Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 2 June 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

CONTENTS

ANNOUNCEMENTS
Photography in chamber 1719
CONDOLENCES
Hon Robert Ian Knowles AO 1719
Hon Norman Henry Lacy 1724
BILLS
Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026 1727
Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026 1727
Royal assent 1727
COMMITTEES
Electoral Matters Committee 1728
Membership 1728
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS
Construction industry 1728
Data centres 1729
Ministers statements: health system 1730
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission 1731
Homelessness 1732
Ministers statements: vehicle registration rebate 1732
Sentencing reform 1733
Health system 1733
Ministers statements: More Trees for Melbourne 1734
Latrobe Regional Health 1735
Deer control 1736
Ministers statements: early parenting centres 1737
Written responses 1737
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS
Western Victoria Region 1737
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region 1737
Northern Victoria Region 1738
Northern Metropolitan Region 1738
Northern Victoria Region 1738
Western Metropolitan Region 1738
Southern Metropolitan Region 1739
Northern Victoria Region 1739
Western Metropolitan Region 1739
Western Victoria Region 1739
Western Victoria Region 1740
Northern Metropolitan Region 1740
Eastern Victoria Region 1740
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region 1740
PETITIONS
Delburn wind farm 1741
Planning policy 1741
Mernda police station 1741
WorkCover 1742
BILLS
Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026 1742
Introduction and first reading 1742
COMMITTEES
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee 1742
Alert Digest No. 7 1742
Economy and Infrastructure Committee 1742
Inquiry into Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles 1742
PAPERS
Papers 1745
COMMITTEES
Legal and Social Issues Committee 1746
Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers 1746
Select Committee on Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274 1746
Inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274 1746

CONTENTS

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS
Bushfire preparedness 1746
Public lottery licence 1746
Payroll tax 1746
Housing 1746
Department of Treasury and Finance 1747
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Notices 1747
General business 1747
MEMBERS STATEMENTS
North East Link 1747
Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria 1748
Go Girls Foundation 1748
Trust for Nature 1748
National Road Safety Week 1749
St Kilda Primary School 1749
Mount Waverley Linear Reserve 1749
Clarkefield development 1749
Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1749
South West Tech School 1750
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission 1750
Construction industry 1750
Planning policy 1751
Liberal Party 1751
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Notices of motion 1751
MOTIONS
Budget papers 2026–27 1751
BILLS
Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 1752
Budget papers 2026–27 1752
Second reading 1752
Committee 1764
Third reading 1809
ADJOURNMENT
Armstrong Creek ambulance services 1809
North East Link 1810
Police resources 1810
Dingo protection 1810
Carer support 1811
Data centres 1812
Woodland Street, Essendon 1812
Women's sexual and reproductive health 1812
Bendigo rail line 1813
Firearms regulation 1813
Southern Metropolitan Region train services 1814
Kangaroo control 1814
Public transport fares 1815
Energy policy 1815
Donnybrook Road upgrade 1815
Middle East conflict 1816
Western Highway 1817
Illicit alcohol 1818
Responses 1818

Tuesday 2 June 2026

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Announcements

Photography in chamber

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I remind people that there will be a photographer here during the day – they are not here yet – from the Parliament of Victoria.

Condolences

Hon Robert Ian Knowles AO

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:04): I move:

> That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death, on 29 April 2026, of the Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO, and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Council for the electoral province of Ballarat from 1976 to 1999, and as Minister for Housing from 1992 to 1996, Minister for Aged Care from 1992 to 1999, and Minister for Health from 1996 to 1999.

I would like to speak on behalf of the government on today's motion. Robert Knowles dedicated his life to serving the Victorian community across more than two decades in Parliament and many years of public leadership thereafter. He earned a reputation as an advocate and reformer whose work improved the lives of countless Victorians. Born in Ballarat in 1947, Mr Knowles grew up in a farming family and spent much of his life connected to the land and communities of western Victoria. Before entering Parliament he worked as a farmer in Clarendon and later as a loans officer with the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission. Those experiences gave him a practical understanding of the challenges facing rural and regional communities and helped shape his approach to public service. Mr Knowles entered the Victorian Parliament in 1976 as the member for Ballarat Province in the Legislative Council, which is where we are today. He would go on to serve the people of Victoria for 23 years. During that time he built a reputation as a diligent parliamentarian who approached public policy with seriousness, compassion and a determination to achieve lasting outcomes.

As a minister Mr Knowles had responsibility for the housing, aged care and, later, health portfolios. He worked to strengthen palliative care services and improve Victoria's health system more broadly. This work continued with significant contributions to health policy and reform at both state and national levels. He served as a commissioner of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, chaired the Victorian Health Innovation and Reform Council and later chaired the board of the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. Through these roles he helped shape the future of health care in Victoria. Mental health was another cause to which Mr Knowles devoted considerable energy. He served on the board of Beyond Blue, later becoming deputy chair, and he was one of the inaugural commissioners of the National Mental Health Commission. Throughout these roles he advocated for reducing the stigma associated with mental illness and for ensuring that Victorians could access compassionate and effective care.

Mr Knowles's service extended well beyond government and health policy. He gave generously of his time to education, serving on the board of Ballarat Grammar for many years and as chair for more than a decade and more recently as chair of Grampians Health. He remained connected to his local community and to the cultural life of Ballarat, supporting institutions and organisations that enriched the region that he clearly loved. In recognition of his distinguished contribution to public life he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2007. His work across health, aged care and mental health continues to make a difference in our state. On behalf of the government I extend our deepest

condolences to his wife Carmel, his children and all those who had the privilege of knowing him. This Parliament records its gratitude and respect for the life of Robert Knowles and his considerable service to others.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:08): I also rise to support the Leader of the Government's speech. It is a privilege to acknowledge the passing of the Honourable Rob Knowles AO, a man who gave 23 years to this Parliament and decades more to Victoria beyond it. Last month I attended his state funeral service at the Cathedral Church of Christ the King in Ballarat, and as we waited for proceedings to begin, what struck me immediately was the congregation that had gathered to pay their respects. The cathedral was full of people from all walks of life, from all corners of Victoria and from across the political divide, united in their respect and affection for one man. It was a remarkable and appropriate tribute even before we heard a word of the service or from the speakers. Rob came to this place in 1976 at 28 years of age, representing Ballarat Province – a farmer from Clarendon. From his very first speech he demonstrated what would define his career: a serious, principled commitment to this chamber's role as a house of review and a defender of democratic scrutiny. In that inaugural contribution he spoke with pride about Ballarat, its history and its contribution to political life and of the importance of country Victoria having confidence in its own future.

He also spoke eloquently about the particular significance of this chamber and the essential part it plays in democratic government through its functions of review and investigation. He certainly put this into practice, serving on the back bench and on countless significant committees for 16 years before taking on the shadow portfolio of aged care and housing. When the coalition won government in 1992, he became the inaugural Victorian Minister for Aged Care and later Minister for Health. By all accounts those portfolios suited him. They demanded judgement, humanity and a willingness to make difficult decisions in the interests of vulnerable people. Rob brought all those qualities. He strengthened palliative care and improved the sustainability of Victoria's health system. The two psychiatric hospitals sat within his electorate in Ballarat and Ararat and gave him direct experience of people walking into his office facing issues of mental illness. The health portfolio was an experience which did not leave him. It shaped the rest of his life's work.

Jeff Kennett has spoken of Rob with extraordinary warmth. He has said that Rob had more influence on him than perhaps any other colleague in government, precisely because he was calm, thoughtful and never afraid to offer frank counsel when it was needed. It was Jeff who persuaded Rob to leave his safe berth in this chamber and contest the Assembly seat of Gisborne at the 1999 election, believing the coalition would win. They did not. With that defeat Rob's parliamentary career came to an end. Jeff has reflected that he was not sure Carmel, Rob's wife, would ever forgive him for that. It seems she did. Jeff delivered a wonderful eulogy at that packed Ballarat church, a tribute as warm and generous as the man it honoured.

But if Jeff felt any guilt, Rob's post-parliamentary life must surely have absolved it. What followed was, if anything, even more remarkable than what came before. Rob served as commissioner of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission. He chaired the Victorian Health Innovation and Reform Council and the Royal Children's Hospital board. He was an inaugural commissioner of the National Mental Health Commission and served as deputy chair of Beyond Blue. He chaired Grampians Health, where he was remembered in that organisation's own words for his 'thoughtful leadership', 'strong advocacy for patient safety' and 'unwavering focus on improving health outcomes' for people across the region. He gave a decade as chair of the Ballarat Grammar school board and was made a life governor. He was a patron of the Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka alongside former Labor Premier Steve Bracks, because Rob was that rare thing: a figure respected and trusted by all sides of politics.

In 2007 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia. It was richly deserved. Former Labor Premier Steve Bracks called him simply 'one of the good guys'. Jeff Kennett said he would have been his preferred successor as Premier. That two men of such different political traditions speak of Rob in the same register of admiration is so very telling. It is why that church in Ballarat was so full. Rob

Knowles was a serious parliamentarian, a humane minister, a loyal colleague, a wise counsel and a servant of Victoria in the deepest sense of the word. He represented Ballarat with pride. He served this Parliament with distinction. He strengthened Victoria's health system, advanced the cause of mental health, gave his time generously to education and civic life and earned respect far beyond the ranks of his own party. I extend my sincere condolences to his wife Carmel; to his children Edwina, Bob and George; and to his grandchildren and his many friends who so admired him. We are poorer for his passing, but Victoria is better for his service.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): I am honoured to associate myself with this motion. Rob Knowles was a person I knew well. I was elected to this place in 1996, and he had been here for a number of years before that but became Minister for Health at that time. I learned a great deal from him. He was a person of great humanity, honesty and massive integrity and a person who understood the interests of the state and was prepared to advocate for those, come what may. He was a person who grew up in rural Victoria – Clarendon – as a farmer. He had had a number of other roles before coming to Parliament in 1976, but as I say, I knew him closely in this chamber. He was Deputy Leader of the Government at the time, Mark Birrell was Leader of the Government and I was a new backbencher. I watched them at that time work in government, and we would discuss things. Often this chamber used to sit very late – I can vouch for that. I would sit and talk to Rob and listen and learn. It was a remarkable way to understand the functioning of our democracy and the functioning of this chamber but much more broadly as well. He was a person who, as I said, was prepared to advocate strongly for what he believed, but he had a style and a way to do that that was not necessarily combative. But he was actually prepared to put the case firmly, honestly, and clearly, and very often he won through in that way.

Later, when I was health minister, I was honoured to appoint him to the Health Innovation and Reform Council and particularly as chair of the Royal Children's Hospital. He was a person, in both of those positions, who was able to advance the interests of the state, utilising data and research to actually improve the functioning of our health system. In the case of the Royal Children's that was the period when the new hospital opened. I was fortunate enough to be health minister at that time, and he was active through that period. It was an opportunity for him to shine. He did work for Kevin Rudd and the national health reform process – Christine Bennett's committee – and the work that he did there was significant as well. He was respected in that position because he understood health from the perspective of a state health minister, having delivered significant reform in this state in his period in the role.

I want to express my condolences to Carmel and to Rob's children, grandchildren and various friends. The church in Lydiard Street, the Cathedral Church of Christ the King in Ballarat, was packed to the rafters and beyond with people who knew Rob – and people knew Rob in a way that is unusual: they actually had a genuine engagement with him in a way that few people have on that scale. He knew people right across the state, right across country Victoria, right through the health sector. Everywhere he went he was regarded well and loved in many cases. I think we are much the poorer for his loss. I certainly personally put on record my remarkable learnings from him through my observation of him.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): I also rise to lend my support to the government's condolence motion on the Honourable Robert Ian Knowles AO. Rob was somebody that I also knew – not as well as Mr Davis, as he outlined in his contribution here today, but somebody that I knew for many years. He, as many have said, was a man of great integrity and honesty. He did transcend the political divide in many ways, working with both sides of government in roles both at a national and local state level. He contributed in many, many ways not only in the role of a local member but in those ministerial roles as Minister for Health and Minister for Aged Care and other aspects that he contributed to in the Parliament but also outside the Parliament. In those roles he had a very deep commitment to things like mental health, such as in his role on Beyond Blue.

I note that former Governor and Beyond Blue chair the Honourable Linda Dessau said:

> Mr Knowles was a passionate champion of mental health reform, and a man who led with integrity and humanity.

The chief executive officer Georgie Harman also said:

> Rob was a gentleman, in every sense of the word. How lucky we are to have known him.

I could not agree more with those sentiments, because he was. He was somebody that I felt did contribute extremely well to every aspect of public life. He was able to deliver in not only the roles that he did as chair of the numerous health boards that have been outlined by the Leader of the Government, Mrs McArthur and Mr Davis, but also those other roles that he played in his local community.

Rob was somebody that you could approach. I know that when he approached me in 1997 to be part of a government taskforce to work on advising government to look at guidelines in managing diabetes, that is what we did. He was incredibly approachable – terrific to deal with and work with. It was that taskforce, that work that we did, that provided guidelines to clinicians and others right around this state but also interstate, and it was work that I very much enjoyed doing.

I also want to make a point about Rob's ability to contribute in so many other ways. It is often forgotten what governments in the past have done, and he was innovative. That Kennett government was innovative. One of the areas in health was the home recovery services, which was a bit like the current Hospital in the Home. It was a project that Rob was very passionate about launching. The outer-east post-acute care project really boosted services for people recovering at home after discharge from hospital, and this program I think went on to lead the way for a lot of the services that we are so fortunate to have now. It was for assistance with nursing, but it also went to other things: Hospital in the Home or the home and community care service in terms of meals in the home as well, providing allied health services, really getting that connection and wrapping around those services to somebody that needed that support in the home recovering from surgery.

There is a lot we can learn from somebody like Rob Knowles. I know that I certainly did. I was very fortunate to know him, as I have said, in the roles that I played, but equally in my role as Shadow Minister for Health he was somebody that you could always phone and ask for advice. I also lend my sympathies and condolences to Carmel and the family and his friends at this sad time.

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:23): I too rise to acknowledge the passing of the Honourable Rob Knowles AO, who was a giant of the Liberal Party and of course very well known in the Ballarat community. I did not know Rob as well as others did, but everyone says the same thing: he was a thoroughly decent man. Last time I saw Rob he was doing what he always did: giving back to the community that he loved. It was at the Ballarat Hospice Care AGM. Rob served as patron, and as per usual, he was pretty popular and people were lining up to say hello. One thing that characterised Rob is that he gave people the time of day. He always listened, and he was always present. Many people that I have spoken to in the last few weeks said that Rob was not your typical politician. He was quiet. He had a great, wily sense of humour and he could make people laugh. He was able to disarm anyone with his easy manner, and that was probably the reason why he was well respected across all sides of politics.

