live in some of these areas, we have an absolute surplus – estimated at over 10,000 – of school spaces in public schools in inner and middle-ring suburbs such as Camberwell and Kew, where the Liberal Party is trying to block people out of those housing aspirations. We have seen the investment that this government continues to make, even in just one small part of my region, in one suburb, that of Clyde North, where we have opened six new public primary and secondary schools in that suburb alone in the last four years and where we are continuing to build these new schools as part of 100 across the state to meet that demand. Yet we see schools in some inner-city suburbs where there is a massive capacity shortfall that is not being filled, and that is because we used to have archaic planning rules that kept people out of living in those areas.

This government is taking real action to provide young people with an opportunity to have a house, to have economic stability and to have a future, and we will continue to do so no matter how much the Liberal Party or One Nation seek to try and stop that, to protect their own interests and to keep looking after themselves at the expense of everyday young working Victorians.

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Report 2024–25

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:02): I rise to speak on the Victorian Multicultural Commission's annual report for 2024–25, which allows me to speak broadly on our fabulous multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria. I want to briefly mention some of the things that have been going on in multicultural communities. I know the new Premier has been very busy introducing himself to multicultural communities, so I want to speak on a round table the Premier held last Monday with Middle Eastern Christian leaders. I happened to speak to several priests and leaders that were at that meeting. Something I found curious that I heard from multiple sources was the Premier was asked about gender ideologies in schools, voluntary assisted dying and a number of other contentious social issues, and the Premier replied on repeat that, 'I'm a new Premier, I'm going in a new direction, and we are going to return to Christian values.'

What you have in this Premier is someone who has been quite dishonest and two-faced, a Premier in Ben Carroll who is willing to say one thing to communities in Greenvale and Broadmeadows and another thing to communities in places like Melbourne, Richmond and Albert Park. I encourage the Premier to be honest with all Victorians. Do not try to narrowcast. I know the Premier's office are

doing sit-down videos, with one for Christian communities and one for Muslim communities, and not putting them on the Premier's social media but sending them via WhatsApp in the hope that no-one else will see them except for those specific communities – I happen to have received both – with very specific, similar language in both.

There is also some other narrowcasting going on that I need to call out, particularly from the member for Laverton, who put up a video entirely in Urdu and Arabic attacking and fearmongering about both One Nation and the Liberal Party. You have heard all the attacks on repeat. It was completely unnecessary for the member for Laverton to make a reference to Israel in that. She said something about Gina Rinehart and that Queensland land should be used by the Israel Defense Forces. Why is that relevant in a Victorian election? We have a royal commission underway, social cohesion is important for our state and you have a member of the other chamber whipping up fear in Muslim communities to try to win votes, using Israel and our Jewish community as weapons to try to win votes in the Muslim community. I have great friends in the Muslim community that were shocked at this video and were shocked that a politician would try to make that link to whip up fear for votes in our Muslim community. I am sure there are members on the other side of the chamber that are going to go and have a look at Ms Connolly's Facebook page and be ashamed of what they see and hear. Go look at it. Go translate it. You have a member of the other place whipping up fear in our Muslim community, trying to link Israel and the Israel Defense Forces and our Jewish community to try to win votes in our Muslim community. As I said, I have many friends in our Muslim community that were shocked to see this particular video, and it is honestly shameful that we have a member of Parliament in the other place whipping up fear while a royal commission is ongoing into antisemitism following the horrific Bondi terrorist attack. Yet we have one member who thinks it is okay to wield the state of Israel and our Jewish community to translate into votes, with a voiceover in Arabic and Urdu and captions only in Arabic. She thinks no-one is going to see and no-one is going to translate this.

This narrowcasting must stop. This government must be able to say one thing to one community that is exactly the same in another community, not tell one community that you are going to return to Christian values and you do not agree with gender ideologies in schools and then go to another community and say, 'Of course we agree with that, and the Liberals are going to cut it.' I am going to call that out and I am going to continue to call it out, because this dishonest Premier, dishonest government and dishonest member for Laverton should be ashamed of themselves.

Wyndham health services

Petition

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:07): I rise to make a statement on a petition tabled yesterday bearing 2295 signatures calling for a new public hospital in Tarneit by 2030. This is a petition that addresses the future of some of Victoria's fastest growing communities in Wyndham and Tarneit and their access to public health care. It is a request that government planning catch up with reality. Wyndham is not a community that might grow one day; it is growing right now, faster than almost anywhere else in the state, and the health system has to grow with it.

Wyndham is now home to around 337,000 people – bigger than the City of Greater Geelong – and is projected to reach approximately 500,000 people by 2040. Think about what that means in practical terms. That is close to doubling the size of an average regional city in less than two decades, all within the boundaries of a single municipality. The expansion of health infrastructure is currently not keeping pace with the growth of the population. Wyndham City Council's 2025 health status assessment found that Wyndham had just 298 public hospital beds. That is 0.88 beds per 1000 people, compared with 2.23 beds per 1000 across Victoria. The same report estimates the municipality currently needs around 797 public hospital beds, increasing to more than 1200 by 2046. They have identified inadequate hospital infrastructure and capacity as a significant challenge for the community. These figures tell us something very important: we cannot plan tomorrow's health system using yesterday's population.

The growth in Tarneit is particularly significant. Tarneit's population was estimated at 69,268 in 2024. It is projected to reach 87,080 by 2030, over 112,000 by 2040 and 125,000 by 2046 – an increase of around 81 per cent in just 22 years. Yet Wyndham city's own health assessment identifies Tarneit, Truganina, Manor Lakes and Wyndham Vale as areas where health infrastructure is lagging behind population growth, with residents needing to travel outside their suburbs and sometimes outside Wyndham to access health services. What this means is that for a young family with a sick child, for an older resident managing a health condition or for anyone facing a medical emergency it is a distance that is not only an inconvenience but also a significant health risk. We recognise the investment already being made at the Werribee Mercy Hospital. The emergency department will increase treatment spaces from 33 to 67 and is designed to accommodate an extra 25,000 emergency presentations every year. We welcome that investment, but we must also be honest about what it means. An expanded emergency department is not the same as a new public hospital. A growing municipality needs not just emergency care but inpatient beds, maternity services, paediatric services, mental health care, surgery, diagnostics, specialist services and allied health – and I could go on. It needs births to happen close to home. It needs surgery waiting lists that reflect local demand. It needs mental health support that patients can reach without a lengthy commute at a time when they are least able to make one. And it needs these services to be geographically accessible with appropriate public transport infrastructure in place and delivered in the communities that are growing the fastest.

That is why over 2000 signatories – paper signatories, and in just three weeks, mind you – are calling for a clear planning and funding pathway for a public hospital in Tarneit, with a goal of delivery by 2030. This is not about replacing or upgrading Werribee Mercy Hospital, it is about complementing Werribee Mercy, expanding the public health network and planning for the future population of Wyndham. We cannot wait until Tarneit has 125,000 residents before we start planning the health infrastructure required to serve them. Planning must start now. The people of Tarneit deserve healthcare infrastructure that matches the size, growth and needs of their community. Health care is a right, not a luxury. I commend this petition to the house.

Department of Parliamentary Services

Report 2024–25

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:12): I rise to make a brief statement today on the Department of Parliamentary Services annual report tabled last year, mainly to offer some thanks to those who have helped me in particular and us collectively in our endeavours in the last four years. To the clerks, table office, attendants, catering staff, security staff, cleaners, member services and library: everything you do makes our life easier.

I particularly want to spend a bit more time talking about the committee work and particularly thanking the committee staff who have supported our efforts in the last four years. I have been a member of two standing committees, a joint committee and two select committees, and I have acted as chair of a couple of them. My staff totalled it up, and we think there have been 22 inquiries, nearly 4500 pages of reports and nearly 100 days of public hearings in the last four years that I have had the absolute privilege of participating in. I want to thank, firstly, all of those who have provided evidence to those inquiries. The inquiries do not work without people coming forward, giving us submissions and providing us with evidence, but more importantly, they do not work without ordinary Victorians telling their stories – and we heard some exceptionally harrowing stories across the course of those inquiries.

There were a couple of highlights for me of the inquiries in the last four years. I think the Legal and Social Issues inquiry into our state education system was exceptionally important. It showed us quite clearly that evidence-based teaching practices – explicit teaching, structured and synthetic phonics delivery – in our schools work and that we should back evidence-based teaching in our schools. Funding is a means, not an end, and improving the outcomes of education for the students who we require to go to school is what we should be spending that additional money on. That, to me, was an exceptionally important inquiry.

The two inquiries that I participated in and chaired parts of – the inquiry into the 2022 flooding event and the inquiry into the 2026 summer fires – heard some harrowing stories of people affected by natural disasters in this state. We know that natural disasters are becoming more intense and more frequent, and our community resilience is tested, so I want to thank everyone for that. Also, from the Integrity and Oversight Committee's point of view – I spent four years on the IOC, and we did some important policy work – the monitoring and oversight work that we did on a regular basis with the integrity agencies should not go unremarked upon, particularly the way we pursued IBAC's handling, or poor handling, of police-perpetrated family violence. To me, that yielded the most significant thing that occurred in committee work in this Parliament, and that was an apology from our anti-corruption agency over the way they treated victim-survivors of police-perpetrated family violence. Seeing that was exceptionally significant.

I thank all the committee staff: the managers of the Environment and Planning Committee Kieran Crowe most recently and Lilian Topic before him; the Legal and Social Issues Committee's Patrick O'Brien, who managed that committee; the Integrity and Oversight Committee's Sean Coley and the team, who were always, always magnificent in what they did; and the select committees, both of which were managed by Matt Newington. I want to thank you all for the exceptional work that you did and the effort you put into making us look like we knew what we were doing and enabled us to ask good questions. I think the reports that we produced were exceptionally valuable and hopefully have delivered some positive outcomes for the people of Victoria.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Preventing Youth Crime

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:16): Today I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report that was handed down this morning, *Preventing Youth Crime: September 2026*. This is an independent assurance report to this Parliament, and it is extremely worrying. It absolutely confirms what we have been very worried about for a long time, and that is that what the Labor government is doing to address youth crime is not working. I have spoken for a long time about the two aspects of this. The first is that the community is less safe, and the second is that we seem to be losing a generation of young people to crime. Unfortunately, this report proves this. In the opening snapshot it says that youth crime in Victoria has had a 40 per cent increase between the years 2022 and 2025 – a 40 per cent increase. It costs $7304 per day to keep a young person in custody. Not only is that the most expensive in the nation, but we are getting worse outcomes than anywhere in the nation. There has been $40 million spent – and in a minute I am going to go to what we are getting for that $40 million – and 2700 participants have received one-on-one support.

I am just going to flick to section 4, which shows that in Victoria there are 26,977 alleged youth offenders, so almost 27,000. But do you know what they did to assess this? They assessed 26 kids – one-thousandth of the total. And, guess what, out of those 26 kids, 11 reoffended. This is absolutely shocking. This is what VAGO said:

> **What we concluded**
>
> We found no evidence to show the program is reducing offending.

So not some evidence, not little evidence – zero evidence that this is reducing youth offending.

Another thing which I think is definitely worth looking at is that now in Victoria there are a total of 236,000 – it is way over that – Victorians who are now victims of crime. That means that 3.3 per cent of Victorians are now victims of crime. There has to be a new start. There has to be a fresh start. A Jess Wilson–led government is going to provide that fresh start. We are going to attack this from both sides. First, we are going to make the community more safe by making sure there are 3000 new sworn police officers. Not only are we going to return the PSOs to the 119 stations, we are going to increase that number by 200, because this is not okay. The first job of any government is to keep its people safe. But not only that, we are going to have programs that pull these kids out of the cycle of offending

that they are committing. We are going to do this by investing $100 million into a program, the safer communities plan. We have a plan for this. What $70 million of that is going to do – and in the short time I have I am going to explain a little bit of it – is we are going to have a first-of-its-kind live-in structured program for serious repeat offenders. It is something that has worked in other states, something that has proven outcomes and something that has been shown to reduce offending. This is going to be something that both the courts and the police will have the authority to refer to.