He served as a minister, most notably in health, housing and aged care, in the Kennett government, because that is where his passion was, and he continued his contribution to public life well after he left politics in 1999. Rob served as a commissioner for the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, he was chair of the Victorian Health Innovation and Reform Council and he served as chair of the Royal Children's Hospital. Those are just some amongst many of his contributions across health, education and community groups. Rob was passionate about improving mental health, and he put this passion into meaningful action by serving as deputy chair of Beyond Blue. Closer to home

and in more recent years Rob was appointed chair of Grampians Health, and I want to read a quote from Grampians Health that they released in the last few weeks:

> As Chair, Rob made a meaningful contribution to Grampians Health through his thoughtful leadership, strong advocacy for patient safety and inclusion, and his unwavering focus on improving health outcomes for the people and communities we serve. His work made a positive difference to the lives of individuals, families and communities across the region.
>
> Rob's impact extended well beyond Grampians Health. Through leadership roles at state and national levels across health, aged care and mental health, he leaves a lasting legacy of reform, advocacy and commitment to better systems of care. Just as importantly, he was known as a generous mentor, trusted colleague and considered voice, valued for both his wisdom and his humanity.

I thank Grampians Health for those words and for acknowledging the huge legacy Rob leaves behind.

But Rob's biggest legacy was his family, and I want to make my condolences to Carmel, his wife; his children Edwina, Bob and George; and their extended families too. Rob will be greatly missed as a calm, measured, reassuring presence in the Ballarat community. His legacy and impact live on through his contributions to community, the people that he impacted and influenced and through the words, deeds and actions of his family, whom he was so proud of. Rest in peace, Rob Knowles.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:27): I too rise to join in this condolence motion for the Honourable Rob Knowles AO, someone who is well known to many on this side of the chamber, and I knew Rob extremely well. When I first joined the Young Liberals at the age of 16, Rob was actually on the executive of the Young Liberals, a generation ahead of me, but I watched his career from that time forth. He came into this chamber, as many have said, on 20 March 1976 and served in this chamber until 17 September 1999, having been the Leader of the Liberal Party in this chamber.

Rob was an extraordinary man that contributed in so many ways not only to political life but also to community life. He was an extraordinary person, someone everyone could look to and admire and someone whom many people loved, not just those in the Liberal Party. Rob was a great family man and raised a beautiful family – his three children Edwina, Bob and George – and was very proud of his eight grandchildren. Rob, as Mr Davis outlined, served in this place for a number of years. He served as Minister for Health, Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Housing. But he also was personally chosen by Jeff Kennett to be his successor, and to do that he needed to move to the other house. Jeff did persuade him to stand down from this house in 1999 and to stand for the seat of Gisborne. Unfortunately, the 1999 election did not go the way that the Premier had thought it would go, and Rob did not win that seat.

Rob did not sit about and retire and just do nothing; Rob got actively involved in other causes in the community and served everyone extremely well. I would just like to read from Rob's funeral notice the list of things that he was involved in. He was the member for Ballarat Province from 1976 to 1999, Minister for Health, Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Housing – I should have remembered that because he actually mentored me as Minister for Housing. He was chair of the Ballarat Grammar school board. He was chair of the Royal Children's Hospital board. He was deputy chair of Beyond Blue. He was chair of the Grampians Health board. He was on the Great Ocean Road Health board, Silverchain Group board, Brandon BioCatalyst board and Food Standards Australia New Zealand board and was a national mental health commissioner. He was a member of the health ministers advisory council. He was commissioner for complaints for aged and community care. He was on the Victorian Liberal Party state executive. He was in the Victorian Young Farmers and Young Liberals. He was on the boards of St John of God Health Care and Global Health. He was patron of the Ballarat hospice. He was in the Clarendon Cemetery Trust. He was an adviser to the Austin Research Institute. He was a consultant to the TAC on healthcare issues. He was on the board of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. He was patron of the Ballarat International Foto Biennale. He was a DrinkWise Australia Limited board member. He was on the Brotherhood of St Laurence board and the chair of that board at the time when I worked very closely with Rob, Tony Nicholson and Tony Keenan to bring in the education first youth foyers here in Victoria. I know that Rob was very proud

of the work that we did there; those education first youth foyers have gone on to serve the community well and to serve the young people who get the opportunity to live in those foyers well. Rob was also on the Anglican Diocese of Ballarat synod.

As Mrs McArthur said, the church was full because everybody admired and loved Rob, and it was a testament to the man – not only the number of people at his funeral but the calibre of people at his funeral. I would like to extend my deepest condolences to his wife Carmel; to his children Edwina Hill, Bob and George Knowles and their partners; and to his eight grandchildren George, Austin, Marigold, Robbie, Oscar, Greta, Winifred and Walter. Vale, Rob Knowles.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Hon Norman Henry Lacy

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:33): I move:

> That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death, on 2 May 2026, of the Honourable Norman Henry Lacy, and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Ringwood from 1973 to 1976 and the electoral district of Warrandyte from 1976 to 1982, and as Minister for the Arts from 1979 to 1982, Assistant Minister of Education from 1979 to 1981, and Minister of Educational Services from 1981 to 1982.

I have just a few remarks on the motion on behalf of the government in recognition of Mr Lacy's contribution to the Parliament of Victoria and to the people of our state. Norman Lacy lived a life marked by service, conviction and a commitment to improving opportunities for others. Years of pastoral work as an Anglican minister shaped his understanding of community life and fostered an interest in education, social welfare and public service that would be of later use in his parliamentary endeavours. Mr Lacy entered Victorian Parliament in 1973 as the member for Ringwood and later represented Warrandyte. He was appointed to cabinet in 1979; as Minister for the Arts, Assistant Minister of Education and later Minister of Educational Services he left a legacy that remains visible throughout the state today.

One of the most significant causes with which he was associated was the campaign to permanently abolish capital punishment. He was a prominent supporter of reform and played an important role in the parliamentary debates that ultimately saw the death penalty removed from the Victorian statutes. In the arts portfolio he oversaw the establishment of the Victorian Arts Centre Trust and the completion of the Victorian Arts Centre, including the iconic spire that has become one of Melbourne's most recognisable landmarks. He was involved in the creation of Film Victoria, which is now known as VicScreen, helping to strengthen Victoria's screen industry and cultural identity. He also played a key role in establishing the Museum of Modern Art and the Australian Children's Television Foundation, institutions that continue to enrich the cultural life here.

In education Mr Lacy introduced compulsory physical education in government schools and paternity leave for teachers. He also recognised the importance of early intervention for children struggling with literacy and numeracy. Through the special assistance program he oversaw the training and deployment of specialist teachers to assist children at risk of falling behind. This reflected a belief that education should provide opportunity for every child, regardless of circumstances, much like the premise that guides many of us today. After leaving Parliament in 1982 Mr Lacy built a successful career in management, education and consulting, and through his work in Australia and China he helped train and mentor thousands of managers and future leaders. He later served for a decade as president of Self-Employed Australia.

On behalf of the government I extend sincere condolences to Mr Lacy's family, friends and all that knew him and worked with him.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:36): I am honoured to follow the Leader of the Government and to speak on behalf of the opposition on this condolence motion for the late Honourable Norman Lacy, former member for Ringwood and Warrandyte, former Minister for the Arts, Minister of Educational Services and a proud Liberal. Norman was born in Richmond on 25 October 1941. His life was one of remarkable variety and devoted service to our society. Before entering Parliament he was a champion basketball player, apprentice plumber, Anglican priest and learned theologian. Those experiences shaped his belief that opportunity, education and personal responsibility were the foundations of any strong society.

Norman entered the Victorian Parliament in 1973 as the member for Ringwood, later representing the seat of Warrandyte. He served in the Hamer and Thompson governments as Assistant Minister of Education, Minister of Educational Services and Minister for the Arts. Throughout his parliamentary career he was regarded as a thoughtful reformer and a strong supporter of Premier Rupert Hamer's vision for Victoria. As Minister for the Arts Norman played a significant role in the development of the Victorian Arts Centre, the establishment of Film Victoria, the Australian Children's Television Foundation and the Heide Museum of Modern Art. His contribution helped shape Victoria's cultural institutions for generations to come.

As Assistant Minister of Education and later Minister of Educational Services, Norman worked alongside education minister Alan Hunt to undertake what has been described as the most significant reorganisation of Victoria's education system in the 20th century. Based on his solid foundational values, Norman believed schools and communities should have greater responsibility and flexibility in meeting the needs of students, rather than relying on a heavily centralised bureaucracy. It is safe to say that Norman was a man ahead of his time. He understood that reform and progress are achieved by having trust in our institutions and the individuals who shape them. It is that very conviction which guided his work in the all-so-important fields of education, the arts and public life.

Upon concluding his services in the Victorian Parliament after the 1982 state election, Norman continued contributing to public life and our state in the fields of management and industry leadership. With the life he lived, Norman did not end his services to the community when he left this place. Norman became a leader in Australia's emerging information technology sector, helping to strengthen professional standards during a period of significant technological change. Through senior roles with the Australian Computer Society, the Swish Group and the Information Technology Contract and Recruitment Association, he contributed to the growth of a vital industry that has become central to our daily life today. Norman was also a passionate advocate for self-employed Australians and small businesses. As president of Self-Employed Australia, he worked tirelessly to advance the interests of independent contractors and support reforms that strengthened protections for small business operators. In recognition of his contribution, he was appointed a life member. It was a fitting honour for a man whose life was defined by service and a belief in the value of the individual.

Norman passed away on 2 May 2026. He will be remembered by many as a dedicated parliamentarian, a reformer, a leader, a man of morality and a significant contributor to the cultural and educational life of this state. On behalf of the opposition, I extend my sincere condolences to his wife Gayle; daughters Fiona, Sharon and Kirsten; son Henry; and his friends and all those who had the privilege of working alongside him. May he rest in peace.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): I am honoured to associate myself with the motion to recognise Norman Lacy, Assistant Minister of Education from 1979 through to 1981, Minister of Educational Services from 1981 to 1982 and, importantly from my perspective, Minister for the Arts from May 1979 through to April 1982. He did preside over a very significant change in the arts and creative industries portfolios. He took on the mantle that Sir Rupert Hamer had left as Premier. But in that period of 1979 to 1982, during his arts incumbency he was responsible for the establishment of the Victorian Arts Centre Trust and for the construction of the theatres, the concert hall and, as the Leader of the Government has pointed out, the spire. There was a challenge in completing those on time and on budget, and there were design challenges, including acoustics, that did provide points of

public criticism. Nonetheless these are very important institutions that have been built and put in place and serve us well, and I note they are being refurbished in the current phase.

He also was active in 1981 with the Victorian College of the Arts. He had legislation passed through an act through the Parliament. Its purpose was the reconstitution of the Victorian College of the Arts that followed the repeal in 1980 of the Victoria Institute of Colleges Act 1965, and this has been an important foundation for our creative sector in the years that have followed. As has been pointed out, he was also active in the creation of Film Victoria in October 1981, establishing a new statutory authority to be responsible for government activities related to the production and distribution of film in Victoria, including film for educational purposes. This has stood the test of time, and increasingly, even now, that institution is playing a very significant role. He was also active in the acquisition of the property Heide II in Bulleen, in Melbourne – the east of Melbourne – and collections of works from John and Sunday Reed and in the ongoing steps for the establishment of the Heide Museum of Modern Art, which was officially opened in November 1981. He oversaw new development of museum policy and the Meat Market craft centre in North Melbourne. All of these are very significant institutions that have survived and continue to play a very significant role in the state's creative and cultural life.

The Australian Children's Television Foundation was an institution that was very much his work. He convinced the New South Wales education minister to come on board. He also convinced the Commonwealth, through Senate committees and others, and every jurisdiction in the country – I think with the exception of Queensland – to contribute financially to the establishment of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, which arguably has had a very significant role through all of those intervening years.

This was a career focused on achievement and outcomes that have stood the test of time. I place on record my sadness at his passing and give my condolences to his family.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:45): I rise today to associate myself with this motion to pay tribute to a remarkable Victorian, a visionary minister, the Honourable Norman Henry Lacy, and extend my deepest condolences to his family, his friends and his former colleagues. Norman Lacy made a substantive contribution to the Parliament and to this state. He was elected in 1973 to the seat of Ringwood and later served as the member for Warrandyte.

Norman Lacy brought a deeply modernising philosophy to the Victorian Parliament, to the Liberal Party and to Victoria more broadly. A lot of people have quite interesting journeys to Parliament, but I think Norman Lacy's may be unique. Serving as a vicar of St John's Anglican church in Healesville, he had a number of Liberal MPs amongst his congregation and also a fair few Liberal Party branch members there, who all very actively encouraged him to seek preselection at the time. They say that the Liberal Party is a broad church, but back then a church was a very common place you would find Liberal Party politicians. I am sure he felt very much at home trading the pulpit for the Parliament.

When we look back on the Hamer and Thompson governments, Norman's role was profound. As Minister for the Arts and Minister of Educational Services he made a significant contribution. As my colleague Mrs McArthur pointed to, he championed the administrative reorganisation of the education department. He saw greater autonomy for school councils, parents and principals as a serious and profound reform. He understood that those on the ground knew what their students needed much better than a centralised department in Melbourne, which of course is a key Liberal principle. As Minister for the Arts Norman recognised the immense cultural and economic value of the creative industries. As has been discussed, when he was minister he was responsible for the construction of the Victorian Arts Centre, the theatres and the spire, so he has left a legacy of bricks and mortar in addition to culture. He embodied the very best of the Liberal tradition: a steadfast belief in individual enterprise, a commitment to institutional reform and a deep-seated desire to lift people up through educational and cultural enrichment. He understood that true conservatism is about evolution, not revolution – a small-l liberal in every sense.

Victoria is richer, more culturally vibrant and a better educated state because of the service of Norman Lacy. His loss is felt deeply across the political spectrum, which is a testament to a life lived with purpose and a commitment to the public good. Our thoughts are with his loved ones during this time. May he rest in peace.

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): I too offer my condolences to his children and their mother – his wife. Of course we are speaking of Norman Henry Lacy, who was born on 25 October 1941 and passed away on 2 May 2026. He was, as we have heard today, the member for Ringwood from 1973 to 1976. When looking at Norman's background, it struck me that like very many of us in this place, I suppose, his early years shaped the person he became. Having lost his mother at the age of 14 to lung cancer and then some short four years later losing his father, he then took up residence at Melbourne University, where he completed his own education. He combined his experience of that education at Melbourne University with his love of Healesville High, where he was taught and where he then went on to teach. Obviously that informed and drove in him a passion for education that we saw in later years, as the assistant minister in that portfolio. But as has been said today, it also drove his passion in the space of the arts. We have heard from speakers today about his contribution. I can only hope that any member in this place has a contribution that has a list of this nature, which includes among the things he managed to achieve as a minister Film Victoria, as we have heard; the Victorian Arts Centre; the Australian Children's Television Foundation; the establishment of Heide; achievements in the teaching space, including specifically of course the thousand special assistance response teachers to help with literacy and numeracy; and in addition to all of that his work in the reconstitution, as we have heard also today, of the Victorian College of the Arts.