We need to have programs that work because, to be quite frank, to invest $40 million, assess it on 26 kids and see that 11 are reoffending is just absolutely horrific. Two per cent of the alleged offenders are being reached in this program – out of the $40 million. Of that 2 per cent, they assessed 26, and of that 26, 11 reoffended. If that does not show you the mess we are in, I do not know what will. It is time we stopped losing a generation to crime, and it is time we made our communities more safe.

Greyhound Racing Victoria

Report 2024–25

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (17:21): I rise to speak on Greyhound Racing Victoria's annual report for 2024–25. This report details a number of things about the industry, which I will speak about. We are still waiting on this year's report, which I am sure will be a very interesting and somewhat concerning read. For four years I have been reading these annual reports of deception, of death, of cruelty, of suffering, of gambling harm and of misogyny, and all of this is being propped up by taxpayer funds and backed in by the government. In their most recent annual report, GRV topped the highest death toll for four years. They are out there saying racing is getting safer, that less dogs are dying, but 450 dogs, which was 28 more than the year prior, lost their lives to this industry. Of this total, 234 deaths were due to injury, 55 due to temperament and 161 for illness or other reasons.

Rehoming rates for the dogs that are no longer profitable to the industry were at their lowest in four years. Anyone who has been in here as I have read my motion every single sitting week updating the chamber on the deaths, injuries and incidents since the last sitting week would know that we have terrible rehoming figures here in Victoria. These dogs are bred for the purpose of gambling, for exploitation. They say they love their dogs, but I tell you what, the second that they are no longer useful to them, they suddenly have nowhere for them to go. In fact their own rehoming program rehomes less dogs than do community rescue groups run by volunteers and funded by donations, who are all anti racing. If that is not telling you how much this industry cares about these animals, I do not know what will convince you.

When the industry is done with greyhounds, they can send them off to the Greyhound Adoption Program, which is their rehoming program that I have just spoken about, which has around a 12- to 18-month-long waitlist. Recently GRV, instead of introducing a breeding cap, which would probably make sense in a rehoming crisis, actually just said, 'You can pay us $3000 to skip the queue.' So now you can pay to get ahead, which is obviously only putting dogs at more risk. Despite this, the government has continued to throw money at GAP and has continued to throw money at the industry. They have received Treasurer's advances and emergency support payments. We actually looked into how much money would be saved if we just simply stopped subsidising greyhound racing in Victoria, just as Tasmania have done. The Tasmanian Liberals, guys, are doing better on this than we are. I mean, when the Liberals are leading on animal welfare, you know something has gone seriously wrong. We would save half a billion dollars over 10 years just by stopping the funding to greyhound racing only. The number is eye-watering if we actually just stopped subsidising all racing codes.

I just want to flick through some of the things that have happened in the racing industry, because of course GRV, for the most part, is exempt from our Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, which is outdated and which the government promised to replace this term. They did not do that. But the dogs are not even protected by this failing legislation. There have been countless horrific events, including multiple live baiting scandals. Despite their saying 'zero tolerance', it continues to happen, and then it is 'zero tolerance' again. You would think that that would mean 'not one more time', but

they continue to make exceptions. There was Turbo Tommy, Deliver and Canya Cruise, who were all exported to China illegally and are in greyhound racing and breeding rings. Pacific Reef, Pacific Dreamer, Dark Stealth and Stealthy Flight were killed using blunt force trauma to the skull with a rock. There was Long Sleeves, who was literally left, rotting from the inside out, to die of gangrene. A vet said even if they did not notice the injury, they would smell the injury, and yet this person got a slap on the wrist.

There was a dog born with no tongue, called No Words, who broke his leg racing earlier this year. There were dogs that were given cocaine as stimulants. There were greyhounds who died on treadmills – that was plural, by the way, everyone: greyhounds, not a greyhound. Multiple died on treadmills. Prohibited substances – 60 different types. And the reasons? I mean, come on. Ventolin was 'from breathing near a trainer that used an asthma puffer', cocaine 'because someone patted the dog down the street'. There are so many things I could say – I am running out of time – but there have been 154 greyhounds killed on tracks, 800 off track and 1240 injured this year. The next report is going to be even worse. The government needs to defund this industry.

Department of Parliamentary Services

Report 2024–25

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:26): I rise to make a contribution on the Department of Parliamentary Services annual report that was tabled last year. It is a little bit too early to do the seasons greetings thing, and therefore, in lieu thereof and as we careen towards the end of the 60th Parliament, I would like to pay a debt of gratitude to the parliamentary staff who keep the Parliament running. Parliamentarians cannot do their job in this place without the multitude of people who fill these halls each and every week. I want to apologise in advance if I leave anyone out, and if I do, it is inadvertent. But here goes.

I want to gesture a debt of gratitude to the Hansard team, who record and publish our words; and to the clerks, who are the custodians of tradition, practice and standing orders in this place, and without their careful stewardship I am sure that there would be chaos. To the committee staff, the tables office, cleaners, library staff and the attendants, thank you all. To the kitchen staff and the staff in Strangers, thank you for feeding us and keeping us all well caffeinated. To the grounds staff, I know the annexe has kept you busy, especially the air conditioning that is either too hot or too cold, along with the amazing water features in our kitchen and offices. To the gardeners, I think it would be the best job going to care for those amazing grounds and gardens, and exhibit A is our parliamentary bees that make excellent honey. To the security staff and PSOs who keep us safe and deal with very aggressive and stunty behaviour in this place, I know your jobs have become much harder of late, so I say thank you to all of you.

I also want to acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues in the north-eastern suburbs. When I was first elected in 2018, I was the only Labor woman elected south of the Yarra. Whilst there were existing members who were re-elected, I came in with an amazing, hardworking bunch of people. I want to acknowledge the Energizer Bunny Jackson Taylor. Your dedication to the people of Bayswater is beyond compare. You have delivered so much to your electorate, and I wish you all the very best for the next chapter of your working life. I know you will bring new and annoying energy and unmatched zeal to whatever you choose to do. To Matt Fregon, who is now in Southern Metro due to a boundary change, the early days of collaboration in the newly formed eastern bloc I remember and reflect on fondly. I enjoyed catching up with you in the electorate and working with you. I enjoyed our chats and points of disagreement. We all share Labor values, which is the glue that binds us in the eastern bloc in the north-eastern suburbs.

To Paul Hamer in Box Hill and John Mullahy in Glen Waverley, I have enjoyed working with you and addressing the needs of the vast Chinese diaspora that we share in our electorates across the eastern suburbs. The Labor government's investment in multiculturalism is demonstrable, and our presence has always been met with greetings and warmth when we have been out and about attending events.

To Anthony Carbines, the member for Ivanhoe; Vicki Ward, the member for Eltham; and Lily D'Ambrosio, the member for Mill Park, I have enjoyed working with all of you. Whether it has been working on delivering sporting clubs, attending Anzac Day services or opening new schools, I have appreciated getting to know your electorates, which you have all served with distinction.

Of course there is my upper house colleague President Shaun Leane. Shaun was the only person who contacted me when I was first elected, and I want to acknowledge that. Only another MLC can truly understand what it is like working in the upper house and how an MLC fits into the weird rubric that government is – the role you play, what you do and what you do not do, and why you so often get left out of things. There is no guidebook, and I have appreciated you welcoming me and passing on to me the wealth of knowledge you had as a serving MLC, and in previous years you did so much of the heavy lifting for the labour movement in the eastern suburbs, most often with little institutional support. Thank you for lending an ear, for guiding me and also for your sense of humour. Thank you, and I wish you all the very best for the next chapter. I would also like to acknowledge the entire Labor MLC team in the 60th Parliament. I want to thank each and every one of you. Even when we disagree, we remember what we are here for, and that is to deliver for every Victorian, because we all know Victorians need Labor governments that deliver for working people.

I also want to acknowledge my colleagues who are true trade unionists in the real sense of the word, the real deal, ones who I have had the pleasure and privilege to serve with. I want to acknowledge Shaun Leane, Gayle Tierney, Ingrid Stitt and John Berger, people with collective values and whom I respect because of our collective and decades-long contribution to the labour movement. I also acknowledge Steve McGhie, Natalie Hutchins, Gary Maas and Bronwyn Halfpenny in the other place.

Last but definitely not least, thank you to all the doggos who have visited Parliament during this term, too many to mention, but one that gets a special mention is Bracks the amazing, beautiful, cuddly bordoodle. You have made my sitting weeks so much more pleasant. I want to thank you, Megan, for bringing him into our lives.

Petitions

Delburn wind farm

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:31): I move:

> That the petition be taken into consideration.

I rise this evening to speak on a petition signed by 3694 people on behalf of the Strzelecki Community Alliance and residents of the Strzelecki district regarding the Delburn wind farm. They call for it to be cancelled. I want to thank Gabrielle, Sindy, Daryl and many others for their persistence, for their dedication and for their respect. Over many years they have become experts in planning processes, environmental assessments and community advocacy – subjects they never imagined that they would have to master – and I am pleased to be their representative, voicing their concerns. They deserve to be heard. As I have said on many occasions in terms of our petitions, petitioners do that work and their voices deserve to be heard in Parliament.

What this is not a debate about is our energy mix or our energy system. It is about fairness and respect. It is about the failure of the Labor government to genuinely listen to communities that raise legitimate concerns about developments that will fundamentally affect their lives, their families and their future. For years these residents have pursued every available avenue for them. They have lodged submissions, they have attended hearings and they have engaged independent experts. They even took their concerns to the Supreme Court. These are ordinary people but beautiful people – when I say ordinary, I mean country people – and they are stars. They are families, farmers, business owners and long-term residents who deeply care about the future of this district.

Their concerns have been consistent from the beginning. They have questioned whether turbines located just 1 kilometre from homes are appropriate – 200-metre-high turbines. They have raised

concerns about the noise impacts, the effect on health and wellbeing and the amenity. They have raised concerns about bushfire risk in this plantation landscape within this region, which has experienced devastating bushfires, particularly in 2009. They know well what bushfires are about. Indeed in some of their documents, of which they have multiple, they raise the issue that bushfire expert David Packham OAM raised that a bushfire disaster in extreme weather conditions can create havoc almost, with lives lost and millions of dollars of damage. The planning process acknowledged the potential for major bushfires to affect this project, and indeed back in 2022 in a parliamentary inquiry into renewable energy the Liberals and Nationals minority report specifically outlined their concerns, even back then, and recommended that community concerns should be properly addressed before new land-based wind farm developments are approved.

Even today – let me give you this context – somebody came into my office, a resident of that area. There has been new construction. It is starting out there on the Strzelecki Highway. One resident came in and said they repeatedly raised concerns about noise impacts on their family during the construction phase, through the day and through the night. After repeated contact seeking assistance from the SEC, the family was reportedly offered a single pair of noise-cancelling headphones, for a family of four. That response helps to explain why so many residents are feeling frustrated and unheard by this Carroll government, soon to be Wilson and O'Brien. Residents also want confidence that complaints regarding noise, permit compliance and community impacts will be investigated independently and transparently. What has changed since the project was first approved that the SEC, and therefore the Victorian government, now has direct interest in the project? That makes transparency, accountability and community confidence more important than ever. For years residents have been saying the same thing: 'Listen to us.' This should not be a box-ticking exercise. Communities should not have to spend years fighting and going to the Supreme Court.

Regardless of where people stand on this project, I believe we should all agree on one principle: local residents deserve respect. They deserve genuine consultation. They deserve transparent decision-making, and the issue is they need to be listened to. I thank Strzelecki Community Alliance and the almost 4000 people who signed the petition. Their persistence, commitment and advocacy on behalf of their community deserve due recognition. I am pleased to put their concerns on record. Indeed, in terms of this government, so often we have heard over my time in this place that people feel overwhelmingly consultold, not engaged with in a respectful manner. This petition just amplifies what many others across different projects have felt. As I say, this is not about an energy debate; this is about community respect. I am pleased to put their views and issues, in my short time, on the public record.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:36): I rise to speak on this petition regarding the SEC Delburn wind farm. Our Labor government made a fundamental promise to Victorians that we would back the SEC to deliver renewable, affordable and reliable energy, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are building the critical infrastructure required to ensure our state hits its targets of 95 per cent renewable electricity by 2035 and net zero emissions by 2045. As a direct result of our investment decisions, the Delburn wind farm will be Victoria's first publicly owned utility-scale wind generation project. The scale and benefits of this project are significant. Once operational this 33-turbine wind farm will generate up to 205 megawatts of renewable energy, enough to power more than 130,000 Victorian homes. It will create more than 300 local jobs and inject more than $22 million into neighbour and community benefit sharing programs over its 35-year operational life span.

The SEC began carefully assessing this project as an investment opportunity in mid-2024. The Delburn site is an exceptionally strategic location. It sits in close proximity to the current and former Latrobe Valley power stations, meaning the necessary high-voltage transmission lines are already located in the area. The region possesses a wind resource profile that complements other Victorian sites, allowing these turbines to generate electricity at different times throughout the day. Importantly, it capitalises on the established highly skilled workforce in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley, who already possess deep expertise with utility-scale power facilities.

I know that bushfire safety is a deeply held concern for regional communities, and the petitioners have specifically raised it here. I want to provide some absolute assurance that fire risk is treated seriously. Construction is proceeding under a comprehensive bushfire mitigation and management plan that had to be signed off by the Country Fire Authority before works even commenced. The practical safety measures are extensive; in February 2026 the installation of five 130-litre firefighting water tanks began onsite. Every single one of the 33 turbines features a lightning protection system as well as built-in fire detection and suppression systems. There is fire camera monitoring for rapid location detection and a mandated minimum 50-metre vegetation-free area around the base of every single turbine. All staff permanently based at the wind farm will be fully trained CFA firefighters. To address a specific concern regarding aerial firefighting, the turbines are spaced a minimum of 640 metres apart, which is more than double the CFA recommended spacing, to allow for the safe passage of aircraft.

The petition also raises concerns regarding financial risks and conflicts of interest. To that end, can I say that the SEC operates under a highly commercial governance structure governed by the State Owned Enterprises Act 1992 and the federal Corporations Act 2001. It is led by an executive team and an independent board of directors, and it strictly complies with the Victorian government's competitive neutrality policy to ensure fair market competition. The investment was assessed against strict criteria, including public purpose, market enablement and sustainable risk-adjusted returns. Those returns will be reinvested directly into more projects to power our schools, hospitals and essential services. It is important to note that so many of our schools will now be powered by the SEC, and so a project like that is just so important to power public entities in our state in future. The SEC will continue to engage openly with the local community, just as they did back in March 2026 when they spoke with more than 200 locals across multiple engagement sessions. Our Labor government absolutely respects the community's voice, and we absolutely are focused on delivering the jobs, investments and publicly owned energy future that Victoria needs.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (17:41): I rise to speak on this petition, and I will state at the outset that the Greens will be supporting the noting of the petition by the chamber, as is our usual position. We thank people who bring issues to the chamber for the attention of the Parliament.

I want to put some of the matters raised by this petition into context, and the plainest context here is that we know those opposite, the Liberals and the Nationals, in potential coalition with One Nation, are intent on blocking investment in cheap, clean renewables and will force our state to continue to rely on expensive and polluting gas well into the future. What that will practically mean for communities right across the state is higher energy bills as well as more emissions, and we know that regional communities are on the front line of increased impacts from climate change. I noted in another petition debate recently that the coalition have already told us that they want to cancel VNI West and open up more exploration for gas, despite experts telling us that Victoria's viable gas is almost already gone. They have a long track record in fact of blocking and trying to rip up clean energy infrastructure. And lest I be too generous with my criticism, we also know that Labor on this side have a long track record of continuing to approve new fossil fuel projects as well, though we are already experiencing climate shocks and worsening natural disasters due to the climate impacts that we are facing from the burning of fossil fuels.

Renewables, meanwhile, are the cheapest form of new energy generation, while fossil fuel prices continue to be volatile and vulnerable to price shocks around the world. In this context, deliberately slowing the shift to renewable energy and keeping us reliant on coal and gas is just completely irresponsible. It will not just cook the planet we all live on but also have the effect of driving up energy prices for every Victorian and increasing fire risk, flood risk and further climate change driven disaster risk. We all know in this place that One Nation are big Trump fans, but it seems that the coalition have also looked at the way Trump's anti-renewable 'Drill, baby, drill' policies have damaged the American economy and said, 'That's what we need more of here in Victoria.'

Renewables and transmission projects are not always perfectly done. They have not always gone about the right things in the right way – particularly, private corporations have often failed to deal adequately

with some community objections. That is always a place where we need to get better in this state. When that happens, it is unfortunate because it damages the social licence of all those renewable projects that we do need to advance in order to tackle our state's energy challenge and climate risk. We need to listen to regional voices, we need to take these concerns seriously and we need to provide clear information about the impacts of projects and mitigate the problems when they arise. Most Gippslanders do support this kind of renewable investment. During consultation on the Southern Gippsland renewable energy road map 80 per cent of survey respondents said that it was extremely important to build and utilise the renewable energy assets available locally. The shift to renewables is an opportunity not only to reduce our emissions but to shift away from the extractivist model of an economy based on fossil fuels. Renewable energy projects should deliver at the same time real benefits to the communities that host them not just to investors a million miles away. The Delburn project is great on that front because, as it is owned by the publicly owned SEC, it is owned by the people of Victoria. On top of that, it is going to provide $22 million in benefits to the local community throughout the life of the project, and that is without even considering the jobs it will create.

As it was raised by this petition, let us talk about bushfire risk, which is something that is very important to reassure communities about. Starting at a systemic level again, the more carbon we emit – a message to those guys over there – the more bushfire risk is created. The more our planet warms, the more we will suffer from droughts and bushfires, and again regional communities are on the front lines of those climate disasters. Projects like this, which will reduce our emissions, are crucial for protecting us from extreme bushfires. On the risk of wind farms directly causing fires, it is really important to reassure those who have signed this petition that turbine fires are rare, and even so, these turbines will be equipped with their own internal fire suppression systems as a precautionary measure; they have systems which automatically put out fires within the cells where these occur and prevent fires from spreading to the surrounding countryside. As Ms Watt mentioned, this project has placed large reserves of firefighting water at strategic locations throughout the project site. This is going to be a great project. Thank you to the petitioners, and I hope we have addressed some of the concerns.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:46): I want to start by acknowledging everyone that signed the petition that has been lodged here in Parliament. Change in any community is not without complication and it is not without difficulty, and we understand that when that occurs, particularly near where people live, it is complicated and raises emotions. With that being said, when we look at what is going on around the world at the moment, nations are becoming more insular, globalisation is going backwards and economies are competing, and the key thing economies are competing around the world for is energy. Energy is what drives economies. It has with our automotive industry and with various manufacturing industries. It has driven what has given us our competitive advantage, our competitive edge. We know that the industries of this century are more and more hungry for electricity, so we simply have to build energy generation, energy storage and energy transmission, because we cannot be economically competitive if we do not have energy. If we are not economically competitive, then we do not have a hope in hell when talking about things like defence, our place in our region and our place in the world.

We know we need electricity. We need to build. If we look at last century, difficult decisions were made. At Yallourn 5000 people were moved to make way for the generation station, for the pits. For Loy Yang A 15,000 acres were cleared. These were difficult decisions at the time. Under Bolte the Liberals used to make difficult decisions. They built highways, they built transmission lines, they built dams. It was nation-building stuff. I will add that they took on state debt to do it, because these are things that we need to succeed and to thrive as a people. This project is line of sight to the coal pits, to the transmission lines and to the substations. I have been out onsite. I have met with locals from the valley, from Mirboo North, that are doing their traineeships, that are doing their apprenticeships, and we are investing in giving young people skills through TAFE and those that are going through uni to do other degrees, because we need people in the energy sector trained up. We need them to do this work to power our state.

The location is in plantation, and as I said before, I acknowledge those that live nearby. It is a change that is occurring. But this provides, as my colleagues said before, 300 jobs in construction – ongoing work. We are not going to see mass employment on a single site, most likely, like we have seen in power generation previously, but with offshore wind, with various solar, with various wind, with various batteries and as these projects start and are refurbed and whatnot, we have got a continual cycle of work and we have got to be committed to that. Labor is committed to that, and I am proud we have committed to investment certainty for industry, that we have had policies that create investment. My criticism? Ms Bath talked about being consultold. When Peter Dutton announced that nuclear power was the solution, at the last federal election, and the Liberals and the Nationals sat there, had they consulted their communities about nuclear reactors? No, they had not. There have been long pathways of consultation on renewables right around Victoria and indeed around Australia to meet the targets that Labor governments have set.

Let us be really honest about what we are going to do, because we have got an election coming up. We are going to find ourselves in a whole world of pain if in a few years time we have got Yallourn – Energy Australia have said they have taken away the gear that will dig the coal out of those pits; it is already gone, and they have got a limited amount of coal left to go – and Loy Yang A, which AGL have said has a limited life span until 2035. They are not looking to go and bust that. Tell Victorians how you are going to power our state. What are you going to build? What are you going to do? Because you can either talk about nuclear fantasies or you can come and stump up to the Victorian people and tell them how you are going to power our state.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:51): I am sure the good people in and around the proposed Delburn wind farm turbines have found this very illuminating. First of all, the debaters. We had Ms Watt. I recognise Ms Watt's sincerity in life, but clearly she read from the Labor Party playbook. So be it. I then listened to the Greens, who on some levels can be so invested in what community feels and thinks and understands and can represent community, and we have seen it on many other occasions. The Greens then decided to go down into a layer and discuss a president from another country, on a matter in relation to which people who signed this petition and raised their concerns fairly. They have told me that there are around 140 houses where people live between 1 and 2 kilometres from those turbines. The Liberals and Nationals have a policy that, should we get in, we will commit to a 2-kilometre buffer from dwellings, from homes; this, up and running, is a 1-kilometre buffer. We heard that things could be done better by the Greens and there is damage to social licence. Well, social licence matters as long as it fits your agenda. I am here raising the valid issues of those good people in Strzelecki. Then we had Mr McIntosh, who went off on his regular rant, his regular foray into spooky space from over here. Let me tell you those people deserve to be heard. They deserve respect. I commend this petition and the petitioners to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended 5:54 pm until 6:17 pm.

Members

Shaun Leane

Valedictory statement

The PRESIDENT (18:17): I thank the chamber for affording me this opportunity: I am going to call myself. I feel extremely fortunate to have been a member of Parliament of the great state of Victoria, which is part of a country that – something we should all boast about – has been occupied by the oldest living continuous culture in the world. It is something that as Victorians we should really boast more about to other countries. Victorians and Australians love coming first and love boasting, 'We were the country that invented the lawnmower.' A lawnmower is a fantastic piece of machinery and it is worth boasting about, but when you think about it, it is so much more worth boasting about that we live on a land that has been occupied by the oldest living culture in the world. We should brag

about it more. We should go to other countries and we should thump our chests. When people get off at our airports, that should be the first thing they see. We should be so proud and we should brag about it. I know progress has been slow, but I take great heart that in this place while I have been here there has been progress in acknowledging that and there has been progress towards reconciliation. In saying that, I want to pay my respects to First Nations elders past and present. I want to say that I take great heart in believing there is going to be more progress. One of the reasons – just one of the reasons – I take great heart in that is because First Nations people have amazing champions and leaders like our friend Sheena Watt.

I feel so extremely fortunate to be a member of Parliament. I feel extremely fortunate in life in general, spending a lifetime with someone I love and adore and sharing the joys life brings – not necessarily but particularly fortunate in a job like this. It makes me feel like an extremely fortunate person. I listened to the words of an INXS song when I was in my gym on the Stairmaster 2000, and the lyrics were basically about how when you are with one particular person all your struggles seem to disappear. That is how I feel when I am with Paula. This includes times we could be doing nothing, but it includes some fantastic times when we get to 1980s bands concerts. We are still crossing our fingers that The Cure will tour Australia again; we are very prepared to travel to New Zealand if we have to. It includes the times we get to watch the mighty Melbourne City Football Club at AAMI Park, hopefully beating Victory – yes, I am looking at you, Michael Galea – and the times we get a chance to sit on the couch and catch up on episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful*; yes, Ridge is a dick. Essentially I am a homebody, and home for me is wherever Paula is. Of course the best, most fantastic thing we share is our wonderful family. We are so fortunate. Our daughters Jackie and Moni, who we love dearly, are just such all-round wonderful people, and they always have been. The blokes they are with, Tim and Matthew, are just terrific people as well. They are all such fantastic parents to the four little rascals. Winnie, Jules, Sam and Ben bring us so much joy and laughter and sometimes the odd unintentional bruise. They are so adorable, and of course we must and we will spoil them. That is a grandparent's duty. I want the rascals to always remember something: 'You're so groovy. Yeah!'