As we wind down the number of weeks we have in this place, there perhaps will not be too many more condolence motions to be had – at least I hope not. It is one of those novel traditions and conventions we have in this place, and I think it is one that when I eventually leave this place in its entirety I will cherish, because I cherish the opportunity for each of us to get up from different political viewpoints and from different political parties and pay our respects to ministers, plural. The truth is that in this place each and every one of us as members, much less ministers, makes a contribution that we hope will achieve something – a contribution which takes an enormous amount of time. I appreciate that the burden for ministers in this place is even greater. The amount of time that they spend in their portfolios, which is also true of course of leaders and premiers, is extraordinary. So to continue this tradition – to pay our respects today to Norman Lacy and his family and to speak to the other condolence motion today – is something that I will leave very thankful for and also appreciative that we continue it to this day, because I think it is not often we sit and reflect upon the contributions of those around us.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

The PRESIDENT: As a further mark of respect, proceedings will be suspended in regard to both motions. The house will resume in 1 hour.

Sitting suspended 12:55 pm until 1:58 pm.

Bills

Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Bill 2026

Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Bill 2026

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (13:58): I have a message from the Governor, dated 19 May:

> The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:
>
> **17/2026** Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Act 2026
>
> **18/2026** Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Act 2026

Committees

Electoral Matters Committee

Membership

The PRESIDENT (13:59): I also advise the house that I have received a letter from Dylan Wight, member for Tarneit, resigning from the Electoral Matters Committee effective from today.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:59): (1325) My question is to the Special Minister of State. The Premier was told back in 2024 that IBAC did not have the powers it needed to investigate CFMEU and bikie corruption on Big Build sites but chose to hide that advice. Since then corruption on Victorian government Big Build sites has been estimated to cost Victorian taxpayers more than $15 billion. Why is your government continuing to run a protection racket for corruption by delaying the new IBAC follow-the-money powers until at least 2028?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (14:00): Thank you for your question, Mr Mulholland, and at the outset I want to reject a number of the assertions that are contained in that question. They are quite inaccurate and quite inappropriate. But dealing with the substance of these issues, I want to firstly thank the Integrity and Oversight Committee for the work that they did in the very detailed and complex inquiry that they held about the appropriate scope of IBAC's powers. As we announced yesterday, the Premier and I have indicated that we will be tabling the government response to that report in Parliament today and that of the 31 recommendations that were contained in that report, 29 of which were directed to government, the government will be accepting in principle and giving in-principle support to the vast majority of those recommendations.

Now, there is no question that the inconvenient truth for those opposite is that these are not simple reforms. They are very complex in the sense that there is an integrated integrity system in Victoria, so these reforms do require careful consideration and further work to get the legislative reforms right. As we have indicated in the response to the report and in recognition of the need to do that work carefully, we will be setting up an expert reference group. On that reference group will be the heads of each of the key integrity agencies to work through those complex changes with us. It will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. That expert reference group will report back to me by May next year, and we will bring legislation to the Parliament in 2027.

What is clear in the government response – if anyone takes the time to actually read that response in full, anyone will be able to see that each of the recommendations have interdependencies. It is complex reform that is required, and changes to one integrity agency's remit can impact on other integrity agencies' responsibilities and scope as well as of course the resources that will be required for any expanded remit when it comes to IBAC's powers. We have said that we will give IBAC the power to follow the money and we will ask the expert group to look at the retrospective nature of that reform. We are absolutely serious about a system – *(Time expired)*

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:03): Minister, even the government's own MPs are starting to wake up to the corruption happening on your watch, with one anonymously quoted in the AFR this morning as saying:

> This is a deflection of historic proportions … Anything short of a royal commission is not good enough. Jacinta, Daniel … and Tim Pallas handed over a monopoly to thugs disguised as unionism, who then used that monopoly cartel power at the expense of taxpayers.

Isn't it a fact that a royal commission is now the only way to resolve Victoria's biggest ever corruption scandal?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (14:04): I thank Mr Mulholland for that supplementary question, and if there are allegations of criminality on any Victorian worksite, they should be made directly to the authorities. It is also important to note that there are other agencies involved in that work right now. Victoria Police are charged with responsibilities when it comes to criminal activity and the investigation of that activity. The Labour Hire Authority have cancelled 150-plus licences on the Big Build. There are other agencies that are already doing this work, and the government accepts that in expanding IBAC's powers we will be able to ensure that follow-the-dollar powers are part of IBAC's remit and that there will be the ability for that to be retrospectively applied. The government is serious about getting this work done, but we are serious about doing it in a proper and considered fashion.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: When someone asks a question, can their colleagues not shout down the minister while she is answering. I would imagine the person asking the question might like to hear the answer, and also the chamber.

Data centres

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:05): (1326) My question is to the Minister for Water. Minister, in my electorate of Northern Metro Region proposed data centres have multiple applications with Greater Western Water seeking access to consume substantial amounts of water, including one for up to 3940 megalitres annually, equivalent to supplying 66,000 Victorians or all of Craigieburn. With the boom of hyperscale data centres, demands for water to cool servers to keep them operating safely and efficiently will increase. Minister, what is the Victorian government's forecast of additional water demand from AI data centres over the next 10 years?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:06): Thank you, Ms Gray-Barberio, for that question on data centres. It is something that has come up on a number of occasions in this place before, and I do want to make it very clear at the outset that there are some really strict controls in place to protect existing water users and the environment. Whether it is data centres or primary production, the use of water within the system is something that is subject to a range of rules, standards and regulations, so before providing any approval water corporations need to be satisfied that water security, need and demand can be met without negatively impacting upon communities and other users.

The urban water strategies guidelines were released in December last year by the former water minister Ms Tierney, who did a power of work to engage with water corporations and with industry – and that includes data centres of course. This is about, again, the opportunities for supply, for example, of recycled water instead of drinking water wherever feasible. The technology around data centres is also something that continues to evolve, whether that is closed loop or whether that is a variety of different water sources. It is, again, about making sure that we are reducing the impact upon the water supply, particularly where water security is a priority.

The recently released *Industry Water Connection Guide* reiterates that really clear responsibility of non-residential users to prioritise the use of non-drinking water. To come back to the point that I made earlier, again, the former water minister has spoken to it in this place, and that guide is consistent with the national data centre expectations as well. That has been developed in consultation with industry. DEECA is also developing a statewide water forecast and adaptive framework, which is intended to manage future water use by data centres.

As has been made really clear, we do want to make sure that we are attracting the jobs that come with data centres in the same way that we attract business investment in a range of other sectors and industries, but we also want that to be balanced really carefully against the availability of water, particularly drinking water supplies. To ensure transparency for water usage, any non-residential water

user that uses over 100 megalitres of water every year has to be publicly reporting that water usage and has to be able to be identified by a water conservation program. If there are any additional water needs required, then they need to be funded by the developer – so again, a user-pays system. We are continuing, through DEECA, to work with the water sector to make sure that existing water use policies for data centres remain fit for purpose.

In relation to the question that you have asked around forecasts, again that depends upon the planning, considerations and approvals that are given in respect of applications as they come forward, so to speculate on that and on future applications that might be made I suspect would not be as helpful to you as continuing to provide you with the information over time, which I am happy to do.

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:09): The Allan Labor government has positioned Victoria as the leading data hub in the Asia Pacific. With countries overseas identifying the growing pressure on water supplies as a result of data centre growth, such as the UK estimating a 5-billion-litre shortfall of water per day in the next 25 years, Victoria's already stressed water systems need to be protected. Minister, what are the limits on how much drinking water data centres can use?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:09): Thank you, Ms Gray-Barberio, for that question. We are looking to attract as much investment as we can in a way that balances the availability and the drawdown of water from the system. Again, I would refer you back to my previous answer, which was about making sure that we are not having an impact that goes beyond that which is approved. As at April there are 35 applications being rigorously assessed by metropolitan water corporations. These applications are requesting a variety of different water amounts for the purposes of approval, but many of these applications will be supported by recycled water options. It comes down to the typology of each individual application – the type of water which is proposed to be used. Again, the guidelines do encourage the use of non-drinking water wherever possible, and that also includes consideration of closed loop. This is something we will continue to work on. I am very happy to continue to provide you with information.

Ministers statements: health system

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:11): We know how important it is for Victorians to get the advice, support and care that they need as soon as possible. Our dedicated health workforce continues to provide extraordinary care to Victorians amidst sustained demand for planned surgeries. The latest data shows the continued incredible efforts of our health services and ambulance services amid continued high demand. Victoria is on track to deliver 210,000 planned surgeries for 2025–26. One hundred per cent of category 1 urgent patients are treated within the recommended time, and 84.5 per cent of planned surgery patients are treated within the recommended time – that is up 2.2 percentage points from last year. Emergency departments continue to deliver rapid care, with a median wait time of just 14 minutes and with the most serious conditions prioritised immediately. We have also seen improvements in time to treatment in quarter 3, with median wait times for category 3 patients improving by three days and all categories by five days compared to the same time last year.

But there is always more work to do. We have a waitlist of around 68,000 patients here in Victoria, from the day that they are first referred to surgery to the day that they are discharged, as compared to around 92,812 on the waitlist in New South Wales. That is why we are reforming the way in which Victorians can be assessed by and access specialist care with a new plan that makes care fairer and more equitable no matter where they live. That includes a specialist care reform blueprint developed alongside experts to make sure we can make the system easier to navigate. We will always support our hospitals and health workers, because that is what we do. When the Melton hospital opens in 2029, we will have built 12 new hospitals. Coincidentally, that is the same number of hospitals that when in power the Liberal coalition closed. We have grown our health workforce and we will continue to do so. We continue to invest in people – *(Time expired)*

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:13): (1327) My question is to the Special Minister of State. Minister, will you explain to the house what substantial differences exist between the follow-the-money powers your government voted to block in March and the powers you announced yesterday?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (14:13): Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for your question. I guess the simplest way to explain this to you is: read the government response, because it is a comprehensive response to a significant piece of work by the Integrity and Oversight Committee. The committee's own report highlights the interdependencies across our integrity system, so there are complexities when it comes to coming up with the right legislation –

Members interjecting.

Lizzie Blandthorn: On a point of order, President, I am sitting right next to the minister and I cannot hear her answer. I would ask that if people are interested in the answer, they afford her the courtesy of listening.

Nick McGowan: On the point of order, President, it might assist the minister if the member behind her also refrains from making interjections from the beginning of the answer.

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if time matters. I will actually uphold both points of order in that it would be fantastic if the whole chamber listens to the minister's answer in silence. So I am on board with everyone.

Ingrid STITT: As I was in the process of explaining to those opposite, it is a complex integrity system that has interconnected legislation, and we need to get these reforms right. I take you to the report itself and quote IBAC's own submission to the report:

> IBAC is one part of Victoria's integrity system and changes to one part of the framework can have implications across the entire system. Any amendments to the legislative framework need to be considered in the context of this system …

So you do not need to just take it from me, Mr Mulholland. That is a quote directly from IBAC's submission to the committee inquiry. Since coming to this portfolio I have prioritised sitting down with the integrity agency heads and hearing directly from them about what their priorities are and how we can work together to ensure that IBAC and the other integrity agencies have the powers and the resources they need to continue their important work. The community deserves nothing less.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:16): On a supplementary, Minister, what has changed since March to lead to this IBAC flip, apart from the Premier's diabolical polling figures?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (14:16): I am not going to thank the member for his supplementary, because the way in which it is framed is a little bit more like a Young Liberals conference than question time in the Victorian Parliament. But what I will say is that we have just responded and we will be tabling the government –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: The minister to continue without any interjections.

Ingrid STITT: I was in the process of explaining again that the government response, which will be formally tabled in the Parliament today, goes to the complexities of these issues and the fact that we are responding to a significant report from a parliamentary committee. We are doing absolutely

the right thing here. Further to that, we have explicitly said that we will do this work with the expert reference group, which will have each of the key integrity agencies represented on it.

Homelessness

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:17): (1328) My question is for the Attorney-General Sonya Kilkenny in the other place. Victorians are enduring dual crises: cost of living and housing. Inevitably the most vulnerable suffer, and rough sleeping is increasing. Recent reporting indicates that some local councils have shifted dramatically towards a draconian and punitive approach for rough sleepers. There are reports of the City of Melbourne CSOs being encouraged to roughen up rough sleepers in the CBD, and the City of Port Phillip council is preparing to punish rough sleepers by confiscating their personal belongings. Contrast this to South Australia, where the South Australian housing authority has developed an app called Street Connect, which allows South Australians to refer rough sleepers to experienced and trained outreach workers. People who use the app are explicitly discouraged from treating rough sleepers disrespectfully and from approaching them, and they are reminded that it is illegal to forcibly move someone on or remove their belongings. I ask the Attorney: what is this government doing to protect vulnerable Victorians living on the streets from these alarming local council measures?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:18): I thank Ms Payne for her question and her interest in this really important matter. I will make sure that it is referred to the Attorney-General in the other place for a response in line with the standing orders.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:19): I thank the minister for referring it on. By way of supplementary, a punitive approach to homelessness will almost certainly escalate tension between council workers, security officers and those that are sleeping rough. This will very likely lead to police involvement. Many rough sleepers are forced to beg to survive, and incredibly, in Victoria begging remains a crime. In 2025 I called for an end to the criminalisation of begging and raised the matter with the Attorney-General in Parliament. The department was tasked with considering my suggestion. I ask the Attorney: when will the government decriminalise begging in Victoria?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:19): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question. In line with the standing orders I will refer that to the Attorney-General in the other place for a response.

Ministers statements: vehicle registration rebate

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (14:19): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's extremely popular 20 per cent rego rebate, which started yesterday and is already delivering meaningful cost-of-living relief to Victorian families. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East has contributed to higher fuel prices, placing additional pressure on household budgets. For many Victorians, owning a car is essential for getting to work, school, medical appointments and community activities. That is why we are providing a 20 per cent rebate on light vehicle registration costs paid for the 2025–26 financial year. Victorians can now claim a rebate for up to two vehicles registered in their name, meaning that for people with one vehicle that is a saving of $186 and for two vehicles that is a rebate of $372. Applications are open through Service Victoria and will remain open until 31 July. The response from the community has been extraordinary. Demand has been exceptionally high, with 677,907 applications received in the first 24 hours alone, demonstrating just how important this support is for Victorian households. The initiative forms part of the government's broader cost-of-living package alongside half-price public transport fares across Victoria until the end of the year and permanent free transport for children under 18 and seniors on weekends. Whether it is running a car or catching a train, getting around Victoria should not break the bank. While others threaten to cut jobs and services, this side of the house is

delivering real, practical solutions that put money back where it belongs: in the pockets of hardworking Victorians.

Sentencing reform

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:22): (1329) My question is to member for South-East Metropolitan Region Mr Galea regarding notice of motion 1382 under standing order 8.01(b). Mr Galea, your colleague Minister Luba Grigorovitch, the member for Kororoit, provided a character reference for a taxidriver to gain citizenship who was convicted of indecently assaulting multiple women in Geelong. You say in your motion the opposition should get behind the government's reform agenda to prevent the inappropriate use of character references. Will you urgently bring on your motion, given the serious lapse of judgement by your minister?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I know, and he is entitled to ask a question about when the member would like to move his motion.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:23): I am very pleased to receive my first question in question time. Thank you, Mr Mulholland. It is a pleasure to speak to motion 1382, which you have drawn my attention to today. Indeed these are very important reforms which have been brought in by the Attorney-General. This is a government that takes victims and victim-survivors very seriously, which is why this is such an important reform for particularly those victims of abhorrent sexual crimes. I am a little bit surprised, Mr Mulholland, that you have sought to bring this to the chamber's attention in light of the fact that I believe this notice of motion arose at a time when your colleagues were dealing with a bit of a difficult situation, one of whom is leaving the chamber right now, owing to the fact that character references from people in your own party drew great –

The PRESIDENT: Mr Galea, I am sorry. It is a new thing now. I am very mindful of setting precedents for future parliaments and future presiding officers, so I think you really need to limit your answer to the timing of when you may consider bringing on this motion.

Michael GALEA: These are very serious, very important reforms, notwithstanding the fact that the current situation is perhaps the only way in which the Liberal Party can actually have its candidates vetted properly. However, I do look forward to having the chance to discuss this further in a debate on this motion at a time very soon.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:25): Mr Galea, the Administrative Review Tribunal said the offender was guilty of 'serious past crimes, implausible current narrative, and continuing lack of insight and acceptance of responsibility'. Given the serious nature of Minister Grigorovitch's shocking judgement and the fact that she has written at least six problematic character references, will you commit to debating this motion before the end of this year?

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:25): The comments that you are making, Mr Mulholland, go some way outside the scope of this motion, which is in relation to character references in courts of law, so I would draw your attention to that. However, Mr Mulholland, I would not dare to presume to override my whip, and I will confer with him about a potential future opportunity to debate this very important motion.

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:26): (1330) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last week at Mercy Werribee surgical beds were closed, surgery was cancelled and staff were being asked to take annual leave. Why are our hospitals closing beds and asking staff to take leave?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:26): Thank you very much, Ms Crozier. From time to time across health

services and in response to need there may be changes to the way in which scheduled operations are run, and this is not something that is new or unique to Werribee Mercy. We do want to make sure that we are prioritising the safety of our workforce and that we are also managing the way in which patients are allocated to services based on the acuity of their need and any specific requirements they may have for treatment.

What I can say is that the additional funding for Werribee Mercy's ED – the $95 million that is in this year's budget – will enable that hospital to be augmented in the way in which it provides supports and services, and we do want to make sure that we can also manage the flow of patients through the system, whether it is from EDs to beds or from EDs through to discharge and to referral. We also want to make sure that we are in a position to provide that support to community and to other parts of the way in which the planned care system operates, including a variety of choices for patients and for clients and consumers. We want to make sure that we are delivering the sorts of changes to planned care and the sorts of improvements that have been identified with growth in demand, and this is where we will continue to work alongside Werribee Mercy Hospital to make sure that those needs are being met now and into the future.

I do want to also send my respect to the people who are working on the ground at Werribee Mercy, providing the level of care that they do to meet patients where they are and providing that level of support along the lines of the *Health Services Plan* and the way in which that prescribes the standards of care, which I am sure that you, Ms Crozier, would agree yourself are necessary and appropriate within a health system that must necessarily prioritise the safety of patients and the workforce above all else.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:29): Minister, you said a lot, but you said absolutely nothing in that answer. Minister, isn't it a fact that health services across the state are cutting services because your government has failed to properly manage the health system? You just said needs were needing to be met, but they are not being met. Beds are being closed; surgery after surgery is being cancelled.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:29): No.

Ministers statements: More Trees for Melbourne

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:29): I rise to update the house on our government's work to make Melbourne greener, cooler and more livable through our More Trees for Melbourne program. As our city grows, we know that access to shade, green space and canopy matters more than ever. It matters for the quality of our streets and suburbs, and it matters for families walking to school, older Victorians moving through their local community, workers on hot days and people enjoying the great outdoors. That is why we are investing $9.5 million to plant 500,000 more trees across Melbourne. The program is targeted, practical and focused on the areas that need it most – communities with low tree canopy cover and greater heat vulnerability. It builds on the success of earlier work in Melbourne's west, with hundreds of thousands of trees already having been planted through the More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West program. This is not just about planting trees. It is about improving the everyday places that Victorians rely on. It is about making suburbs cooler and healthier; it is about supporting biodiversity, improving stormwater management and creating better urban environments for future generations; and it is about making sure government investment goes where it can have the greatest impact, because this is what good environmental policy looks like: practical action, targeted investment and lasting benefits for all Victorians.

Latrobe Regional Health

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:31): (1331) My question is again to the Minister for Health. Minister, why was there no orthopaedic surgical coverage at Latrobe Regional Health last Friday?

The PRESIDENT: I just would say that there has been –

David Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: I am just saying the level of detail may not be –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: I am going to call the minister, but I am just saying that that could be a concern.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:31): Ms Crozier, we have been here before, and I will take us here again. When you come to this place and you ask questions with a level of very local granular detail, it is very difficult for me to be able to provide you with a very local granular answer. On that basis, Ms Crozier, I would seek your forbearance as I get that information, and to that end I am always happy, if you would like to contact my office, to provide this information to you. There are a number of your colleagues who do exactly this, and we are in a position to facilitate support and assistance to them. Ms Crozier, if that is the use of your question, then my answer relates to the fact that I will get you some further information once I have an opportunity to seek it.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:32): Minister, this issue was raised on Melbourne radio last week – last Friday. It is in the public domain. I do not know what your staff or what your office are doing, but you should be aware of what is happening in our health services, because they are failing Victorians because of your leadership. Minister, Latrobe Regional Health is a lead hospital under the government's amalgamations. If they cannot provide basic services such as orthopaedic cover – meaning there was no orthopaedic surgeon available between Bega and Dandenong – then how is the lead hospital going to provide backup services and support the communities of East Gippsland?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (14:33): Thank you, Ms Crozier. Again, you are referring to –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr McIntosh, please.

Harriet SHING: You are referring to a very local, very time-specific matter for one part of the state.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, the minister is trying to answer the question.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, if you would like me to seek information for you –

Georgie Crozier: I do. I am asking you – in question time.

Harriet SHING: If you are asking for information, which you have just indicated you are after, then I am very happy to seek further information and to provide it to you.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I think the minister has confused it with the first question, which she was going to undertake to do. But this question is regarding the amalgamations that the government is undertaking and this being a lead hospital. She does not need to get information; she needs to answer the question that was asked of her.

The PRESIDENT: There was a referral to the specialist as well.

Georgie Crozier: No. How is the lead hospital going to provide backup services?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, there was a referral, which –

Georgie Crozier: Would you like me to repeat it?

The PRESIDENT: No. The minister has got 2 seconds. Minister, do you want 2 seconds? No.

Deer control

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:35): (1332) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Minister, the deer population has grown to over a million, and they are devastating native forests across much of the state. Why are deer still listed as a protected species in Victoria?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:35): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in our deer management strategy. I will note that we are working to make deer control more effective through strong science and research, as guided by the *Victorian Deer Control Strategy*. I recommend everyone get a copy of that strategy. Escalating deer populations is a major and complex challenge across the state. We do know that there is a biodiversity challenge, and our approach on this issue is clear and pragmatic: given the scale and distribution of deer across Victoria, statewide eradication is not the goal. Instead we are focused on reducing the impacts of deer where they matter most – protecting high-value environmental, agricultural and community assets. Deer management is an important shared responsibility, with government working in close partnership alongside public agencies, private landowners, traditional owners and the broader community to deliver effective outcomes. Our government supports the safe and regulated use of hunting as an important management tool, and as I stated earlier the deer management strategy is the lead in this.

The classification of certain deer species as game under the Wildlife Act 1975 does not prevent control when deer are causing damage on public or private land, and land managers no longer require an authority-to-control-wildlife to manage deer – except for hog deer, that is – subject to conditions under the relevant orders, and controls remain available to public and private land managers using both recreational and professional management methods where deer impacts are significant. Therefore I reject the broad premise that it is not possible to manage deer. It is, and therefore they are not a protected species.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:37): Minister, you would be well aware that we need to cut the population of deer by at least 35 per cent per year in order to stop it from increasing further. What percentage of population reduction was achieved for deer through the government's programs last year?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:37): I thank Ms Copsey for her supplementary question. We are working to make deer control more effective through strong science and research as guided by the strategy. This includes investing in research of deer populations and their impacts, improving monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and ensuring that decisions are guided by robust, evidence-based data. Importantly, our strategy aims to reduce risks to public safety and to better protect native ecosystems and threatened species from ongoing damage. Our long-term vision is simple but ambitious – that deer no longer cause significant harm to Victoria's environment, to agriculture or to community wellbeing.

Katherine Copsey: On a point of order, President, with 30 seconds remaining, I ask that the minister answer the question that I posed.

The PRESIDENT: I will call on the minister, but as far as the level of detail goes, the expectation for the minister to have that off the cuff would, I imagine, be problematic.

Enver ERDOGAN: I appreciate your guidance. In relation to the specifics in terms of the number, as I said, one of our goals is to collect better data in relation to this. It is a science-led approach. If there is anything I can further provide, I am happy to provide that, Ms Copsey.

Ministers statements: early parenting centres

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:38): Last week it was an absolute pleasure to join the member for Hastings Paul Mercurio MP and member for Frankston Paul Edbrooke MP to officially open the Hastings early parenting centre. This EPC is just one of the Allan Labor government's 11 EPCs currently delivering parenting services to families of children aged zero to four right across the state. Early parenting centres offer specialist parenting supports for families needing extra assistance in the areas of sleep and settling, child behaviour, parent–child attachment and parent–child health and wellbeing. The centre has both day and overnight stay facilities to host families for up to five nights. The day-stay unit has four separate rooms with cots where parents can receive one-on-one support from the centre's team of professionals. The overnight family unit has 10 private family rooms, each with its own bathroom, and bedrooms for parents and babies as well as rooms for other children or carers. The centre also has an indoor and outdoor play area and communal and dining and kitchen areas where families can settle in, meet with other families and enjoy meals provided by the centre with each other.

Each time I meet with the families and staff at our network of early parenting centres, I recognise that these centres are creating an extensive community of support for young families. The multidisciplinary team of staff includes a nurse unit manager, registered nurses, enrolled nurses, midwives, maternal and child health nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers. Families can feel well supported by the extensive knowledge and skill of the expert teams. The EPC in Hastings is nestled beautifully into the local landscape, offering a lovely, calm environment to welcome families looking for support in raising their little ones from their very earliest days, and I was taken by the beautiful sunlight and tranquil outlook from each room.

Our state Labor government has invested over $168 million to refurbish and rebuild Victoria's early parenting centre network. With 11 EPCs now operating right across the state and two more on the way in Northcote and Shepparton, families can rest assured that by attending one of the Allan Labor government's early parenting centres, they will be well supported on their parenting journey.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (14:40): Mr Erdogan will get the answers for Ms Payne from the Attorney-General, and I note that ministers did offer to get further details outside the standing orders for respective members.

Constituency questions

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:41): (2336) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. On 15 May a blade failed and fell at the Lal Lal wind farm near Yendon – the second such incident there, following a blade lost to lightning in September 2019. My constituents want to know what became of the first blade and what will become of the most recent one. Are they simply cut up and buried onsite? With the Codrington wind farm in my electorate due for decommissioning in 2027 and its operator acknowledging there is no international standard for blade recycling, what is the government's policy for disposing of the thousands of tonnes of fibreglass and composite waste generated by both incident damage and planned decommissioning across Victoria?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:42): (2337) My question today is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Warranwood Road is only about 550 metres long, but it is an important connector in the Warranwood area in my electorate, with a nearby school and many

residents driving, cycling and crossing this road every day. A constituent of mine has raised a number of serious safety concerns with this road. They have sadly reported to me that a teenager was hit by a car while riding on this road. Warranwood Road needs to be upgraded to increase safety for cyclists, for pedestrians and for drivers. Minister, will you upgrade Warranwood Road so that there is a safe cycling path and a safe pedestrian crossing?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (14:43): (2338) My question is for the Minister for Health to advise when hospitals in the Hume region will receive funding to implement an electronic medical record system. I have been contacted by Albury Wodonga Health, Goulburn Valley Health, Nathalia Cobram Numurkah Health and Northeast Health Wangaratta regarding the urgent need for funding for an EMR system for the region. Implementation of an EMR is a key priority for these organisations, who provide vital health services across the region. It is widely recognised as supporting safer, more efficient and sustainable service delivery over time. The ability to electronically record and share clinical data reduces risk and enables continuity of care across services. Planning and preparation for an EMR across the Hume health services is well advanced, but the critical next step of implementation remains unfunded following the recent state budget. Collectively, Hume is now the only region of Victoria where no health service has an EMR in place or is funded for implementation. This is a matter of ongoing importance for health services and communities across the Hume region. I look forward to the minister's response.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (14:44): (2339) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, the Moonee Valley Sustainability group and concerned constituents contacted my office yesterday about the Department of Transport and Planning's plans to remove approximately 16 mature trees in Woodlands Park, Essendon, today. These trees provide vital urban canopy cover, reduce urban heat island effect and contribute significantly to local biodiversity. The community were not meaningfully consulted before the decision was made to remove the much-loved trees. Will you urgently intervene to halt the removal of these trees and meet with the Moonee Valley Sustainability group to discuss alternative pathways to protect these valued community assets?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:45): (2340) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister instruct Regional Roads Victoria to fix the dangerous potholes on Echuca Road near the Lancaster turn-off? A constituent contacted me to say the state of Victoria's roads are a national disgrace, and I completely agree. He drives along the Mooroopna to Echuca road every day, and the road surface near the Lancaster turn-off is getting worse and worse, with crumbling edges and dangerous potholes getting bigger by the day. There are paint markings around the potholes waiting for repair that have worn off and been repainted three times in the last 18 months, and no repairs have been done. The road is crumbling, but the Allan Labor government does not care. Road users have installed their own warning signs to alert other drivers to the dangerous road conditions. The minister must invest in the regional road network that connects our state and repair Echuca Road immediately.

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (14:46): (2341) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. On 24 May I attended the 'Leakes needs lights' rally and heard from many frustrated constituents that their request for traffic lights at the incredibly dangerous and congested Leakes Road interchange has been ignored. When I raised this issue last year the

previous minister ruled out installing temporary signals for technical reasons. A petition from Ms Grigorovitch in the other place states:

> … the safety risk is critical now, and something must be done in the interim to improve the safety of this dangerous interchange.

My constituent asks: will the minister explain why the community are being asked to wait for the completed $1 billion Western Highway upgrade before they can travel safely around their own suburbs?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:47): (2342) My matter is for the Minister for Police, and it concerns Oakleigh and a resident in Atkinson Street in Oakleigh. They are facing significant noise pollution and dangerous speeding and hooning in and around Oakleigh, specifically along Atkinson Street and Atherton Road. That is a 40-k zone, and sometimes I am sure that is not strictly adhered to. But leaving that aside, this is very different from some casual error; this is a planned set of events, noise and hooning. As she said, the frustrating part is that this is not some mysterious underground operation. We know where they gather, the times they regularly appear and what they do. It should not be this hard, Ms Fenton said to the opposition through an email. So what I would ask is that the minister look into this. This is, it seems, because police have been stripped out of many local police stations, leaving towns exposed.