As far as being fortunate goes, as a member of Parliament I have mentioned a lot of people in the past few weeks by name that have really helped me be afforded the privilege. I feel fortunate as an MP, and we all should, that we have the opportunity to mention people that are important to us on and leave it on the public record. There are some others that I need to show appreciation to today. The support of the plumbers union has been invaluable to me. Earl Setches is an absolute champion. He is kind of like one of those mad genius guys, but he has always had my back. But it is not just Earl; it is Paddy, the Menzies brothers and so many men and women at the plumbers union: a union, in conjunction with the Master Plumbers, that supplies free quality training for not just their members but their members' family members, which is an amazing thing. There is an employee at the plumbers union that has been such a great mate for so long, and he is such a great man: Paul Coffey. The time Paula and I spend with Paul and his wife Janelle so greatly enriches our lives. I also want to acknowledge the Electrical Trades Union. The ETU have been doing a great job in representing electrical workers. I know back when I was there I was annoying the bejesus out of the leadership and probably everyone else. I acknowledge that at the time it was suggested that maybe I should consider moving on and becoming a member of Parliament because of it. In the end it has been the best outcome for all concerned.

Of course I have to thank the leaders of my party and also the leaders of this chamber, who have afforded me so many great opportunities: the brilliant Steve Bracks and John Thwaites; John Brumby – I owe a lot to John Brumby, and if it was not for John, I would not have been an MP for as long as I have been; Rob Hulls, whom I always looked up to, not just because he could swear for Australia; Daniel Andrews, who afforded me so many opportunities and led the party to three elections; James Merlino, a person with a big heart who was always a great sounding board; likewise Jacinta Allan, whom I am also indebted to for the opportunities she afforded me; and of course Ben Carroll and Gabrielle Williams, whom I have worked together with over the years on a lot of good things. I also thank the leaders of this house John Lenders and my good buddy Gavin Jennings. In the

early days, when a lot of people thought I was a Martian, Gavin Jennings afforded me so much time and so much advice. A lot of the time we spent just laughing, but I think that is a good way to learn as well. That is a pretty easy way to learn. And Jaclyn Symes – I am not sure if I am right or not, but I feel that Jaclyn was the most chill about what I could potentially say in this chamber during any contribution, because no-one knew what I was going to say in here, especially me.

To my colleagues: we spend so much time in here together. I have to say it has been my pleasure. Our internal levity has always been our best relief in here, whether it is just me and Terps catching up and having a laugh about stuff happening in our shared electorate or the time when, while sharing an office with Harriet Shing, we co-wrote *Sky Rail*, the Broadway musical. It has been such an excellent adventure. In saying that, I am pretty sure all the people I have mentioned looked at me as someone that was a bit out there, but fortunately for me, they saw past that and put trust in me to get some important stuff done. I want to acknowledge staff members of the leaders who were important to me, including Johnny McLindon, Lissie Ratcliff, Jessie McCrone, Ben Foster and others.

I feel so fortunate to have been a member of Parliament of the state of Victoria. In the early days of being an MP, two mothers of sons with high degrees of autism came to me and told me they were desperately advocating for an autism-specific secondary school in the outer-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It was an absolute privilege that they let me join them in their advocacy to ministers and departments. It is all to their credit that the Eastern Ranges School has been operating in Ferntree Gully for many years now.

I feel fortunate to have worked with Jacinta Allan in the early days of the new government when she held the transport infrastructure and employment portfolios, and she made sure the social spend was inserted into the project tenders. She and Daniel Andrews sent me out to get the policy moving on our projects. I feel fortunate that Gavin Jennings gave me the opportunity to assist in developing the government's first social enterprise framework. You are not always completely sure how something like the social enterprise framework is going to be received, but probably short of a year after it was launched I caught up with the boss of Social Traders, who told me that he and a department head were going to a Scandinavian country to do a TED Talk on Victoria's social enterprise framework. I cannot remember them being involved in the development too much, but it is all good. Our framework and our social spend on the larger government projects afforded me an opportunity to meet so many fantastic social enterprises. Because of the framework, because of the social enterprise spend in the tenders, those enterprises, for example, that supply work for men and women with intellectual disabilities – good work on award rates – these policies have caused or helped those enterprises to absolutely thrive.

I feel fortunate to have been the President of the Legislative Council in the last Parliament and that I was in a position to push the kitchens of the Parliament to stay open in whatever fashion they could to give the catering agency workers a chance to maintain a wage during COVID. I feel fortunate to have a buddy in Brendan Nottle from the Salvos, who told me because of the nature of COVID he could not keep his kitchen going down at Bourke Street – a kitchen that fed hundreds of people every day. We put two and two together, which resulted – this is a figure that catering is quoting – in 1.8 million meals being produced to feed people that needed a lift, out of our kitchens here. I feel fortunate to have another buddy Paul McConville, who is the head of the Parliament's catering. He and I had a lot of good contacts at other charities. As far as the meals coming out of here goes, we enlisted not just Salvation Army 614 – I have got to say there is no show without Brendan Nottle, but not just 614 – we enlisted the Lazarus Centre and Heaven at the Hill at St Peter's Eastern Hill, Father Bob's Foundation, Melbourne City Mission, St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria and St Mary's House of Welcome onto the program when meals were coming out of here for people that needed it. And then something really cool happened: other state parliaments followed our lead. They saw what we were doing, and other parliaments in different states of Australia followed our lead, opened their kitchens and started producing meals for people in need during COVID. Then the federal Parliament joined in.

And then something even really cooler was that our friends across the sea in New Zealand opened up their Parliament's Beehive and started to produce meals out of their kitchen. So here, we are leaders.

I feel really fortunate to have been the Minister for Veterans when veterans were pushing for a royal commission into veteran suicide, and the cabinet agreed to my submission that our government should be the first jurisdiction to go against the grain and openly push for it.

I feel fortunate that at the time I was the Minister for Local Government – local governments can cop a really bad rap, but they do a power of good work. You just have to look at our Victorian public library network, which is such a wonderful jewel in the crown of our state, and its amazing, extensive services are free. When I was the minister, I visited a very small library at a very small regional town, and I was a little bit scared of the librarian. She had a Gough Whitlam badge on. She was a little bit older than me, believe it or not, I thought. Anyway, we are doing the minister tour thing, and she looks at me and she goes, 'You and I are going to have a chat, away from everyone.' So we had a chat away from everyone, and she said, 'You know what your job is?' And I go, 'I'm expecting you are going to tell me.' And she said, 'Your job is to make libraries stay free for everyone.' And I think collectively, as the people that come in here, that is all of our jobs.

Moving forward, I can tell you I have written two books. One was a political cartoon book that I did a long time ago, and it went all right with a couple of people. Another book, just about stuff, took me 10 or 12 years to write. I think I am the only one who has completely read it and I like it, so that is all right; that is all that matters. I am glad to announce today that I am working on a couple of other books. One book title will be *People That Have Been Lucky to Have Met Me*, and I have started naming people in alphabetical order. There will be a number of volumes. The first volume is quite thick, and it goes from A to Dan – you are supposed to laugh at that. Another concept I am working on is an illustrated book, which I plan to illustrate myself. That is going to be called *How to Be an MP for Dummies*, and it is going to contain a number of little tips. One of them is: do not be the first one to stop clapping when your leader is getting a round of applause. But I am not too sure how this book is going to go, because right now I am going to completely give away the crux of it.

If you are like me at all, the first time you get elected you go, 'Oh, beaut,' and then a millisecond later you think to yourself 'What does an MP do?' And so you come into Parliament House, and it does your head in about when you are supposed to stand in your place and what type of contributions you are supposed to do at any given time of the day. And you are bound to have to say naff things like 'pursuant to' and 'the other place'. And then something fantastic happens. You go out to the electorate, and you are privileged to meet so many good people that are doing good things for other good people that are doing and pushing for good causes, and it dawns on you that that is probably your job – to acknowledge them and their good work. And if you are privileged enough to be asked, you advocate for them to have the ability to do more good work. If you are lucky enough to be given duties on top of the privilege of being an MP, you get the opportunity to advocate for certain stakeholders right across the state. And after you do that, what we do in here makes so much more sense. That is it: our job is to represent and advocate. It kind of starts and ends there.

For example, if a school councillor approaches you as an MP for help to advocate for them for a capital improvement at their school, it is not your initiative, it is theirs. And if their advocacy is successful – and you might have helped – you do not build that part of the building. You do not teach in that new part of the building. If a health network enlist you to help to advocate for the installation of a specialised piece of equipment in one of their hospitals and they are successful, you may have assisted, but you do not install it and you do not operate this piece of equipment that could be saving people's lives. We advocate. We represent. That is it. We may be advocating for a constituent or a stakeholder to ministers or departments or other levels of government – for health networks, education facilities, sporting associations, NGOs. The scope of where you can operate your advocacy is only limited by the network you have developed. We are fortunate. If you are fortunate enough to have 'MP' on the end of your name, it can go a long way in assisting an institution or corporation getting focused to assist that person in their issue when you approach them, and you should never waste that.

In early days again I got invited out by the president of the council of the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre. We walked around the centre, and he showed me this little extension. He showed me this blank wall and went, 'This place here – we want to put a TV there, but we haven't got a power point and an aerial.' And he was looking at me, and I went, 'Oh, okay. Well, I think I know some good electrical contractors that will be prepared to come and install a power point for free, because you do such good work.' I am looking at Tom now. I said, 'Some electricians aren't great at installing aerials, so you want to get that right, so let me have a think about that.' So I went back to the office, and I was thinking about it at the time. I am driving back to the office. There is an ad on the radio for Mr Antenna. So I got back to the office, and I got on Mr Antenna's website, and the only space you could communicate with Mr Antenna on his website was a little block for complaints – and limited words as well. So I wrote, 'Hi, Mr Antenna. I'm a member of Parliament. My name's Shaun Leane. The cerebral palsy centre – they need an aerial. Any chance you could send out one of your people to install an aerial for free so they can do some good work?' Too many words. Anyway, I got it in there – send. And then about a week and a half later I get an email from Mr Antenna. Mr Antenna emails me, and he goes, 'Absolutely, sir. We'll send one of our franchisees out there and they will install an antenna within the next couple of weeks' – winning. Those sorts of things just make your job. So we are advocates for good people and good things.

In my book *How to Be an MP for Dummies* I will pose the question: how does an MP know they have done a reasonable job? When my buddy Gavin Jennings left here, after he gave his last speech, I got up and said that how an MP has performed their role is so subjective. You have days when a constituent might tell you you are a hero for helping them out. Some MPs might like to think they are actually heroes, but we are not heroes. A lot of people think all MPs are villains, but we are not villains – at least the majority of us are not. Mainstream and social media might share their view on your performance freely, political commentators as well. Political commentators – there would be a growth industry. It seems like now you kick any tree and three of them will fall out. Your political opponents might share their critiques freely. Your colleagues might share their views about how you are travelling, sometimes even when you are in the same room as them. But I am going to say that a long time ago it dawned on me that there is one person that really knows how hard you have gone, and that is yourself. We know how hard we have gone. You know how many times fatigue has gotten the better of you, and you know how long it has taken to snap yourself out of it. You know how many times you have been kept awake at all hours of the night thinking about how you can best advocate to get good things across the line as opposed to thinking about self-interest and the next extra title you might be able to grab. You know you have opened yourself up when you clearly believe you need to push against the tide and what issues you have avoided taking on because it has made your life easier. In my opinion, the person staring back at you in the mirror has the best idea of how you have gone. And of course everyone wishes they could have their time again in certain situations and maybe approach them differently. In saying all of that, in the future when I look myself in the mirror and reflect on my time as an MP, I am going to be okay.