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (14:48): (2343) My constituency question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Residents in my electorate are furious about a proposed puppy farm application in Elphinstone. The facility plans to house 150 dogs and implement a mandatory caesarean birth policy. Many Victorians believe puppy farms have been outlawed, and they would be forgiven for thinking so. In my previous role as president of Oscar's Law I worked closely with the Victorian Labor government and the minister at the time Jaala Pulford on the puppy farm reforms passed in 2017. Those laws were intended to end large-scale commercial dog breeding, but loopholes have allowed some operators, including breeders the reforms were designed to shut down, to slowly come back into business. The ministerial exemption process, which allows breeders to exceed the legislated dog cap, was intended to only be used in exceptional circumstances, but it is not. Will the minister reject this application and commit to strengthening Victoria's puppy farm laws to close these loopholes and end these puppy farms for good?

Western Metropolitan Region

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:49): (2344) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building, regarding a public housing tenant in my electorate formally assessed as at high and immediate risk due to family violence and still waiting for relocation. Can the minister please update my constituent on how long she must wait, despite documented immediate risk and threat escalation? Rebekah, a constituent in Footscray and mother of two, recently experienced an attempted armed home invasion, reinforcing serious safety concerns. She has raised the issue with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and provided the department with multiple risk assessments, including from the Magistrates' Court and a specialist family violence service, confirming her high-risk status. Despite this, she has been told by the department that she has got years to wait for relocation. This is particularly concerning to me, given the perpetrator has recently also been released on parole and is nearby.

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:50): (2345) My question is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Western District Health Service staff have brought to my attention the critical need for upgrades to the emergency department at Hamilton Base Hospital. Development plans were

completed in 2004; however, the Department of Health put the project on hold while a statewide health industry prioritisation of work strategy was underway, expected to be completed by mid-2025. Shockingly, despite a three-decade-long wait, no funding was allocated to Hamilton hospital in the 2026 state budget. Minister, could you share with my constituents what exactly the prioritisation strategy found and why the Hamilton hospital ED upgrade was deemed ineligible for funding?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (14:51): (2346) On Sunday I was in St Arnaud at a community rally where concerned locals were fighting the state government and defending their community. Despite multiple promises about a return to rail in 12 Labor budgets, there has been no funding made available to return rail services to St Arnaud along the Mildura line. Will the Minister for Public and Active Transport commit to meeting locals and working through potential options? Martha Haylett, the local member, has been totally disinterested and did not even go near the rally.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:51): (2347) My constituency question is also for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the 541 bus from Broadmeadows station to Craigieburn North. A constituent recently contacted me regarding the frequent inconsistency and delays of the 541 bus. These delays have caused both financial and general heightened stress upon my constituent and even left them missing a medical appointment because of the unreliability of the service. In addition, the constituent outlined how the buses along this route often do not display the route they are travelling, making it difficult for passengers to actually identify the right service. I recently wrote to the minister seeking action on this bus route, and I once again ask: will the minister ensure that the 541 bus route is properly funded to ensure that constituents can adequately rely on the service moving forward?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:52): (2348) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. This is a government that cares little for regional Victorians outside the tram tracks. A Leongatha resident has raised concerns that recent changes to the Leongatha–Wonthaggi bus timetable now barely provides more than an hour between arrival and departure, making it extremely difficult for people with a disability, the elderly or those with visual impairments to actually make their medical appointments and access essential services. This reflects a broader issue in relation to feedback across Gippsland that recent bus timetable changes are not adequately reflecting the needs of the community nor is there sufficient consultation with the community, so I ask: will the minister review these timetable changes and create longer timeframes and more, and flexible, services to ensure residents can reliably access the services that they need?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:53): (2349) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health, and it relates to Maroondah Hospital – specifically a mother who came to me yesterday in fact at Eastland. She had taken her child to Maroondah Hospital.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Nick McGOWAN: Great interruption; it was about paediatrics. The minister might recall that last year the previous Minister for Health wrote to me because there was a suggestion by Eastern Health that they would remove paediatrics from Maroondah Hospital. That decision was reversed by the then minister. Nonetheless, this mother's concern, as she put it to me, was that last Thursday or thereabouts she took her young son to Maroondah Hospital. He had a suspected broken finger – in fact he did have a broken finger – but he was turned away from that hospital with his mother at 6:30 at night because they were told there were no paediatrician and no paediatric services there. I would like to understand from the minister the nature of the paediatric services that continue at Maroondah, if any.

Petitions

Delburn wind farm

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 889 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council to the Allan Government's decision to bail out the defunct Delburn Wind Farm using SEC Victoria and taxpayer funds, after costs ballooned from $320 million to $700 million and private investors abandoned the high bushfire risk project.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to immediately cancel the Delburn Wind Farm and reverse the SEC Victoria funding, due to a clear conflict of interest and unacceptable bushfire and financial risks.

Planning policy

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 658 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the Department of Transport and Planning's proposed Train and Tram Zone Activity centres will permit high-rise, high-density zones across established suburbs, including McKinnon, Bentleigh, and Ormond. Under these proposals, planning powers will be removed from local councils and communities, with major developments approved as-of-right and decision-making centralised under State Government control. This represents a significant shift away from local input and democratic planning processes. In addition to central precincts allowing developments of up to 20 storeys, the proposed zones disproportionately include extensive surrounding catchment areas. Within these areas, existing planning protections will be stripped away, allowing three to six story developments as-of-right.

These changes will, remove important planning safeguards that currently protect the character and livability of established neighbourhoods; override municipal heritage overlays and designations, putting irreplaceable heritage homes at risk of demolition; further strain already stretched public infrastructure, like schools and medical clinics; weaken canopy tree protections, leading to the loss of green cover and neighbourhood amenity; and fundamentally and negatively alter how established communities will look, feel and function for future generations.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to immediately desist from the proposed Caulfield to Bentleigh and Elsternwick Train and Tram Zone Activity Centres, consider significantly reducing the catchment walking radius from the stations, revise the area to only include roads managed by the Department of Transport and Planning, remove streets within the catchment radius of McKinnon Station, outline the proposal's environmental benefits and how it will provide promised 'jobs and services', engage in genuine and transparent consultation with affected local communities before decisions are finalised and make this consultation publicly available.

Mernda police station

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 2257 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that:

1. Crime has increased by 54% in the City of Whittlesea Police Service Area since 2022
2. There have been two serious machete attacks in the area within 13 weeks of each other
3. The opening hours of Mernda Police Station have been reduced to 10am-6pm Monday to Friday
4. Local police report that the Mernda station is operating at only 50% of its designated staffing numbers.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council calls on the Government to ensure that Mernda Police Station is fully staffed and returns to being open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Wendy LOVELL: As this petition qualifies for debate under standing order 11.03(10), I give notice that I intend to move 'That the petition be taken into consideration' on the next day of meeting.

WorkCover

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 376 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the urgent need to reform Victoria's workers' compensation system. The current system does not properly support injured workers, particularly those with psychological injuries and too often causes delays and decisions that prioritise profit over recovery. Victorian workers deserve a WorkCover system that treats every injury, physical or psychological, fairly, promptly and with dignity. The Government needs to act now to create a fair, respectful and supportive workers' compensation system for all Victorians.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to change the current laws and establish a comprehensive, trauma-informed and publicly managed workers' compensation system that includes statutory recognition of the right to worker wellbeing, safety and recovery; free, independent advocacy and peer-support services for all injured workers; integrated physical and psychological rehabilitation with safe, graduated return-to-work plans; stronger enforcement of employer compliance with workplace health and safety laws; and transparent reporting and clear accountability for all claims management decisions.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Planning Amendment (Restricting New Fast Food Developments) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (14:58): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Planning and Environment Act 1987, to provide for restrictions on new fast-food developments and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

David ETTERSHANK: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 7

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:59): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 7 of 2026, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (14:59): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report on the inquiry into electricity supply for electric vehicles, including an appendix, extracts of

proceedings and minority report, from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Georgie PURCELL: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

This was a referral that was given to us some time ago now and probably became even more relevant at the beginning of the inquiry process as we faced a fuel crisis across our state. It was a real realisation that perhaps we need to do something about electric vehicle supply and, importantly, charging infrastructure across our state. I very much want to thank Ms Copsey for sending this referral to us as a committee.

The electric car market reached new highs globally in 2025, growing by 20 per cent from 2024 to exceed 20 million sales. The sale shares of electric cars in the overall car market increased to 25 per cent. This marked the fifth consecutive year in which annual electric car sales increased by about 3.5 million. While Australia has lagged behind other countries in this transition, it is clear that the uptake of electric vehicles is rapidly gathering pace. Electric vehicles have seen a massive surge in Australia, making up just over 13 per cent of all new car sales to date this year. Momentum is building rapidly, with EV market share peaking at 16.4 per cent in April, meaning roughly one in every six new cars sold across the country is fully electric.

One of the obstacles to Australian uptake has been a lack of public charging infrastructure. While this is less of an issue for the majority of people who can charge at home, it has a substantial impact on the willingness of people who have no way of charging at home to transition to an electric car. This may be because they live in an apartment building, which we heard about heavily throughout the inquiry process, or a house with no off-street parking or they rent and are unable to install a home charger. These equity issues, along with some of the other limitations of the public charging infrastructure in Victoria, have been a big focus of the inquiry, but the committee also saw great opportunities to enhance the electricity grid through bidirectional charging, as electric vehicles are energy storage systems on wheels. In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, electric vehicles have the potential to not only greatly reduce the cost of personal and commercial transport but also the cost of energy in the home and in businesses. Overall this was a really interesting and, as I said, very timely inquiry. The report makes a number of great recommendations, which will, hopefully, be adopted and increase access to charging infrastructure and ultimately electric vehicles, because that is one of the big barriers holding people back from making purchases in the first place.

I would really like to thank all members of the committee and all of the witnesses who made submissions and gave evidence throughout the inquiry. Their insights and expertise were really helpful and helped the committee understand the somewhat complex issues that were being examined. I would also like to thank all the committee members, who approached the inquiry in a collegiate and professional manner. It is a topic area that we all agreed needs addressing. There is a minority report, so we do have some differing views on the way that should be done, but overall everyone worked really collaboratively throughout the inquiry process.

As always and probably most importantly, I would really like to thank the committee secretariat for their professional and diligent work. That includes committee manager Michael Baker. This is his second-last inquiry before he retires. I know electric vehicles are very much a passion area of his, and he was absolutely stoked to do this inquiry on the way out. Thank you, Mike, for managing the inquiry process. I would also like to thank both Alyssa Topy, our inquiry officer, and Jamie Huffer, research assistant, for their excellent work during the inquiry and their assistance in drafting a complex and detailed report. I know all members who work on committees know this, but the committee staff work incredibly hard, often across a range of different inquiries. As chair of the Economy and Infrastructure

Committee, I just want to say a really big thankyou again for your great work in supporting us in doing our jobs and making us look good a lot of the time when we table these reports in the Parliament. This is a really great report. It was great to be part of it, and I look forward to seeing the government's response, hopefully before the end of the term.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:04): I am pleased to be able to speak to this report. This committee certainly inquired into lots of different issues, and this one saw the Economy and Infrastructure Committee look at electric vehicles and the integration with Victoria's electricity supply. We received lots of submissions, and we heard from a range of witnesses, including local councils, battery experts, energy suppliers and the EV association, amongst others. We appreciate the input of different MPs; we, the Liberals and Nationals, submitted a minority report. We do support practical measures to ensure that the integration of EVs within the electricity network is reliable, affordable and fair without placing additional cost pressures on Victorian households, increasing safety risks or compromising the reliability of the state's electricity system.

Certainly, the rise in EV sales that we are seeing is going to increase demand for electricity, and this is of concern when we have issues around energy reliability in Victoria, and that was evidenced by the Victorian Auditor-General's report at the end of last year about managing the transition to renewable energy. Continued government subsidies place additional costs on taxpayers, and the report did recommend quite a number of different incentives, which is a concern – as we have seen from the recent state budget, we have massive state debt, and the interest costs per day are staggering.

Power reliability is a significant issue, particularly in regional areas. We heard about areas like Euroa that have struggled to upgrade their network system there, and they have countless outages, which is a big problem. There are also safety risks associated with the batteries; we heard it is like a helmet that gets damaged: you cannot predict how reliable it is. But moving forward, we need to ensure that there is reliability in our energy system and consumer choice and long-term benefits for all Victorians.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:06): I rise to give a brief contribution. As Georgie Purcell has said, the intervening circumstances of the fuel crisis have only made the recommendations coming out of this report more salient. There are a number of recommendations around supporting uptake of EVs, including for the Victorian government to strengthen targeted demand-side incentives, like purchase subsidies and registration discounts, and advocating to the Commonwealth government. That, importantly, includes the Victorian government funding targeted programs around emerging areas, like bidirectional charging technologies, to build the market in relation to these emerging technical areas.

I also note really pleasing recommendations around things that are entirely within government control, such as increasing procurement and continuing to play that important role in bringing more EVs, particularly second-hand ones, into the market for Victorians and supporting local government to do the same. Importantly as well, there is a recommendation around addressing misinformation and misconceptions around electric vehicles, which we heard are a little bit prolific, particularly in the online environment, so that is an important element for the government to step into as well.

The other recommendation I wanted to highlight was the important one that we heard around EV readiness and the National Construction Code. There has been some backsliding in that space, and my concern is that it will be much more expensive and burdensome on households to retrofit technology for EVs that are growing in number so quickly rather than putting that in place and making sure that new builds are EV ready.

Thanks again to the secretariat for all the immense work that went into creating this. It was a very interesting inquiry, and I commend the report to the chamber.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:08): I will make a very short contribution. I would like to thank the chair and all the other committee members. I thought it was a very interesting inquiry. In some ways, though, not to repeat what other members have said, really, to an extent, what

the inquiry did was simply reveal the issues as opposed to address the issues or solve the issues. We saw a range of issues around the economics of electronic vehicles and infrastructure – that almost every layer of the whole industry needed subsidies to be viable. We had issues with equity and fairness and accessibility in rural areas. There were multiple opportunities but also issues with batteries and some things around that. I think in future that the report will be valuable largely from the point of view that it identifies the problems, but the actual harder work of solving the problems remains unaddressed.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Sustainability Reporting by Water Corporations, May 2026 *(Ordered to be published) (released on 20 May 2026 – a non-sitting day).*

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 22 *(Gazette G19, 7 May 2026).*

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government responses to the –

Electoral Matters Committee's Report on the Inquiry into the 2025 Prahran and Werribee by-elections.

Integrity and Oversight Committee's Report on the Inquiry into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Report on the Inquiry into fraud and corruption control in local government: a follow up of two Auditor-General reports.

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

Bass Coast, Cardinia and Casey Planning Schemes – Amendment GC148.

Buloke Planning Scheme – Amendment C44.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme – Amendment C282.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme – Amendment C270.

Horsham Planning Scheme – Amendment C88.

Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendments C488 and C489.

Moorabool Planning Scheme – Amendment C103.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme – Amendment C318.

Southern Grampians Planning Scheme – Amendment C63.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme – Amendment C287.

Yarra Planning Scheme – Amendment C338.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Building Act 1993 – No. 42.

County Court Act 1958 – No. 56.

Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004 – No. 41.

Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012 – No. 44.

Electoral Act 2002 – No. 45.

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 – No. 47.

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – No. 46.

Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 – No. 43.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55 and 56.

Legislative instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of –

2026 Ministerial Order under section 16BA of the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005.

2026 Ministerial Order under section 22A of the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005.

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Wetlands Closure) Notice No. 2/2026, under section 86 of the Act *(Gazette S235, 5 May 2026).*

Proclamations of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates for the following acts:

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Act 2026 – Whole Act – 12 May 2026 (*Gazette S232, 5 May 2026*).

Electoral Amendment Act 2026 – Parts 1 and 2, other than section 73 – 25 May 2026 (*Gazette S251, 19 May 2026*).

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers

The Clerk: Pursuant to section 36(2)(c) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a copy of the government response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers.

Select Committee on Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274

Inquiry into Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274

The Clerk: Pursuant to section 36(2)(c) of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a copy of the government response to the report of the Select Committee on Victoria Planning Provisions Amendments VC257, VC267 and VC274.

Production of documents

Bushfire preparedness

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 1 April 2026 relating to bushfire management on the motion of Ms Bath. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Public lottery licence

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 13 May 2026 relating to the public lottery licence agreement on the motion of Mrs McArthur. The letter states that the date for production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Payroll tax

The Clerk: I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 28 May 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis and further to the government's initial response on 19 June 2025 relating to payroll tax for general practitioners and other health professionals. The government have identified 21 documents within the scope of the order and make a claim of executive privilege over two documents in part and 11 documents in full. I further table eight documents in full, two documents in part and schedules of the identified documents.

Housing

The Clerk: I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 15 October 2025 on the motion of Ms Gray-Barberio and further to the

government's initial response on 5 January 2026 relating to alternatives to demolition of public housing sites. The government have identified 25 documents within the scope of the order and make a claim of executive privilege over 21 documents in full. I further table four documents in full and schedules of the identified documents.

Department of Treasury and Finance

The Clerk: Finally, I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 June 2026 in response to a resolution of the Council on 14 May 2025 on the motion of Mr Davis and further to the government's initial response on 18 June 2025 relating to briefings provided to the Treasurer. The government have identified three documents within the scope of the order and make a claim of executive privilege over those three documents in part. I further table the three documents in part and the schedule of the identified documents.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, a number of these documents motions and the responses received here go back a very long way, and it might be that the government minister at the table, or indeed someone else, can explain. For example, the last one goes back to May 2025. It relates to a small number of briefings that would not have been hard to locate. It is just frankly incomprehensible that it should take one year for a small number of briefs –

The PRESIDENT: I do not think this is a point of order, Mr Davis.

David Davis: The minister might want to explain.

The PRESIDENT: I think there is a provision for you to move a motion to take note of the Attorney-General's response.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:14): I move:

> That the house take note of the documents tabled today and the documents not tabled pursuant to those letters.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:29): I move, by leave:

> That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 3 June 2026:
>
> (1) notice of motion given this day by me on integrity;
>
> (2) notice of motion 1430, standing in David Davis's name, revoking planning scheme amendments GC270 and VC300; and
>
> (3) notice of motion given this day by Katherine Copsey on public transport.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

North East Link

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:30): I want to acknowledge a significant milestone reached on the construction of the North East Link, with tunnel-boring machine Zelda breaking through at Bulleen recently. With this, the excavation of the northbound tunnel on the project is complete, whilst excavation continues in the southbound tunnel, with TBM Gillian expected to break through in the coming months. When completed, the two three-lane tunnels will link Watsonia and Bulleen, providing seamless access onto the Eastern Freeway. These tunnels will benefit not only

the local community but the whole state by providing a direct route for up to 15,000 trucks per day travelling between Melbourne's north and east. This will greatly reduce congestion throughout the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, allowing for commuters to get to and from their destinations faster than before. Along with the work on the Eastern Freeway and the M80 ring-road upgrades, each day the North East Link is one step closer to completion.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank residents in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region who have been putting up with disruptions, roadworks and traffic delays in order that the project can be delivered. But I do know that people in my region definitely cannot wait to see this project completed, because it will mean so much more to them to have local streets returned back to them. I also want to thank the thousands of workers who have worked tirelessly on this project, because without those workers and their skills, this project would not be built. It is only a Labor government that provides secure, well-paid work on projects such as the North East Link. That also then in turn supports families with cost-of-living pressures.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:32): 'Cattlemen care for the High Country' – that is their slogan, but it is also their lived reality. Last week I took up the opportunity – a very rare opportunity – to travel on horseback to Mount Stirling and indeed to Craig's Hut with the McCormack family, Bruce, Emily and Cass, who is the fantastic president of the cattlemen's association. I saw the most beautiful vista, the most beautiful scenery. I saw hunters out deer hunting. I also saw hikers in a different spot hiking. What I did see, which was most distressing, were carpets of smothering blackberry. It is the most beautiful area, and this public land, this space, is being choked with pests and weeds. I want to thank the cattlemen for their kindness, their understanding and their long-term tradition of caring for the High Country.

Go Girls Foundation

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:33): Last week I also had the opportunity to go and hang out with the Go Girls Foundation. Michelle Jobson and Rita Bottomley established the Go Girls Foundation, a charity that supports women facing domestic violence, unemployment, homelessness or social isolation. They are a philanthropic organisation. They are the most wonderful group of people, because they create positivity, they create a vision and they create capacity in women. I really want to thank them and all the sponsors of the South Gippsland charity golf day. It runs with philanthropic donations, and they are fantastic. I also want to give a shout-out to the Go Girls 100-kilometre challenge.

Trust for Nature

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:33): Recently I had the pleasure of travelling around parts of the Western Victoria Region with Corinne and Ben from Trust for Nature and visiting some amazing properties. Sincere thanks to Matt, Ros, Peter and Simone for having me at their places to see what can be achieved if we prioritise nature. Trust for Nature works to protect native plants and wildlife forever, using conservation covenants over land. They also have brilliant experts on hand, like Ben, who can provide advice and guidance for people who are working to restore habitat. The Greens are proud to have been able to get additional funding and support for their conservation work, and it was terrific to be able to get out and see some of the benefits of that. I was blown away by the properties we visited and the dedication of the people who were patiently working to restore the land, whether through partnerships with Wadawurrung traditional owners to do cool burns and revegetation or through literally getting on their knees and pulling out weeds and invasive species for hours and hours on end. What I particularly loved seeing was how ancient species reappeared when given the opportunity. Once native habitat was restored and freed from pest plants and animals, it thrived and essentially took care of itself. There is so much we can all learn from this. I would love to see more of our public and private lands restored to native habitat in the way that Trust for Nature helps to do.

National Road Safety Week

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:35): I rise to deliver a brief members statement. Last week was National Road Safety Week, which is an important week for those of us who have a professional background in the transport industry. Everyone is affected by road safety, because we all use roads in some way and we are all affected by what happens on our roads. When I was the secretary of the Transport Workers' Union I represented workers – truck drivers, bus drivers and gig economy workers – who spend days at a time on our roads working on some of the most dangerous jobs in Australia. We need to keep our roads safe, because these workers also deserve the right to return home safely to their families at the end of a shift.

St Kilda Primary School

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:35): I also had the opportunity last week to visit St Kilda Primary School alongside the Premier, the member for Albert Park in the other place and Cr Meghan Hopper, the Labor candidate for Prahran at the next election. The visit took place on the back of a budget which delivers more than $13 million to fund the construction of the new oval and competition-grade gymnasium. I would like to thank the principal Sue Higgins for hosting us and showing us around the campus.

Mount Waverley Linear Reserve

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:36): Lastly, I also had the opportunity to join my good friend the member for Ashwood in the other place at Mount Waverley Linear Reserve. We reopened the park after works had been done to create a fenced off-leash dog area for the local community to enjoy.

Clarkefield development

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (15:36): My constituents in the Macedon district are seriously concerned about a proposed housing development that will build 2300 new dwellings in the tiny hamlet of Clarkefield. Together with the recently approved development in Riddells Creek, this would bring over 9000 new residents into two neighbouring rural towns. The Labor government gave residents and the council just 28 days to study and assess the proposal, with public submissions closing yesterday. That is not enough time for close consideration of over 80 technical documents, and councillors are furious that the proposal is being rushed through with minimal scrutiny. Local residents and stakeholders are outraged about this proposal, which contradicts the shire's statement of planning policy intended to protect smaller settlements like Clarkefield. In the first phase of the development, local traffic would rely on a single, unsignalised intersection on the Melbourne-Lancefield Road, a 100-kilometre per hour rural arterial. This would be a serious hazard when traffic increases significantly. There is no secondary school planned for Clarkefield or Riddells Creek, and all other colleges are bursting at the seams. Train patronage will explode, but there is no plan to expand parking at the railway station or extend the platform to allow boarding on all six carriages of a train. Greater Western Water has said it does not plan to put in reticulated sewerage at the site before 2040. If the government pushes ahead with this development, it must address the – *(Time expired)*

Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:38): I rise today to condemn the Allan Labor government's ongoing failure to implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, OPCAT, in Victoria. Australia ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture in 2017, and its purpose is simple: independent, preventative inspection of places where people are deprived of liberty, including prisons, youth justice centres, police cells, secure mental health facilities and other closed environments. Victoria is still undermining OPCAT in practice by refusing year after year to establish the independent preventative inspection system that it promised to implement. That failure is even more egregious now, because Labor's regressive bail laws are driving more people into

prisons on remand before conviction and often before they have had any real chance to defend themselves and the government is warehousing more people in already pressured prisons while refusing to implement the oversight system designed to prevent abuse behind locked doors. The government needs to answer basic questions: will it implement OPCAT in Victoria before the end of 2026, what funding has been allocated to do this and will the minister instruct the department to prepare legislation and a consultation framework? Victoria cannot keep expanding and overloading the prison and corrections system while refusing the human rights safeguards that should come with that. The question is simple: what is the government trying to hide by refusing to implement OPCAT?

South West Tech School

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:39): Last week I had the pleasure of visiting the site of the new South West Tech School currently under construction in Warrnambool. The South West Tech School is Labor's $12.65 million investment into the future of our region's young people. In contrast, we hear of the Liberals' $40 billion in cuts to the future of our region's young people. The South West Tech School will bring state-of-the-art STEM learning facilities to the south-west. I was pleased to see the fantastic progress on the building, which is on budget and on track to open in term 4. Employers like Sun Pharma in Port Fairy, Alcoa in Portland and Wannon Water, for example, all need the latest in innovation skills. The South West Tech School will inspire young local innovators to do exactly that. My thanks and congratulations to Rohan Keert, the director; Mark Fidge, the CEO of South West TAFE; and Damien Tan from the construction team at AW Nicholson. While Labor is investing in young people in the south-west of Victoria, we cannot trust the Libs when they have already promised cuts.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:41): Jacinta Allan's comments yesterday regarding corruption and her newfound concern around it were quite astounding – a massive backflip. I want to just recognise those experts that have spoken on what is required, including Robert Redlich, who said on ABC radio:

> … I can see that there are powerful reasons why this should be implemented immediately.

He was referring of course to the IBAC powers and not to the delay of 18 months that this government is making, kicking the can after the election. We all know what is going on: they are hiding from the truth. He went on to say:

> We are dealing with a corrupt environment where every day public funds are wasted.

I do not know whether it is a $15 billion loss or, as the Premier says, it is significantly less than that. Whatever it is, it is an unprecedented historical scandal – Robert Redlich is right.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: And for the Treasurer and others to be interjecting, saying, 'What nonsense,' or whatever they were interjecting with, shows you just how out of touch they are on how corruption is rife in this state and how there are so many concerns. Another expert, Australian chief executive Clancy Moore, said that the proposed broader definition of 'corrupt conduct' would give IBAC more scope to uncover favouritism. He warned that a royal commission into the allegations uncovered by the *Age* was still required to clean up the construction industry. It is only the Liberals and Nationals that Victorians can trust to get to the bottom of the corruption in this state, because for far too long Jacinta Allan, as minister and now Premier, has turned a blind eye and let it run rife.

Construction industry

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:43): I join Ms Crozier in calling for a royal commission and stating that this government, a corrupt government, is squandering billions of dollars – maybe $15 billion, maybe $30 billion; who knows exactly what the number is, but it is a

massive number – in direct corrupt payments that it has known are going on, and it has got to be cleaned up by a royal commission.

Planning policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:43): But my purpose today was to actually speak about another matter, and that is the planning system and where the state government is going with its high-rise, high-density development sites. GC270 will see 26 high-rise, high-density sites, and VC300 will see six storeys allowed as of right. I say the community should be involved, council should be involved and an arrogant state government that is overriding the community and fighting against the community is destroying our suburbs. We all want to see more housing, but this is not the way to go about it. We all know that there are ways to get housing – the precinct structure plans and other steps to bring them on. But housing numbers are down under this government. They are falling under this government. They are failing to provide housing for our young people, and now they are seeking to destroy our suburbs, destroy the quality of life, destroy the ambience and destroy the livability. I say these planning amendments need to be ripped out and proper planning schemes put in place.

Liberal Party

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:44): Never in the long history of the Liberal Party has a former prime minister served as our Liberal Party federal president, but last week that all changed. My friend, our nation's 28th Prime Minister, the Honourable Tony Abbott AC, was elected unopposed as federal president. While Tony left the Lodge over a decade ago, his fighting spirit has never abated. He is joined by one of the finest political strategists in the nation, Brian Loughnane, who is now state president of the Victorian Liberal Party. They, like me, like Angus Taylor and like Jess Wilson, are not in the business of appeasement. We are drawing the battlelines for the fight between patriots and traitors. Labor is the party of broken promises, toxic taxes, union thuggery and social engineering. We are the party of patriots. We treasure our traditions, honour our flag, respect our history. We do not say sorry for who we are or bow down to the noisy, flag-burning activists. We protect the rights of women and girls and do not let men in women's spaces. We love celebrating Australia Day, not banning it. We do not do what is easy, we do what is right.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:46): I move:

> That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1440, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Budget papers 2026–27

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (15:46): I move:

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

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to the resolution of the Council on 13 May 2026, the budget papers will be debated concurrently with the second-reading debate on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026.

Bills

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Budget papers 2026–27

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:

That the bill be now read a second time.

And Jaclyn Symes's motion:

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

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:47): I am pleased to rise on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026. A budget is not a press release. It is not a highlights reel of press releases or time to recut ribbons already cut – or at least it should not be. The state budget is meant to be a plan. It is the document in which the government tells Victorians how it will manage their money to make their lives better, easier, safer and more affordable. It is a statement of priorities, and it is a test of competence. It is a discipline families struggling under a cost-of-living crisis display every day, because they know there are choices of priorities that have to be made. Why? Because there is no endless pot of money to casually dip into. Our business owners know it too, because if you make a mistake in business, it costs you your own money or it costs you a penalty or even a criminal charge. You cannot wish away your financial responsibilities, and you have to quickly and permanently learn not to make similar mistakes again. The authors of this budget have never felt that discipline. They have never sat a week out from paydays wondering whether they will make wages for their staff. They have never reached the end of their overdraft, because all they have to do is raise a new tax or borrow more, and they can do so endlessly because they can.