Members applauded.

Sitting suspended 6:51 pm until 7:06 pm.

Wendy Lovell

Valedictory statement

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:06): Representing the people of Northern Victoria Region, and before that North Eastern Province, in the Victorian Parliament has been the greatest privilege of my life. I thank the Liberal Party for having the faith in me to serve six consecutive terms and my constituents for electing me six times. I was first elected on 30 November 2002, 24 years ago. On that day I won a seat for the Liberal Party that we had never held before, and my election was very much against the tide for that election. When I think back to that night it seems a very long time ago, and 24 years is a long time, but I have been so busy and so happy doing what I do that it also seems as

if that time has just flown. I stand here 24 years later as the longest serving female in the history of the Victorian Legislative Council and the third-longest serving female in the history of the Victorian Parliament. I am also the longest serving Deputy President of the Legislative Council and the second-longest serving Liberal female in the Victorian state Parliament. None of these were milestones that I set out to achieve. In fact I thought I would be lucky to serve a single term, because after I was elected the Labor government announced that they would make changes to the upper house, and one of those options was to abolish it.

I want to particularly thank those people who were there from the start, who helped to get me elected to this place. Thank you to Ian Carson and Peter Clarke, who were the state president and state vice-president at the time. If it was not for the two of you taking me out for a coffee and a very serious conversation after a Friday morning state executive meeting, I would never have put up my hand. Your belief in me, along with the encouragement I was getting from my local community, gave me the confidence to stand. At first, I saw standing as a valuable experience, but I never truly believed I would win. Perhaps that is what drove me to campaign so hard. I won my seat through sheer hard work, doorknocking until my feet bled. I have often joked that I had a different set of bandaids for every pair of shoes I owned. But it was no joke, it was actually true.

I will also be forever indebted to the assistance I received from my very dear friend the then member for Murray Sharman Stone, the then member for Benambra Tony Plowman and the then member for Indi Sophie Panopoulos. I want to pay tribute to a group of local Liberals who will forever be very special to me. We call ourselves Team Murray because these are the Liberals who initially came together to assist Sharman to win the seat of Murray in 1996: Bill and Gwen Parsons, Barry and Lorraine Smith, Del and Gerald Brown, Lou and Doc Brown, John Taig, Rob and Doug Watson, Annie Donaldson, Gail and Willem Van Zeist, Dougie Stone and Bill Hunter. Team Murray are far more than party volunteers. They are my friends, my advisers and my constant source of support.

Bill Hunter holds a special place in my story. It was Bill who encouraged me to attend a Young Liberals meeting when I was just 15 years old. As a result, I joined the Liberal Party on my 16th birthday. That one simple conversation helped set the course of my life.

I also want to thank all those people who have served in positions on my electorate council but particularly those who have held the position of chair: Barry Smith, Bill Parsons, John Lithgow and Brad Hearn. I also extend my thanks to our long-serving secretary Tony Schneider, to my Liberal family, to my branch members and to the dynamic women who make up our local women's sections. I will be forever indebted to you for your encouragement and support and for being my eyes and ears throughout the extremely large electorate of Northern Victoria Region.

To my parliamentary colleagues, I thank all of you for your support and friendship. Politics takes us all away from our families, but this is especially true for those of us from regional Victoria, and often our colleagues are our family away from home. Some of my happiest memories of Parliament are of the years I shared an office with my two dear friends David Koch and John Vogels. There are plenty of good stories I could tell you about that office, but it is probably better that I do not.

To those who have led our party over the past 24 years – Robert Doyle, Ted Baillieu, Denis Napthine, Matthew Guy, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Brad Battin and Jess Wilson – I thank you for your support but also for your tireless efforts on behalf of the Liberal Party. Being the leader of a political party is never an easy job.

I was fortunate to be given portfolio responsibilities from my very first day as a member, and I have held positions ever since, including as a shadow minister for multiple portfolios, Minister for Housing and Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, and in the Legislative Council as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, Deputy Leader of the Government, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, leader of opposition business, manager of government business, opposition whip and Deputy President.

I will be forever grateful to Ted Baillieu and Denis Napthine, who bestowed upon me the great honour of serving in their cabinets as the Minister for Housing and Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. As Minister for Housing I inherited a portfolio in crisis. The waiting list had blown out to 41,212 families. The Auditor-General tabled a report that stated that more than 10,000 of the department's properties were uninhabitable due to Labor's lack of investment in maintenance. In my first briefing with the secretary I was advised that the Office of Housing would be trading insolvent by the end of March. Turning the department around was like turning the *Titanic*, but fortunately we managed to avoid the iceberg.

We went on to do some very good work in my four years as minister. We stabilised the budget, cleaned up drug activity on the inner-city high-rise estates, invested in maintenance to save some of the homes and commenced the redevelopment of entire estates, including New Norlane in Greater Geelong and Olympia, the former Olympic village in Heidelberg West, at little or no cost to the state. We built around 8300 new homes, upgraded a further 8150 and reduced the waiting list to 34,320, a reduction of 6892 families. In comparison, there are now 58,021 families languishing on Labor's ever-growing waiting list, an increase of 23,701 families. Of even greater concern has been the blowout of the priority waiting list from 9625 to 33,253, an increase of 23,628 families under Labor. These are some of our state's most vulnerable families: those who are escaping domestic violence, who are homeless, who are living with a disability or who have a special housing need.

My proudest achievement in the housing portfolio would have to be the Education First Youth Foyers. The foyers are 40-room student accommodation style apartments for homeless youth. They are co-located with TAFE and provide subsidised housing and counselling services to young people who, due to unstable housing, are disengaging with education. In return, the young people commit to a mutual obligation to participate in education, training or work. I built three youth foyers in Shepparton, Broadmeadows and Glen Waverley, and I worked with Richard Wynne, the minister who replaced me, to get a commitment for two more in Wodonga and Wangaratta, both in my electorate. Around 1200 young people have benefited from support in a youth foyer since we opened the first one in 2013, and incredibly 89 per cent of them have left the program engaged in further education, employment, or both. I have also heard of more than a dozen students from the Shepparton youth foyer who have now gone on to purchase their own homes. Taking a young person from couch surfing and disengagement from education to completing their studies, building a career and purchasing a home is life-changing for the individual and saves governments millions over that person's lifetime. The foyer program is good Liberal policy because it focuses on investing in people to ensure they can build better lives rather than just providing a handout and keeping people welfare dependent. I am incredibly proud to have written the policy for the Education First Youth Foyers and to have seen them through to delivering real results.

In the early childhood portfolio I was proud to lead the sector through a period where we invested in children, educators and new facilities. We provided record funding for grants to expand or build hundreds of kindergartens and integrated early education and care centres. We commenced building integrated children's centres on primary school sites to provide a one-stop shop for families and better transitions for children. We also provided record funding to train new educators and for existing educators to improve their qualifications. We invested in children by increasing the hours children attended kindergarten programs, and during my term as minister more than 97 per cent of four-year-olds participated in kindergarten, which was a record for our state. We also increased the participation of Indigenous children in four-year-old kindergarten from 57 per cent to 95 per cent and commenced free three-year-old kindergarten for Indigenous children and children known to child protection. Later in my term as minister I had the opportunity to guide the rollout of improved services right across the nation as the chair of the ministerial council during a period when the national laws brought the rest of the country up to Victoria's standards.

If I had to sum up my career as a local member in six issues, they would be: bushfires, drought, floods, water policy, a health service crisis and potholes. Natural disasters have been a constant throughout

my career, beginning with the millennium drought and its impact on our primary producers. I have never taken a break over summer due to bushfires, with major fires occurring in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2015, 2016, 2019–20 and 2026. The bushfires were interspaced with floods in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2022. And if there was a summer without a fire or a flood, a storm would wipe out our fruit crops. Potholes have of course been the biggest issue regional Victoria has had to deal with over the past four years, but water policy has been the issue that has affected our region the most. We have had our fair share of debate and change, including green papers, white papers, the Living Murray, the unbundling of water and land and the Murray–Darling Basin plan.

On a local level there have been many projects that I am proud to have played a part in delivering, including, but certainly not limited to, the GenesisCare radiotherapy service in Shepparton; investment in hospitals in Shepparton, Echuca, Wangaratta, Benalla, Kilmore and Seymour; the Echuca–Moama bridge; the widening of the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway; reinforcement of the Eildon Dam wall; the suicide barriers on the Melrose Drive overpass in Wodonga; the Annie North women's refuge in Bendigo; and the Liberals' election commitment to duplicate Donnybrook Road from the Hume Freeway to Epping Road.

Of course some of the most important work we do we cannot actually talk about, and that is the work we do to assist individual constituents, and our office has helped thousands over the years. But I do want to tell one story of a family that I helped very early on in my career. This family had a young boy called Matthew. He was 10 and he was autistic. Matthew had an IQ of I think about 72. It was just above the cut-off level for attending a special developmental school, which meant he was in mainstream school. Matthew's long-term outlook in life had been such that they had told his parents that he could learn to read and write and that he could probably get a drivers licence but would never hold down a long-term job. But because Matthew became violent when he became frustrated, every school they enrolled Matthew in had a 'no reading or writing' policy for Matthew. That meant he was not even going to fulfil his limited potential. They had worked with many MPs before they met me and had had no result for Matthew. I worked with the Department of Education, with the minister and with the special developmental school in his home town, and we got Matthew dual enrolled in the developmental school and mainstream school. His mother wrote to me at Christmas time that year to say that he had actually written her a note that was three sentences long. She said, 'You have no idea what a difference you have made to my son's life.' That was my first real win for an individual, and it has always stuck with me. It was something that blew me away: that as MPs we could make such a difference to a person's life. I am only sorry that that help did not come until Matthew was 10. He should have had that help from his early developmental years.

Some of the best fun I have had in my career I have shared with David Davis. Together we led the coalition in the Legislative Council from January 2008 to December 2014. During that time we were both part of Ted Baillieu's leadership team that led our party into government. As leader and deputy leader of the government we did not lose a single division in the upper house. Together we have run campaigns that have resulted in real benefits to local communities in Northern Victoria, starting with the Rochester hospital. In January 2005 the Bracks government announced their intention to close the operating theatres and acute services at Rochester. Over several weeks we ran a campaign that involved a public meeting with almost 2000 attendees, relentless WIN TV and press articles and parliamentary pressure. Within weeks we had turned that decision around, and the government was forced to invest in a rebuild of the hospital.

The new Bendigo Hospital is another of David's and my achievements. I worked with doctors, nurses and the *Bendigo Weekly* to run a campaign of horror stories about the old hospital, which pressured the Brumby government to come up with their plan to build a smaller hospital over two sites that would have needed to be replaced today. As Shadow Minister for Health, David worked with local medical professionals to establish exactly what was needed to service the Bendigo community. It required an extra $102 million on top of what Labor's small hospital would cost, which was provided by Ted Baillieu as an election commitment. Not only did we build a world-class hospital and an

integrated cancer centre on a single site with 372 acute inpatient beds, 72 same-day acute beds, an 80-bed mental health unit, a five-bed mother-and-baby unit, a 25-bed maternity unit, 11 operating theatres, a multimodality medical imaging department and a regional integrated cancer centre with four radiotherapy bunkers and capacity to expand to six, but we also delivered, on top of that, a 100-place childcare centre, a wellness centre, a 128-bed hotel, an atrium and a cafe, a two-level link bridge over Arnold Street, a helipad, a multideck 1350-vehicle car park, 15 short-stay accommodation units and a conference facility, together with significant infrastructure and landscaping upgrades. What was Jacinta Allan's reaction to the Liberals' bigger and better Bendigo Hospital? She said, 'It's too big. We don't need a hospital that big.' Jacinta Allan is the only MP I have ever known to argue her community deserved less when it came to health services. But now that it is a success, she wants to claim it.