In Victoria we have endlessly raised taxes and we have endlessly borrowed, and look where it has led us. This is a budget that lashes together a disintegrating ship just enough to hold it together and to keep it afloat until the next election, but not one day of planning beyond it. When Labor came to office, net debt was $21.8 billion – less than 6 per cent of the economy. On this government's own numbers that net debt is heading to $199 billion by 2029–30. Debt is climbing by $27 million every single day, and the debt is not free. The interest bill is now approaching $9 billion, which is $32 million a day, and the Auditor-General's figures have it heading towards $10.6 billion a year eventually. By 2028–29 close to 10 per cent of all that Victoria raises will go not to a hospital, not to a classroom and not to a police station but to a payment of interest to our lenders. Next year this state will spend more on servicing interest than it spends on Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and every kindergarten in the state combined and will still have $1 billion of interest left to pay beyond that. It is more in interest than we raise in land tax. If you did not have this interest, you could literally abolish land tax and the budget would be no worse off. That is the opportunity cost of this debt. Every paramedic we cannot roster, every classroom we cannot fund, every station that is without a PSO, every police station closed – that is the interest bill at work. And how did we get there? We got there through a decade of taxing more and producing less. This is the highest taxed state in the nation, with 67 new or increased taxes since 2014. Payroll tax has more than doubled and land tax bills have quadrupled. For all of it, our productivity has lagged the rest of the country for 10 full years. A state that once ran a trade surplus now runs a trade deficit.

We are taxing a stagnating economy and claiming the debt-fuelled spending as growth, which brings me to the headline this government most wants repeated: a surplus. The number the government is promoting in this budget is a net operating surplus of under $1 billion. The cash deficit, meanwhile, this year is $7.7 billion. The operating costs result for 2024 was a loss of $2.6 billion, worse than forecast. Over six years, accumulated operating losses came in at more than $50 billion. This state has run a cash deficit every year for nine years. One thin, singular, artificially constructed operating surplus

in half a decade is completely meaningless. It is a nominal surplus that depends entirely on unlikely events, generous assumptions and the government's hope it can shuffle money around so that no-one notices where the gaps are. In the government's own papers, spending growth will suddenly fall to 2.5 per cent when it has averaged 7 per cent. It is a surplus propped up by a billion-dollar backroom lottery deal that needs serious scrutiny, a surplus engineered the way struggling householders engineer one, by not opening some bills.

That brings me to where some of these bills are kept. Treasurer's advances are, when applied correctly, according to convention, meant to be a contingency, money set aside for genuinely urgent and unforeseen circumstances to be spent before the Parliament can sit and accounted for afterwards, for floods, for fires, for natural disasters, for the unexpected. In this budget the Treasurer's advances will be around $10.3 billion. Of that, the amount actually set aside for genuinely unforeseen matters is just $100 million, literally under 1 per cent of the total. Ninety-nine per cent of Treasurer's advances is money this government already knows is going to be spent. More than $5 billion of it is ordinary operating spending, the running costs of health and education parked in a central line and released to departments quietly during the year away from the estimates process. This is how the fudge works historically. In June 2023 the Minister for Health had to reach for emergency Treasurer's advances of up to $1.179 billion so public hospitals could meet their payroll and pay their creditors. Hospital wages are not unforeseen; they arrive every month or fortnight with predictability. If projects are running under departments, the budget allocations should reflect this transparently. But this is a government effectively and purposefully avoiding genuine budgetary process and rigour. The most insidious thing about this abuse is that the Victorian people do not get to see where the money will go, do not get to comment on it and do not get to judge it, not now and not this year. It is a crude, aggregated total not broken down by department or purpose. The detail is only ever reconciled in future appropriation bills roughly a year or more later.

We are not, in this chamber, approving this spending; we are signing off on cheques already handed out two years ago. And that is not an opinion: the Auditor-General has pointed out that for this government 'unforeseen' simply means an item that has been left out of the budget, whether they knew it was coming or not. When the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, VAGO, investigated how these advances were approved, two-thirds had not followed the proper process; a Treasurer's advance was picked as a funding source after the decision was made. The Centre for Public Integrity has described this practice as the equivalent of a slush fund and warned that Parliament has lost control of the public purse. The economist Saul Eslake called it a derogation from the basic accountability we owe the public over public money. And it is not normal: while the federal government is busy racking up record debt, it has not used Treasurer's advances at all in the last two years. Victoria has run $12 billion to $14 billion through Treasurer's advances year after year. But bad practice routinely performed is not the same thing as normal, it is just a lower standard normalised – it is an abuse. I guess at this point it would be appropriate to circulate our amendment regarding Treasurer's advances, if I could ask the clerks to do so. I move:

> That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with 'this house refuses to read the bill a second time until the government legislates to require the Treasurer to publicly report on Treasurer's advances within 30 days of approval.'

The point of the amendment is simply this: given that the practice of Treasurer's advances has been changed by the government and it is not following convention, there needs to be a counterbalancing mechanism to re-establish and restore transparency and accountability around Treasurer's advances. It is a fairly simple mechanism so that if you are going to order one, if you are going to engage that mechanism, then it should be reported. It should be publicly available to the community and to the Parliament as to what that advance mechanism is and what has been requested. If in the fullness of time the actual transfer does not occur, then that can be also announced. There is no harm in transparency and reporting. We would like to see – and we think it would be of great benefit to the people of Victoria and to budgetary transparency, probity and rigour – is that we simply know what,

when and why Treasurer's advances are pulled out of that aggregate slush fund and applied or requested to be applied.

With this bill before the chamber, let us consider what we are being asked to do under this appropriation bill. We are being asked to approve a budget where a significant proportion of this appropriation is not defined and is hidden in advances. This is an abuse. We are being asked to approve a budget where key line item matters are buried by aggregation under meaningless titles and indecipherable categories. This is an abuse. We are being asked to approve a budget where, in estimates, half the ministers and department secretaries could not answer basic questions on how they reached certain figures or what the efficacy of their spending would be and even palmed off questions between them, with no-one taking accountability. Many figures in the budget are almost impossible to reconcile back to the figures in press releases and public statements. This is an abuse. We are being asked to approve a budget management process that adds further catastrophic debt to our balance sheet while claiming this is part of a debt stabilisation plan – a debt stabilisation plan that has run up record state debt in six successive budgets. This is vandalism.

We are being asked to authorise a budget that has to resort to the most elongated, spurious mathematics to explain away the debt burden in absolute terms by pointing to debt as a percentage of GSP. This is deception, and we will dwell on that just a little bit. The ratio under the forwards goes from 24.9 per cent of GSP debt to 24.4 per cent of GSP, so it is still over 24 per cent. What exactly is being claimed? The debt is still going up in absolute terms, as is the interest as a proportion of revenue. So are we claiming here the achievement of a rounding error? This is gaslighting. Debt to GSP used to be 6 per cent. Of course this assumes anyway that the forecast level of economic growth will actually be achieved, which is a heroic assumption. Why would we believe it? There is literally nothing in this budget that is specifically directed to structural reform to address the state's poor productivity, the key driver of economic growth.

For a decade Victoria has had the lowest productivity in the entire nation, yet the government has, through this budget, not a single genuine measure to address it. There is no provision for the funding shortfalls under the NCIRS research programs, meaning our place as Australia's premier research centre is in dire default and will likely be lost to New South Wales and Queensland. In this budget Victoria's trade and investment budget has been cut by almost 25 per cent. It has cut off funding to our essential medical research institutes, nine of which say they will be forced to close. And after years of claiming how wonderful and successful they were, the budget folds LaunchVic and Breakthrough Victoria and replaces them with a new model with no clear mandate. There is no tax reform. There is no innovation policy that scales beyond selective grants. Anything done is a one-off intervention, not repair at a system level that makes the whole state more efficient and productive.

This is economic neglect at a structural level. It is neglect that means our state's disadvantage to other states is now going to be generational and difficult to reverse. Our momentum is going backwards. Our families are going backwards. Our services are going backwards. The state's dreams and pride are going backwards. Entire sectors of our society feel as if they have been forgotten and deprioritised or are expected to sit tight and suck it up. We are killing farmers' hope. The taxman is at their door, and the land thieves of VicGrid are at their gate. Look at the queues at food banks – thousands of families lining up every night just to feed their children. Where is the budget solution for them? Or should they just accept it?

You are telling victims of home invasions, those maimed in machete attacks and those seeing their livelihoods firebombed to sit down and shut up because the criminals' interests come first, but you are making such great progress via initiatives like machete bins. We are losing 150 police a month net. We do not bring in new recruits faster because the government cannot afford to pay their wages. You are telling teachers, whose pay and conditions have reached breaking point, that you are perfectly willing to drag out every negotiation point in your desire to keep our educators and school sector the lowest funded in the nation. You are telling local communities that their interests and concerns count for nothing through the brute force of planning powers, Melbourne's anti-human anti-community

activity centres and the usurping of farmers' lands and their rights in the west. You have assumed a godlike arrogance over the rights and property of others. You lay out your rules, you enforce them, you take away the right to object, you use compulsory acquisition as a weapon and then you lie about your plans. You punish anyone who displays aspiration or who through their blood, sweat and tears might achieve a small advance in life – a business, a holiday home, providing rental supply – and along with your federal Labor Party partners you take perverse pleasure in taking the lion's share of the rewards of efforts you had nothing to do with, you did nothing to contribute to and you have no right to. Who gave you the right? No-one did. You just took it.

To our businesses: what might you have hoped for in this budget? You might have hoped for some kind of understanding that we are the heaviest taxed state in the nation, that the tax burden on businesses in the state have brought them to crisis. It is frankly beyond belief and, left in Labor's hands, beyond repair.

This is a budget full of Jacintanomics. We cut $3.8 billion from Victoria's roads and bridges budgets but magically added exactly $3.8 billion in federal funding to the Suburban Rail Loop: that is Jacintanomics. We paid $200,000 for plastic pot plants in SRL offices during a cost-of-living crisis: that is Jacintanomics. We spent $70,000, apparently, on plaques because one word was missing from the Premier's title: that is Jacintanomics. We spent $15 million on machete bins that prevented no crimes, and the crimes still go on: that is Jacintanomics. We withdrew a $12 million subsidy to the Avalon air show, an event that generates $240 million for the Victorian advanced manufacturing economy each event: that is Jacintanomics. We lost the motorbike grand prix because we could not manage the money to negotiate to keep it, abandoning the community of Phillip Island, but amazingly other states could afford it and took it: that is Jacintanomics. We oversaw and endorsed the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games and, after paying a half-a-billion-dollar penalty, paid Glasgow $200 million or more to host them on our behalf: that is Jacintanomics, with broken promises to the regions and our reputation as the sports capital in tatters. We oversaw $15 billion in taxpayers money going directly to organised crime, but somehow we are not willing to call a royal commission to get it back: that is Jacintanomics. We cut funding to Writers Victoria, leaving our creative industry sectors less supported than any other state: that is Jacintanomics, doing over the arts. We are being asked to authorise a budget where the Minister for Emergency Services did not even have a draft of a budget for the CFA or the SES: that is Jacintanomics. We do not fund our schools to the agreed total and miss out on $2.4 billion in federal funding under the Gonski agreement: that is Jacintanomics, doing over education.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I have been listening to Mr Welch's contribution in my office, and also I have just heard a little bit of it coming into the chamber. The use of the word 'Jacintanomics' I find sexist, and I ask that he refrain from using sexist language in his contribution.

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Sonja Terpstra: Unparliamentary, then, but sexist language is also unparliamentary language.

Melina Bath interjected.

Sonja Terpstra: I do not need foot soldiers of the patriarchy on the other side of the chamber here groaning and moaning when I make a point of order.

Melina Bath: Acting President, a member may make a point of order; it is not an opportunity to then throw accusations or hand grenades over to the other side.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Thank you, Ms Bath, for the update. Can we just get to the original point of order. I will be back in a moment. I am not going to uphold the point of order. I do not really feel it is sexist or offensive. It is also a good time to remind people that we have

a broad church in this place and to just be aware that what you say may upset other people. In this instance I find that it is a catchphrase more than something that is offensive.

Sonja Terpstra: Acting President, I might have a chat to the President. Perhaps this is an issue for the Procedure Committee to look at, the use of unparliamentary language, because it is about this place being occupied by a majority of women in the chamber. I reassert my point that language can be sexist and unparliamentary and it can cause offence. I think it might be something that may not be offensive to men in this chamber, but it certainly can be offensive to women in the chamber.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): You are well within your rights to ask the President and the committee to look into it. But if Mr Welch could just continue on, we will get through this.

Richard WELCH: I would, just for a point of equivalence, point out that in very recent times we have heard the phrase 'Jess Kennett' thrown around in relation to the Leader of the Liberal Party, and that did not seem to offend anybody.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Mr Welch, let us move on from the issue, and let us try and stick to the budget.

Richard WELCH: The use of the term 'Jacintanomics' is appropriate. I do not apologise for it. I think it is a completely useful shorthand, and I will explain why it is a useful shorthand. It is not just a budgeting technique; it is more a manipulation methodology that specialises in maintaining a narrative and weaving illusions through press releases, slogans and empty promises over hard economics, transparency, accountability and actual delivery. I think it is a phenomenon in our society. It deserves a name. You need to have names for phenomena in order to describe them.

Let us move on to another word with a contested definition, shall we? Say, 'investment'. The government is very fond of using the word 'investment' to describe its spending. Fixing leaking roofs in schools – apparently that is not a basic everyday point of maintenance; no, that is 'investment'. Doing routine, normal maintenance of roads – no, that is not just part of the job of government; that is 'investment'. The community will do well to remember that every time the government claims 'record investment', it is inevitably treating normal operations of government as something extra, new or added – it is not, and that is deception.

In terms of actual capital investment, capital spending should return more than it costs. When you spend more and the roads get worse, when you spend more on roads but less roads are fixed, when you spend more and the surgery lists grow longer, that is not investment; it is giving yourself a trophy for coming last. This all has a consequence in our suburbs, in our regions, at the family table, on the shop counter, with the company accountant and in the paddock. This month the Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance surveyed businesses across regional and rural Victoria. Nearly one in four of them say they may not survive the next 12 months in this environment. That is what is being reported: one in four established regional businesses staring down closure within a year. The survey also asked how much confidence those businesses have in the state government. Fifty-six per cent had none at all. As the alliance put it, 'These businesses are not entitled, they are exhausted.' They need hope.

The government levies are at record levels of commercial and industrial land tax. Commercial and industrial land tax is a tax on a business's working capital, the very money it needs to buy new equipment, to keep good staff and to make patient investment that keeps them competitive. But guess what, Victorian land tax is the highest in the nation. Payroll tax is a tax on the act of employing a Victorian. Guess what, Victorian payroll tax is the highest in the nation. We tax capital, we tax jobs and then we wonder why the patient capital never comes. We wonder why we are no longer competing with other states, let alone the wider world. It is the same story in every direction. New home building has fallen to its lowest level in more than a decade, while more than 56,000 Victorians sit on social housing waitlists and residential bonds have fallen for seven straight quarters. We are losing the next generation's shot at a home. Crime has become a moral failure with a budget at its roots. 746 Victorians become a victim of crime every day, 41 police stations sit closed or on reduced hours,

and a retailer who cannot keep the lights on past closing time is not investing and not hiring. These are not normal levels of crime; these are historic all-time highs. Where is the budget repair for this? The government cannot afford the salaries of new police. In health, more than 68,000 Victorians wait for elective surgery while in this state you wait 151 days for general dental care that takes eight days in New South Wales. Where is the budget repair for this?