Another really important local achievement that I owe thanks to a colleague for is saving SPC. As many of you would remember, in February 2014 there was a real chance that Coca-Cola would close SPC. Sharman Stone was on the case federally, but unfortunately her pleas were falling on deaf ears. I was getting much the same reaction from the departments and some ministers, who brushed me off saying it was the commercial decision of a company. It was only after I went to the Premier, Denis Napthine, and pleaded the case on behalf of Shepparton that things started to move. Later that day, I got a call from Denis's chief of staff to say, 'We have a flight booked for early tomorrow morning. Can you organise meetings with fruit growers, the council and SPC management, because Denis wants to see for himself how serious the situation is.' Denis committed to return to Shepparton within a week with his decision. He then had the department put together a package worth $100 million, including $22 million from the government and $78 million in a commitment from SPC that saved an iconic business and hundreds of jobs in my community.

Throughout my parliamentary career I have been driven by several enduring priorities: stronger regional communities, better infrastructure, improved health services, quality education, support for vulnerable people, water security and opportunities for future generations to live and work in regional Victoria. I hope I have done my region proud.

In a few weeks I will pass the baton to Steve Brooks. Steve is my hand-picked replacement, and I thank the party preselectors for also choosing Steve. I am delighted that he will lead the coalition ticket along with Gaelle Broad. It is not often, as a member of Parliament, that you actually get to choose your own time to depart and you get to choose your own successor; fortunately, I have managed to do both.

To my electorate office staff Tamara Kirkby, Rob Loring and Claire Coates and others who have worked in my office over the years, thank you for everything. It is a great comfort to an MP to have good staff and be confident that constituents are getting first-class service. But most of all, I thank you for putting up with me.

To my ministerial staff – Anna Cronin, Alicia Byrne, Matthew Malone, Melonie Yurovich, Bridie Allanadale, Lucy Sinclair, Amanda Redman, Tim Rose, Alysha Murphy, Brenda Segal, Sarah Brown and my driver Peter 'Henry' Lawson – thank you for being an amazing team. Your hard work delivered real benefits for children and families in Victoria.

To the department staff, particularly the then director of housing Arthur Rogers, deputy secretary of early education Sonya Sharp, our departmental liaison officers Kerrie Moss and Stuart Cardell and the secretaries of the departments Richard Bolt and Gill Callister, thank you for everything you did to support our agenda. Together, we improved services in Victoria. I also want to acknowledge Shayne Graham, who died suddenly at the age of 37. Shayne was a much-loved member of our departmental team, and his death broke all our hearts.

To the staff of the Parliament, including the clerks, attendants, papers office staff, committee staff, Hansard, the library, security and PSOs, the catering staff, the cleaners and the gardeners, thank you for everything you have done to support my work as a member in this place. I particularly enjoyed

working closely with Robert, Anne, Richard, Keir, Sally, Vivienne and Annemarie as Deputy President over the last eight years.

Finally, I want to thank my family: Louise, Gary, Doc, Nanna, Maddie and my four beautiful nephews Rodney, Sam, Kane and Jake. Politics demands sacrifices not only from those who are elected but also from the people who love them. You have given your encouragement, your patience and your understanding over many years. None of this would have been possible without you, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And boys, beware, because the fun aunty will now have a lot more time on her hands for all sorts of activities, including interstate footy matches to support our beloved Tigers.

I am committed to working hard for Northern Victoria and the Liberal Party right up to the closing of the polls, because there has never been an election more important to the future of our state and the future of all Victorians. I wish Jess Wilson, my colleagues and all our candidates the best of luck, because our state desperately needs a fresh start with a team that is ready to govern.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve this Parliament, the Liberal Party and, most importantly, the people of northern Victoria.

Members applauded.

Sitting suspended 7:30 pm until 7:51 pm.

Joe McCracken

Valedictory statement

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (19:51): I was looking for inspirational quotes to sum up my time in this place. A Google search resulted in 'Live, laugh, love'. That did not really get me that far. Then I thought maybe I should quote some TV shows that I grew up with. *Little Britain* was one of my favourite shows, and it might reflect the voting in this chamber – 'Yeah, but no, but yeah, but no, but yeah, but no, but whatever.' It had some relevance but did not really encapsulate what I wanted to say. Then I thought, 'Hey, Joe, you're a millennial. The ultimate source of wisdom for a millennial is *The Simpsons*.' In the one I found from Homer, he says, 'Kids, just because I don't care doesn't mean I'm not listening.' And the other one that I found was 'Won't somebody please think of the children?' Sort of polar opposites, those. The practical application of politics was there but probably not the vibe that I was after. Then I thought maybe I would go through and think of some music. Classic 1980s hits like *Everybody Wants to Rule the World* or *Shout* by Tears for Fears had a certain relevance to this chamber. Then I thought that maybe I would go for something a little bit more modern, like *Poker Face* by Lady Gaga or *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* by Green Day – again, somewhat relevant, but also somewhat depressing. Finding a good quote was hard, so I moved on.

Something that has not been hard in my time in this place has been working with the diverse communities of Western Victoria. It has been a huge, huge honour. Serving with 39 other fine people in this place has also been one of the biggest honours of my life. I think the part that I have loved the most about this job is being out and about in the community talking to people, listening, learning and trying to help out where I can, and I hope I have done my community proud. But there is a cost, and it is time. As I get around about halfway through my life, it makes you sit back and think about how much time you have left, and time is precious. So as my time comes to an end in this place, I would like to reflect on some of the experiences and the people I have had the good fortune of working with, particularly in this chamber but also beyond. At the end of the day politics is all about people, and I have loved working with everyone in here in our own way.

Now, I know this place is adversarial, but I discovered only recently that I had a nemesis, or should I say an arch nemesis. Mr McIntosh let me know of his self-identification only last sitting week. But like all good arch nemeses, I know his kryptonite – two words: Jeff Kennett.

When the fires were burning near my home town of Beaufort only a couple of years ago, many people I grew up with were displaced, even my own family. You probably will not remember this, Ms Symes, but you reached out to me as the Minister for Emergency Services at the time, and you checked in and said, 'How are you? I understand your family's under a bit of trouble.' I have never forgotten that, so thank you.

Mr Galea – my next victim – I feel like we have been on committees together since day one. You are kind, you are decent, you are smart and you work incredibly hard. And if you want to join the Liberal Party, I can help you out. I am not sure whoever had the title, but now that I am leaving this place, you are undoubtedly the official godfather of the gay mafia. Run the firm well, my friend.

A few months ago I found a photo of myself and Ms Tierney from when I was mayor of Colac Otway and Gayle was the local member. We were opening a kindergarten. It is a really lovely photo. Mr Galea commented, and he said, 'My God, you both haven't aged a day.' In that moment I almost signed up to the Labor Party, but then my sanity was restored. Ms Tierney, you have always been a good sport, and thank you for your camaraderie.

Ms Shing, I think I have probably asked you, maybe, out of everyone in here, more about car parking than anything else. You are witty and you have a synonym for every word, utterance, phrase, term, expression, statement, comment, remark, message and locution that has ever been conceived. I wish you all the very best in your future as well.

To Ms Watt, Mr Batchelor, Ms Ermacora and Mr Tarlamis – did I say that right, because I never did, Tarlamis; I am only stirring – with whom I have served on committees, and indeed all the members of the government, thank you.

Now to the crossbench – to the Greens, in particular Mr Puglielli and Ms Gray-Barberio, who I have also shared committees with, we have not always agreed, but we have found common ground, and I am very, very grateful for that. Our dealings have always been fair and up-front. Aiv, I fear that I will not be around for any more committees to see Demi Moore make an appearance – maybe some other star might appear in the future. Rachel Payne, we have worked on committees as well. Again, we probably disagree on many things, but it never really became an issue because you always focused on working positively with people. If I consumed some of your wares, I might have been more agreeable too, but I never did, I am sorry. Good luck to you as well.

To Mr Bourman, one of the most decent folks in this place: Jeff, you say you are a simple man, and I agree, but I also think you are a wise man. Thank you for being a mate. I will miss our chats out the back, the banter and the friendship.

Mrs Deeming – if she can be proud of anything, it is her family. I know that is her greatest achievement, and I know that she knows that as well. I thank her for her friendship. I know she has had a roller-coaster ride, but I wish her well in the future as well.

To Mr Limbrick, you are kind of the opposite of Ms Shing – anything that can be said in 10 words you say in two. But I have always been really impressed and humbled to be working with you, particularly on the Commonwealth Games committee and more recently on the TAC inquiry. You are straightforward, down to earth and direct, and I will miss that no-nonsense approach.

My first interaction with Georgie Purcell was before this place, when she was partially responsible for shutting down the Colac Otway email system by flooding it with spam. She probably also saw my angry email to Andy Meddick when he sent me a Christmas card, a vegan Christmas card. To me, though, you will always be a fellow upstart on Neil Mitchell on 3AW. I miss those days.

Ms Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, I knew as soon as I met you that we would be friends. You are my walking buddy, my quizmaster, my consistent plus one but most importantly a true mate. You are a grounded country girl, and that is why I think we have always clicked so well. And you are more capable than you know – don't cry.

To all my friends and colleagues in the coalition, to both David and Georgie – I am getting a bit disorientated now – as previous leaders of the coalition, thanks for giving me a go. Georgie, you asked me to be whip, and David, you gave me many opportunities to lead debates, and I am very thankful to you both. David, if they do not name a bench or a rug or a chandelier or something after you, I would put in a complaint because you are basically part of the furniture here by now, my friend.

To my great friend Mr McGowan, I will miss catching up over a cuppa. I will miss your Irish accent. I am not sure I will miss the short shorts or the wardrobe malfunctions, but I will miss the great humour that you handled yourself with. Ringwood will be lucky to have you.

To Mrs Hermans, or should I say Mrs Magnesium, thanks for your friendship over this term of Parliament, working on inquiries and always being down for a good yak and a long yak. I know after this place we will be able to keep in touch on one of your many phones. Good luck in the future.

Dr Heath, you have always been extremely decent, warm, friendly and beyond loyal. I will miss our evening walks, and you miss many of them too. Your discussions about shoes I will never understand, but I can see you always put your best foot forward. I know you will always miss the neck-cracking – or as you say, 'adjustments' – which I think you actually took a secret little bit of pleasure out of doing. I know that family is a huge part of your life, and I always will consider you a sister – and by that I mean quasi-sibling, not a member of a religious order.

Now Mrs McArthur. I owe Bev many things. Bev, you are hard working, determined and a warrior. That is something I could never match you toe to toe on. Underneath you are incredibly funny, and it has been an honour working with you as a fellow member for Western Victoria Region over the past four years but even beyond that in the Liberal Party as well. I have learned so much from you, Bev, but I fear I still do not live up to the fashion stakes that you set such a high standard on. The work continues.

To my colleagues in the Nats, Ms Bath and Mrs Broad, I have always valued your friendship. Both of you are incredibly passionate about your electorates and fighting for country Victoria. Thank you, and I will miss you both in our own different ways.

To Mr Welch, Mr Mulholland, Ms Lovell and Mr Luu, I am also thankful for having served with you. Each of you have made a contribution in your own way, and I know you will continue to do so in whatever capacity that might be in the future, whether it is with the party or out in the community. There is a lot that you have been able to work with all of us on, and I am very, very grateful for having been even a very small part of that.

I also want to acknowledge some people from the Assembly, including Mr Richard Riordan, who was an old man at the age of 16. Richard, good luck to you and Catherine with your growing grandparent responsibilities. Over the time I lived in Colac they were very, very good to me, and I am grateful.

To Michaela Settle, who I feel I am giving the kiss of death to right now – Michaela and I spent a long, long, long time on pre-poll together. I think I had a verbal altercation with someone from the AEU, and that must have been the attraction, because ever since she has been nothing but thoroughly decent towards me. Michaela, as the senior government MP in Ballarat, I thank you for always acknowledging me at events, for treating me with respect and for the many laughs we have shared.

Nicole Werner – Nicole, that tree outside will have our name on it one day. I will miss you. You are an intelligent woman, and I know you will do great things in the future. Thank you for always being there as a close confidant and a true friend. I know never to ask you for directions, but I do know that wherever I am in the world I will always be able to find you because I will always be able to hear you. Your cackle will ring in my ears forever and ever and ever.

To Kim Wells, thanks for teaching me Chinese with Nicole. To James Newbury – for being the gayest straight man I know. To Bridget Vallence – she is just an all-around good mate.

To the leaders I have served under – John, Brad and Jess – thank you. To Brad and John, I know we probably had our differences on different things, but I appreciate the opportunities that I was given and the work that we did together. Both of them are decent blokes, and I say that despite Brad's hair. To Jess, I will miss catching up for coffee on sitting weeks. Good luck to you at the election. If Victorians do you the honour of electing you Premier, I have no doubt you will do an amazing job.

To all my colleagues in the Liberals and Nationals from right across both chambers, I am very, very grateful and humbled to have served with you.

To all the staff in this chamber and indeed across the Parliament, your professionalism and care is second to none, particularly Adam. He has always been so accommodating with those impromptu tours I have dragged him along to. In fact he is dragging me along – who am I kidding? Phil, for his sense of humour; Greg and Theo, boss and deputy boss as they are well known, and of course Pete; the tables office team – everyone does such an amazing job. Patrick O'Brien from the Legal and Social Issues Committee has had to endure my sense of humour. I am sorry, but he has done so with grace and always a huge smile. To all the staff I have worked with on inquiries, a huge thanks for your capacity, your diligence and all those deliberation days. Sometimes they were really tough, but it just goes to show how good they really are at the work that they do.

Thanks to Sam Groth, who was a good mate. He was someone I respected greatly. I think Sam's family was unfairly brought into the public spotlight, and I would not wish that on anyone's family. I wish you well, Sam, in whatever you do, and I am sure it will be a success.

I would not have made it here if I had not had support personally, and there are a lot of people I would love to name. I cannot name them all, but I certainly want to thank my staff: Margaret Turner, Matthew Verschuur and Jo Huitson – he is up there. Thanks for your loyalty, your friendship and your fun over these years. It has been a genuine pleasure working with you. To my friends at Colac Otway shire, where I was before this place, mayor Jason Schram and former councillor Kate Hanson, I thank you very much as well.

To my friends Mr Chander Sharma and his wife Maneesha, to Mr Sachin Dahiya and Shalini and his lovely daughter Saisha as well, and to Asheep Kaur, I have been absolutely honoured to work with you and learn about the Australian Indian community over my time. I am thankful for those lessons and for helping me make connections, and I am thankful for all the amazing people and organisations you have introduced me to that make up the vibrant and colourful Australian Indian community. I am blessed to have you in my life, and I am blessed that you are here tonight.

To Lionel Skram, who was a mental health and autism awareness advocate – his work is inspiring, as is his art. Thanks, Lionel – a humble man with big ideas.

Thank you to all members of the Liberal Party who have supported me, including the very first people who signed me up, long-suffering Margaret and Daryl Barling, who have put up with a lot. To the people I have met along the way – people like Marcus Foord and to Helen Bath, here with me tonight – you have all been amazing supports and sources of wisdom and laughter. Thank you. The Liberal Party is nothing without our volunteers, and you will always be valued and appreciated.

Thanks to my dad Terry and my stepmum Heather; they have been okay as well. They have actually been quite good.

To my partner Jack, thank you for keeping things afloat at home while I have been away – a lot. I know it has taken its toll. You have sacrificed many things so that I could do this job, but that time is soon to be over. I look forward to spending more time with you and to building a better future together. Thanks for your love and your support. I think I would be lost without you. Now the cats will finally love me, and I can finally get around to doing the side garden.

Now to finish up, I actually did end up finding a quote, by the way, that largely encapsulates my time here in this place. It comes from a well-known Australian TV series, and it is from the opening theme of the show. It goes:

> Have you ever, ever felt like this?
> Have strange things happened?
> Are you going round the twist?

And my answer to all those questions is: absolutely, yes.

Members applauded.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (20:13): I move:

> That the house do now adjourn.

Youth crime

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (20:13): (2828) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny in the other place. Seventeen new violence prevention programs are being delivered through the violence reduction unit. The action I seek is an update on how early intervention and community-led programs will help prevent youth crime and keep Victorian communities safer.

Workplace safety

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (20:14): (2829) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is that the Attorney publicly apologise to the workers of Victoria for her failed workplace protection orders regime. Victorian traders suffered 41,775 retail thefts in the past 12 months, a 30 per cent increase on 2023, on top of ram raids, firebombings and harassment of workers. There were 4823 assaults and related offences at retail locations in the year to March, and there are around 100 violent retail crime events in Victoria every day, more than a third of the national total. Thanks to Labor's wet-lettuce approach to law and order, Victoria has the infamous title of the retail crime capital of the country. Labor likes to parade around as the party of the blue-collar worker but then shafts them at every opportunity, punishing aspiration and promoting feeble excuses for criminals while ignoring the cries of victims.

The coalition twice sought to introduce workplace protection orders. The government even voted against our private members bill being introduced. That same morning the new Premier, whose first job was at Kmart, announced he would legislate the orders himself after months of delay. Frankly, you could not make this stuff up. The act has now passed, after the government opposed coalition amendments that would have backed the worker. These laws would have started the scheme the day after royal assent rather than next year. It would have been more expansive, covering all service-related workers and not just goods-based ones. It would have allowed interim orders ensuring violent repeat offenders could not enter the premises while the retailer waited for the court date. And it would have let police officers, not just affiliated unions, apply on a worker's behalf. But that is not the case thanks to Ben Carroll, and the backlash from the sector could not be more overwhelming. A Coles executive general manager Martin Smithson said the legislation has gaps. Australian Retail Council CEO Chris Rodwell was more absolute, describing the regime as the weakest in the country. Every day of delay leaves workers exposed to the same offenders, the same abuse and the same threats. This is the last sitting week. Caretaker provisions commence in early November. Unless an additional sitting week is called, there is no chance of this being resolved under Ben Carroll and Labor. To the workers of Victoria I say: if you want change, you must vote Liberal.

Medicinal cannabis

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:17): (2830) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to support a government-funded evaluation of medicinal cannabis as a treatment option for veterans and first responders who have sustained work-related injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain. Pharmaceuticals such as antidepressants and benzodiazepines are currently the first line of treatment for PTSD. These medications remain central to treatment, but they are not for everyone. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide identified significant risks associated with polypharmacy – that is, the use of multiple medications concurrently. These include increased risks of suicide and overdose. Veterans reported feeling like zombies, losing their quality of life and connections to community, and family breakdowns. The royal commission also called for investigation into promising new therapies, and this must include medicinal cannabis.

Department of Veterans' Affairs data shows medicinal cannabis use among veterans has grown, with a reported 80 per cent reduction in polypharmacy use. Many veterans prefer cannabis over much stronger, harsher and highly addictive pharmaceutical options, including those prescribed by doctors. An Australian feasibility study involving 3800 records conducted by OnTracka examined whether first responders could be safely supported through a structured cannabinoid medicine program. Over 12 months the study retained more than 85 per cent of participants and found that first responders had reduced nightmares, improved sleep and decreased anxiety. The growing body of evidence and real-world data from the OnTracka feasibility study shows that medicinal cannabis provides meaningful benefits for many people living with PTSD, chronic pain and other complex, treatment-resistant conditions. Given the elevated rates of PTSD and suicide among veterans and first responders, we must enable access to all effective treatments, especially those that allow treatment while retaining quality of life and relationships. Better access and evaluation can help to inform future workers compensation policy, clinical guidelines and funding decisions, ensuring first responders have access to safe, effective and evidence-based treatment. Therefore the action I seek is for the minister to support a government-funded evaluation of medicinal cannabis as a treatment option for first responders and veterans.

Casey bus services

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:19): (2831) I rise with the new title bequeathed to me by Mr McCracken tonight. I rise to speak on a very important subject, and that is buses. I am always very excited to talk about buses in this place, as members may be aware, and my action this evening is for the Minister for Public Transport. The action that I seek is for the minister to continue engaging with communities in relation to the large tranche of bus reforms that are currently up for consultation on the Engage Vic website in relation to the City of Casey. It has been a real privilege to work on and to see these really important reforms that were announced in this year's state budget coming into place as part of a raft of measures across the state, including in the south-east, as I have previously mentioned, the 802 and 804 in and around Dandenong North and bus services in the Karingal and Skye areas as well. This particular consultation is in relation to one of the most significant changes proposed in the budget, and I am very much encouraging all of my constituents to engage with this process. Much of Casey's current bus network was designed in an era when many of those essential connector road links were not quite built yet, as is the case with many new communities that have grown up in the past 10, 20, 30 years. As a result, this presents a real opportunity to provide better, simpler and faster bus services that provide those quicker connections to the essentials: train stations, services, shops, hospitals and everything in between.

One of the things I am most excited about, though, is that we look set to be providing a massive frequency boost to services. One such example – the 888, which runs pretty much in a direct line on Clyde Road down from Berwick down through Clyde North to Clyde – will see its weekday frequencies proposed to be increased from 60 minutes to 20 minutes. That is just one of many examples, including the Sladen Street–Berwick–Cranbourne Road bus, which is to see upgrades too.

I have been working with the outstanding member for Cranbourne Pauline Richards, who has been working very hard to secure some of these upgrades as well, in particular the upgrades to routes 795 and 796. These are the routes that go down to the coastal villages of Casey and the Warneet–Tooradin area from Cranbourne, but they service as well some significantly growing areas south of Cranbourne, such as Junction Village and Botanic Ridge. The reforms as proposed would see these two routes now run directly through these suburbs and estates, providing that closer access, and also see a significant frequency boost from just five times a day to a consistent hourly service. Many, many great things are proposed here as well as to the 836 and 846 in the south side of Berwick and extensions to the 897 and 899, and indeed as well with the new 896 proposing to provide coverage for the first time to the Livingstone estate in Cranbourne East. There are many, many such exciting improvements on the way, and I encourage everyone to have their say.

Cardinia Life stadium

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (20:22): (2832) First of all, I would just like to congratulate you, President, and also Ms Lovell and Mr McCracken on incredible valedictory speeches and wonderful careers. I wish you all the very best in the next chapter. Well done.

On Saturday Brad Battin and I were so proud to join Liberal for Pakenham Radmila Dyson to announce that a Jess Wilson–led government will invest $20 million into the Cardinia Life stadium redevelopment. That means four new basketball courts, taking it to a total of 12; a dedicated show court with seating for 1500 people, which will be such an incredible boost to the region; three new half courts outdoors for casual play; a brand new gym facility; and modern change rooms. This is so exciting for the community for a lot of reasons. It was such a fun day. The place was just packed full of hundreds of young players and their families and friends. When Brad announced the investment, he said it was on one condition: somebody had to shoot a hoop; they had to get a three-pointer. The contestants lined up, and it was young Aaron who really shot that goal and scored himself an incredible place in history.

When Cardinia Life opened in 2006, it was a first-class facility and it was something that locals were so proud of. Yet while we have seen the rapidly growing community, we have not seen the infrastructure keep up. There has been rapid population growth, yet we have not had the hospitals and we have not had the sports facilities and the roads to keep up. Sports have a lot of benefits. Beyond physical and mental health, they also build stronger communities and they reduce crime. The population that Cardinia Life served has more than doubled since its heyday in 2006 and the stadium is not fit for purpose anymore. Kids are starting basketball at 9 o'clock at night on school nights. The stadium is open until 10 pm – it is booked out every night until 10 pm – and every single season, just because of capacity, 20 to 30 teams are turned away. That is about 500 players that miss out. The community is anxious about what is going to happen next, because participation is falling.

I want to give a special shout-out to the people that have advocated for so many years – the local schools; the sporting groups; the 135 user groups that use it; Basketball Victoria; the Pakenham and District Basketball Association, especially Ryan Shallcross; and of course Radmila, who has advocated for this for such a long time. So my adjournment is for the Minister for Sport. The action that I seek is: will you outline to the community why it has been neglected for the past 12 years and why people have not had the opportunity to participate in sport?

Road maintenance

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (20:25): (2833) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to explain to my constituents when the government will be accountable for the dismal state of our roads and start paying compensation for damaged vehicles, medical expenses and loss of work due to pothole accidents. Constituents in Northern Victoria are frustrated and angry at the state of the roads in their region. They are sick to death of having to foot the bill for damaged roads this government has neglected for the last 12 years, putting their lives and vehicles at risk while simply going about their daily travel. Unlike

their metro counterparts, regional Victorians cannot just leave their cars at home and take public transport to get to work, school, appointments or just life. Regional roads are our lifeblood. FOI data received by the *Herald Sun* in August this year covering the 2024–25 and 2025–26 financial years reports that 1809 claims were made for vehicle damage due to potholes and damaged roads. 1786 of those were rejected, which means just 23 motorists were paid compensation. In May this year, Department of Transport and Planning secretary Jeroen Weimar told the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that to that point in the 2025–26 financial year, 592 claims had been made and assessed but only 13 were successful in receiving compensation. That is 579 motorists who were left footing the bill for mismanagement of the road network by this government.

During a cost-of-living crisis, when some families are struggling to keep the lights on or put food on the table, being left to pay for repairs for damage that occurred through no fault of their own could quite literally leave some people on the brink of collapse. Between January and July this year we saw a rise in reports of potholes and damaged road surfaces by 31 per cent from the same time last year. In July we saw both the Goulburn Valley Highway and the Hume Highway fall into such disrepair that over an 11-day period the RACV reportedly attended 49 tyre- and wheel-related breakdowns. We saw video footage of lines of cars pulled up on the side of the highway, broken down, and drivers in distress.

This is not good enough. Compensation for damaged vehicles, medical expenses and loss of work due to damage caused by the abysmal state of our roads should be easily accessible and quickly paid. The government should take ownership of their failing road network and bear the costs, not the motorists.

Community health services

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (20:28): (2834) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health. Community health centres are the absolute front line of our healthcare system. Before coming to this place I spent time working in the sector, including time as the deputy chair of Merri Health, which I have spoken about a number of times. I know that community health centres are not just about a standard GP appointment. For many people these centres are a safe harbour and the only place they feel supported enough to seek care. This is exactly why Cohealth is so important to me and my constituents. There have been a few debates in this place about its future, and earlier this year Cohealth's general practice services were under enormous pressure due to structural federal funding shortfalls. We heard a lot of noise and fearmongering regarding the future of Cohealth, but we actually wanted to focus on the hard work of delivering a solution, and I was incredibly proud to see our Labor government step in to secure Cohealth's long-term future in the inner north.

We are delivering a massive redevelopment of the Hoddle Street site in Collingwood, and this investment means Cohealth will have a permanent, purpose-built clinic on the ground floor, allowing them to continue their vital outreach work and provide integrated medical, nursing and allied health care to the people who rely on them every single day. Importantly, above the new clinic our government is building 69 new social homes. That means safe, secure housing for some of our most vulnerable. It is exactly the kind of practical, integrated policy that makes a real difference in people's lives, delivering health care and housing at exactly the same site. While Cohealth will be temporarily relocating to Trenerry Crescent in Abbotsford during the build, the local community knows their services are safe and their permanent home is secured. I would just like to say it is not all that far from its current site, having worked just one street over from Trenerry Crescent. The action I seek is for the Minister to provide information on how our Labor government is supporting community health organisations across the Northern Metropolitan Region.

Middle Hut battery energy storage system

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (20:30): (2835) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action that I seek is for the minister to reject the planning application to locate a battery energy storage system inside the green wedge zone on Middle Hut Road, Doreen. Battery energy storage is intended to stabilise the energy grid and smooth supply by storing energy when generation is high and prices are low and releasing energy back into the system when demand goes

up. However, current technology using lithium ion batteries contains a risk of runaway fires, so we must be very careful about where such battery systems are placed.

There is currently a proposal to install a massive battery energy storage system, or BESS, in Doreen, which will cover 14 hectares of farmland and paddocks with lithium ion batteries. This project would be a massive industrial facility, and the proposed site for the BESS is simply not an appropriate location. The site is inside the green wedge zone. It is covered by an environmental significance overlay and sits within a designated bushfire-prone area. These protections exist for a reason. The Black Saturday fires of 2009 engulfed this area and local residents still report having great difficulty getting insurance because of the known bushfire risk. Yet this proposal plans to put fire-prone lithium ion batteries right in the middle of paddocks and rolling hills that are not easily accessible to fire trucks. Nillumbik's planning scheme states that the green wedge zone is designed to preserve agricultural land by preventing incompatible use and development. Let us be clear: the battery system would be a large industrial facility that is incompatible with the agricultural, Indigenous heritage and environmental values that underpin the green wedge zone.

Instead of informing neighbouring residents about the controversial plan at the earliest opportunity, the developers left their consultation until the last minute, just before applying. They had a community information session on 29 August while intending to submit a planning application in September and expecting to get approval by the end of the year. A second forum was promised but has never eventuated. The developer acknowledges that lithium ion batteries can experience a thermal runaway event resulting in fire. Yet during the session the proponents refused to answer questions from the floor and left the community deeply alarmed by their failure to adequately address the serious fire risk. As I have noted in a previous speech, in 2021 when the Victorian Big Battery near Geelong caught fire it burnt for three days from Friday morning into Sunday. We cannot have this facility within the green wedge.

Animal welfare

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (20:33): (2836) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action that I seek is for him to provide an explanation for all of the broken promises and inaction that he and his government have presided over. In the past term this government made big promises to animals, people and the planet. But the shameful reality is that the vast majority have been pushed to the side.

Let us begin with the most galling: ignoring their own report recommending a ban on duck shooting. In response to the parliamentary inquiry they committed to measures to reduce wounding, including shooter accuracy testing, by 2025. It still has not happened. The long-promised animal care and protection bill to replace our broken 40-year-old laws that are no longer fit for purpose has been ready and languishing on the desk of at least three premiers and was announced 10 years ago. We are also yet to see the new wildlife act. The existing laws are 50 years old and those are not working either. We were promised action on the sale of fur after multiple examples of misleading labelling, including cat fur being sold as sheepskin or wool. That did not happen, but the government sure wasted my time getting me to chair a taskforce.

The government still has not released its response to the parliamentary inquiry into wildlife road strike, which was due months ago, or implemented its commitments on pig welfare after that parliamentary inquiry. The inquiry into animal rights activism saw only the pro animal agriculture recommendations actioned, and that inquiry happened last term, but commitments to protect animals and improve consumer confidence have still been ignored. Even worse is what happened with the parliamentary inquiry into ecosystem decline, which I worked on with my former boss as a staffer in 2021 – five years later, that report still has not even been responded to. I am not confident that the review into our broken puppy farm laws will be made public, let alone actioned, and obviously it will not be legislated this term. Despite promising to address the law preventing pet greyhounds from running off leash at dog parks, all we have seen is another taskforce report – except we have not actually seen it yet. Poultry

guidelines are delayed. It is easy to blame bird flu, but let us be honest, guys – you were not going to do it anyway. And despite Victoria being the only state continuing the dangerous practice of jumps racing, the government failed to act after the deadliest day in history, instead allowing Racing Victoria to investigate themselves. Promises to let victim-survivors prerecord evidence and protect counselling notes have been delayed until after the election – and that is only some of it.

As this term ends, there is still so much more to do for animals, people and the planet. That is why the Animal Justice Party in the next Parliament matters – so that these issues are prioritised or at the very least the government will still be held to account. Premier, you have had chances to make changes for good, and it is time to justify why you failed to act.

Local learning and employment networks

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (20:36): (2837) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Skills and Training. For 25 years local learning and employment networks, or LLENs, have played an important role in helping young people move from education into employment. LLENs are place-based organisations that bring together schools, employers, training providers, community services and government to help young people stay engaged in learning, build their skills and find a pathway into work. One of the strengths of the network is its genuinely local knowledge. In regional Victoria that matters. Our rural communities are different. Young people can face different barriers, employers have different workforce needs, and services available in one community may not exist in another. LLENs have spent many years building the relationships and local knowledge needed to make those connections work. I understand that the current core funding arrangements end on 31 December this year, while procurement processes for future programs, including School to Work, are still underway. That uncertainty is concerning for organisations that need to plan, retain staff and maintain relationships with schools, employers and young people.

Across northern Victoria LLENs play an important role in supporting young people across our smaller, rural communities. The action I seek is for the minister to provide clarity about the future of this important capability, particularly across northern Victoria. I ask the minister: what is the government's plan to retain the local relationships, employer connections and knowledge built through LLENs over the past 25 years and provide certainty for 2027 planning before the current funding ends? What evidence has informed changes to funding for the broader LLEN role, including whether the cost of losing and later rebuilding this capability has been assessed? And if this capability is lost, what mechanism will ensure local coordination, regional knowledge and connections between schools, employers, training providers, community services and government are maintained? Young people in regional Victoria need more than programs. They need people who understand their community and can help connect them with the right opportunities.

Data centres

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (20:39): (2838) The data centre investment boom is straining the finances of working Victorians, fuelling construction costs, diverting much-needed construction workers and tradespeople away from housing, stoking inflation and putting upward pressure on interest rates. Gaps in regulation have also seen ordinary residents charged literally millions through their power bills to pay off tax liabilities incurred by data centre developers. Happily, the Australian Energy Regulator closed that particular loophole in its Jemena electricity distribution determination, but it illustrates the need for robust regulation if we are to prevent huge multinational corporations steamrolling communities and then asking them to foot the bill. We have been calling for safeguards around the data centre sector since the government announced that it would be ruthlessly attracting investment by cutting regulation.

The government has now released the $5.5 million *Sustainable Data Centre Action Plan*, introducing sensible guidelines to assuage our concerns. Data centres will be required to power themselves, pay for their own infrastructure, use non-potable water and meet consultation, safety and planning requirements. Data centre developments cannot come at the expense of Victorian consumers, we are

told. Unfortunately, I fear it is little more than window dressing – remarkably insubstantial. Despite the plan mandating consultation, there appears to have been no community consultation in drafting the actual plan. It largely leaves oversight of energy demand, grid readiness, water security and environmental impacts to existing planning and regulatory frameworks, which are already chronically under-resourced. And these modest measures will not even apply to the 19 applications currently under assessment – projects which will potentially consume roughly 4 per cent of Melbourne's water use and the equivalent electricity consumption of 4 million to 6 million households. These projects simply get a free pass.

The Liberal Party and One Nation have chosen to watch and wait rather than commit to any action. But whichever party forms government after the next election will have to reckon with this. Data centres are not your average infrastructure project. They need strong regulation. We have to get this right, and if we lose some investors along the way because we are prioritising the safety and wellbeing of Victorian communities, so be it. The action I seek is that the Premier impose a moratorium on new data centre developments until we have a framework that genuinely puts in necessary guardrails and shares the economic benefits with local residents.

Palliative care

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:42): (2839) My adjournment is for the attention of the Minister for Health. There are many issues that are brought up in this place, from lighting in car parks to tax policy and the way our justice system works. Sometimes the issues we tackle are literally life and death. The debate that we had related to the voluntary assisted dying laws was conducted with the seriousness and compassion that it deserved. Supporting people well through their end-of-life journey is very important, and most people do so with the support of palliative care workers. There is, however, a lot of unmet need. I recently met with Palliative Care South East and heard about their work and their proposal for a community hospice centre in the south-east. Within a decade this region is expected to need 57 designated palliative care beds. It currently has access to 21, all of which are hospital based. The model proposed by Palliative Care South East is based on Anam Cara House in Geelong and other services around the world. State government investment would be balanced with Commonwealth investment and private fundraising. This is a modest investment which will likely save money, as doing this well is to do it efficiently and will save money across other areas of the health system. People deserve to die well wherever that is possible, surrounded by loved ones and in a peaceful environment. My request for the minister is a modest one: simply meet with Palliative Care South East to hear about their proposal for a much-needed community hospice service.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Finance, Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Government Services) (20:44): Today there were 12 matters. I will make sure they are all referred on to the relevant ministers.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (20:44): President, I have a number of overdue questions and matters. There are about 20 of them, and if the minister is happy, I will just hand him the list of those.

Enver Erdogan: Thank you, Ms Copsey. That would be helpful.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (20:44): President, I also have a number of outstanding matters – 27 of them in fact. There are 13 adjournments, 11 constituency questions and three questions on notice. If the minister is happy, I will just hand him the list.

Enver Erdogan: Thank you, Ms Lovell. That would be very helpful.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 8:45 pm.