This is what being economically adrift looks like as a state. The people have to work harder than ever and receive less, and there is the contradiction at the heart of the bill. You cannot claim to have delivered a surplus while running a $7.7 billion cash deficit. You cannot claim to be investing while the things that you spend on progressively get worse year by year, month and day. You cannot claim the mantle of financial responsibility while having to fund hospital wages through emergency contingency and keep any detail from this Parliament. You cannot claim to be a competent economic manager while believing, insanely, that you can tax your way to prosperity, you can borrow your way out of debt and you can somehow use government spending as the key driver of economic growth. We must be honest about the books. We must put productivity, not punishment, at the centre of how we tax. We must stop borrowing our children's future to pay for our own present, because the pain of this budget does not fall on the people who wrote it. It falls on the young couple who will never own a home. It falls on the regional employer signing the lease for one more year and praying that they can handle it. It falls on the child who is not yet born but will inherit the debt and the interest. It does not have to be this way. The alternative is not altogether that complicated, and our leader Jess Wilson has made it clear.

First, let us reintroduce honesty and transparency to the budget process. Let us have a charter of budget honesty. Let us end the rule by Treasurer's advance. Let us have accurate, honest statements. Second, we will bring back a productive economy. We will lift payroll tax to a threshold of $1.1 million and then $1.2 million and cut the metropolitan rate. We will progressively raise the land tax threshold back to $300,000, easing the squeeze on more than 270,000 taxpayers, many of them small businesses. And third – discipline – while the public service has grown 60 per cent against a 19 per cent population growth, we will bring it back to a sustainable size. This is a mature, reasonable and sensible approach to undertake a back office hiring freeze. There will be no staff cuts, no redundancies and not a single frontline job gone, and anyone who tells you otherwise is not telling you the truth. We will end the corruption on the Big Build and every other government project across the state. We will recruit 3000 police to reopen the stations Labor closed, and we will commit to what this government will not: a royal commission and a real cash surplus by 2032. Not an accounting surplus, not an operating surplus – a genuine surplus, because only a real surplus can begin to pay down the debt and only paying down the debt can free the money to fund the services Victorians actually need.

The opposition will obviously not stand in the way of the state's supply – Victorians need their hospitals funded and their schools open. But we will not pretend this budget is worthy of them or the state's future. Victoria can be a state that lives within its means, that rewards effort instead of punishing it and tells its people the truth about their own money. This is the choice before the state. It is the choice this government has failed to make. In 2026 it is the choice the Victorian people will make for them.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:17): I rise today to speak on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 before us. Having spent many hours examining these budget papers through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process, I do not intend to spend more hours here today discussing the papers. I will keep my comments brief on behalf of my Greens colleagues, and no doubt my colleagues will have more to say on further take-note motions to come before the chamber.

Many people have lost faith in this government's ability to make a difference in their lives. For so many people who are struggling with the cost of living, nothing for them has changed. They look at this budget and they see that structurally it does nothing to change the big problems that Victorians are facing. Instead, they see more special treatment for the major corporations, they see bandaids and they see election sweeteners. People can see that our schools, our hospitals and our public services remain underfunded. They can see that we are failing to preserve biodiversity and stop species extinction and

that the damage of climate change is being felt across the state. At the same time, ultrarich corporations continue to rake in billions in profit and government keeps giving them what they want.

It should not be this way. It is time for a government that will improve people's lives with permanently free and frequent public transport. It is time for a government that will take on the cashed-up interests to fund relief for people struggling to pay their rent, their bills or their mortgage; an economy that puts community wellbeing before shareholder wealth; and a government that puts nature before profit and protects our native ecology. The people in this room right now could make it happen if they listened to the community, who have made it clear they are not impressed by more of the status quo. But they will not. They will not because the coal and gas lobby, the gambling lobby and the billionaires have got to them first.

To anyone who is fighting just to keep a roof over their head or the heater on this winter, you are not alone. The Greens want to see our state build huge amounts of public and affordable housing to limit rent rises and to make sure that everyone can afford a home. We want to lower energy bills by making renewable energy cheap and accessible for home owners and for renters. We want to invest in preserving nature to protect the natural world that we are all a part of. All of this is possible if we tax the ultrarich corporations to pay for it. The biggest banks, gambling companies, the fossil fuel giants and wealthy property developers have been getting a sweetheart deal from this government, and in return they donate to their campaigns – and let us be real, it would be the same under the Liberals. The Greens have a plan that would raise $18 billion from these megacorporations and these ultrarich developers. If we demand better, we can make sure everyone can afford to live a good life. Only the Greens have a plan and the vision to make this happen. That vision is not to be found within these budget papers. It was clear on budget day and it has been clear through budget estimates, and Victorians have noticed.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:21): I rise to make a contribution on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026. There is a phrase often misattributed to ancient Chinese curses but was actually penned by Terry Pratchett: 'May you live in interesting times.' As the Treasurer alluded to in her budget speech, we are indeed living in interesting times:

> … global pressures that once felt distant have started landing right in people's everyday lives.
>
> War in Ukraine. Tariffs and instability in the global economy. War in the Middle East.

At a time like this government should not stand back. She conceded:

> Government can't solve everything – we know that.

It is true: government cannot solve everything, and it is no secret that this one is operating within very, very fiscally restrained environments, but again, as the Treasurer said, it can make life just a little bit easier.

No doubt the community, legal, disability and alcohol and other drug sectors and others that work at the pointy end of disadvantage are relieved that their programs will be funded for another year or so, but in real terms much of this funding amounts to a decrease in investment, as it does not factor in CPI increases. Across the board the structural investment needed to sustain current demand for vital services, let alone to meet ever-growing demand, is simply not there. Maybe government cannot do everything, but with a projected $2 billion surplus over the course of the forward estimates it could be doing more. There is also the small matter of nearly $5 billion buried in the budget, sequestered for projects yet to be announced, no doubt to go on big-ticket items in marginal seats once they are in full election campaign mode.

One of the realities for all governments is that the demand for services always exceeds the funds available. They are forced to ration services, be they elective surgery, infrastructure projects or the number of police and ambos. Budgets are about what governments choose to do with their given bucket of money, about the priorities and the values that are prime to a government. For every investment there is an opportunity cost – that which you spend on one thing cannot be spent elsewhere.

So what does this budget say about what the government values and the corresponding opportunity costs? It certainly values big infrastructure projects. This government has I think a chronic addiction to big things and being seen to get big things done. Under the Andrews government, throwing buckets of money at infrastructure projects was a highly successful electoral strategy, largely applauded and electorally rewarding. The Level Crossing Removal Project is an obvious example. But in these interesting and uncertain times, when Victoria is mired in debt and taxpayers are forking out $24 million a day to cover interest payments alone, how many big infrastructure projects can we really afford, particularly given the obvious supply constraints that exist within the economy?

Take the Suburban Rail Loop. That seemingly bottomless money pit is looking less like a smart investment in the future of the state and more like a giant albatross around the government's neck. Early estimates put it at around $35 billion for the east section alone, but that figure has certainly blown out significantly, as the government is relying on 2020 figures. This is frankly astonishing. No government would ever accept a tender with a five-year-old cost plan attached. It might be a perfectly good piece of infrastructure linking multiple electorally marginal seats, but with benefits that are debatable and unlikely to materialise for some decades, it should simply no longer be a top priority for this government, particularly not when you weigh up those opportunity costs.

Consider public transport – something very pertinent to my constituents in the west. During the 2014 election campaign, Labor promised to electrify the Melton line. Thirteen years later, not much has happened. We have trains coming from Ballarat that are already full by the time they reach Melton, and when I say 'full', I mean no standing room; I mean people literally forced to stand in the toilet cubicles at peak hour. Thanks to Jeroen Weimar, we now know that construction on that project will not even begin until after the Sunbury transport hub is completed around 2030.

What about buses? Remember that comprehensive bus reform proposed by the Department of Transport and Planning back in 2023? The fast, frequent and connected grid of buses would have been transformational for so many communities in the west, but this was rejected by cabinet on a cost basis and in favour of tipping more money into Big Build projects. I have spoken many times in this place of the excruciating state of the western bus network. In place of a properly functioning bus network we get a few additions to the timetable or the odd route modifications. This piecemeal approach is like putting a bandaid on a bullet wound. It is a source of bitter hilarity among my increasingly cynical constituents that for each piecemeal change there is a photo-op for whoever the local member is. The record currently stands at three MP photo-ops for one bus route amendment, but odds are that it will rise to five seats before election time. While commuters fight to get on a train or find a bus, the government has awarded billions of dollars to the operational consortium for the Suburban Rail Loop, which will not even open before 2035. It is basically a poison pill for future governments and exactly the sort of action we all condemned Jeff Kennett for with the east–west tunnel, only on steroids.

Then there is the public housing tower redevelopment project. As I said before, level crossing removals were a great idea, but demolishing 10,000 housing units, most of which are entirely habitable, in the middle of a housing crisis is simply insane – doubly so now that we are seeing Homes Victoria compete against first home buyers and renters to buy private dwellings to house public housing tenants evicted from the towers. I mean, in what world does that make sense? Seriously, did the department not have an alternate accommodation plan or option? We have 65,000 people on the ever-growing public housing waitlist, with 100,000 Victorians accessing homelessness services each year. These are people. These are families. They are sleeping in cars, in tents, in refuges or on the street. People can wait for up to eight years for housing. It is a disgrace, and it is the product of decades-long neglect by governments of both persuasions.

In this context we see the government's repeated refusal to produce even the most modest documents to justify the demolition of the towers – business cases, decanting schedules, building conditions, reports. The process has been shrouded in secrecy, and it is not good enough. This is not an isolated case. There are many areas where this government simply refuses to release information to public

exposure and public scrutiny. It is little wonder people have lost faith in it. It is equally clear that the government has no faith in the common sense of Victorians.

Labor regularly frames itself as the party of working people. As Premier Allan boldly declared at this year's ALP state conference, 'We are not just a government, we are a movement powered by workers.' It is an incredible statement when we have all witnessed the shameful spectacle of Victoria's frontline workers – its health workers, its teachers, its ambos and its police – needing to take industrial action to get a wage increase that barely covers inflation from this Labor government. Sector responses to the budget have a depressingly similar theme – it is enough to keep the lights on, but that is about it. To quote Uniting Vic.Tas CEO Carol Jeffs:

> Sadly, these measures are a drop in the ocean and do little to move the dial to reduce poverty and disadvantage in the community.
>
> … families and individuals doing it tough continue to fall behind.

Investment in the alcohol and other drugs sector is a record $415 million, a 4.244 per cent increase on previous funding. It sounds like a lot, but it is not enough to keep up with inflation, let alone the growing community demand for treatment. Median wait times for treatment remain at around 40 days. On any given day some 4500 people wait to access AOD treatment. This budget does little to address the strain on resources and frontline workers and means that many Victorians will be unable to access the services they so desperately need.

The disability sector welcomed investment in inclusive education and some funding for Thriving Kids, but at the same time the government has reduced its spending on disability programs and services by $68 million. This is at a time when federal funding for the NDIS is being rolled back. It is also tragic to see the closure of over 90 supported living disability homes, with a further 450 at risk of closure. This government simply says it is a federal problem. Minister, stand with some of the 70-year-old, 80-year-old parents whose kids, who are 50 or 60, are being thrown out onto the streets, as they weep and ask 'What do I do?' and tell me that that is a compassionate Labor government.

Equally disturbing is this government's lack of actions to address our mental health crisis. Mental Health Victoria wonders if the royal commission reforms have been benched:

> At the midpoint of Victoria's Royal Commission implementation, the 2026–27 State Budget outcome for mental health limped across the line aided by a handful of hard fought and worthy investments but weighed down by a heavy burden gifted to our future selves.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth has noted:

> Targeted youth mental health support, a recognised national emergency, has not received the increased investment the Royal Commission promised, and that families and young people urgently need.

It is a far, far cry from Victoria's youth strategy, released in 2022, which promised young Victorians:

> … inclusive and accessible support to achieve their goals and feel optimistic, motivated and inspired about their future.

It was one of those whole-of-government strategies full of worthy aspirations and bold actions that the government has basically walked away from. I suspect young people would find little inspiration in this budget.

By the way, are we still the Education State? I know it is a tagline on our number plates, but with the state's record of inadequate and inequitable public education funding, and with Victoria lagging behind every other state in terms of funding its Gonski commitments, surely that slogan is not merely redundant, it is an embarrassment. We cannot afford to fund education, public transport, health services or housing, but at least there is no shortage of change to fund the government's much-vaunted tough-on-crime policies. While frontline services struggle to stay afloat, the budget has hundreds of millions of dollars for prisons and policing and for responses that have proven over and over to be useless in preventing and reducing crime. This includes $720 million to increase the number of prison

beds. While these regressive laws create further need for legal services, the budget fails to fund these services. The Federation of Community Legal Centres noted the lack of new investment in community legal centres and Aboriginal legal services to meet the growing needs in Victoria:

> For every client a community legal centre takes on, two are turned away, illustrating the chasm that exists between need for the holistic legal and community support … and the limited resourcing these centres have to meet it.

Of course Aboriginal people in particular bear the brunt of the government's punitive new laws, which will drastically increase the number of adults and young Aboriginals incarcerated. Yet the combined funding received by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and Djirra is less than 1 per cent of the $734 million allocated to community safety measures and Victoria Police. The hypocrisy of a government who pledged that the Statewide Treaty would make real, practical changes to achieve better outcomes for First Peoples in Victoria and close the gap introducing laws that disproportionately impact First Peoples was not lost on Nerita Waight, CEO of VALS. She said:

> Signing a Treaty doesn't mean you've signed away problems you've created … The government can no longer claim that the harm caused by their policies and investments is 'unintended consequences', when it is clear the outcome will be the mass incarceration of our people.

The investment in the violence reduction unit and modest investments in early intervention show that this government knows that funding directed at addressing the root causes of crime, poverty and disadvantage does work. But they have placed it all on being tough on crime, which is a sad joke when you consider that Victoria Police is 1500 officers down, morale is at rock bottom and so many senior and experienced officers are on the verge of retirement.

These policies lead to greater and unsustainable costs, with the ever-increasing cost of jailing people, of refurbishing old jails and building new ones, of keeping people on remand. Based on current trends, we will shortly see nearly 50 per cent of our prison population simply in remand, neither tried nor found guilty of any offence but incarcerated nonetheless, often for extended periods. The government knows all this, but these are the choices that have been made. These are the priorities that have been accorded. In this election year they have hedged their bets on punitive laws and big announcements and $5 billion worth of projects yet to be announced, while Victorians across the state are wrestling with cost of living, housing and a chronic lack of services. Time will tell if this budget is enough to convince that exhausted and increasingly disillusioned electorate to give this government another shot.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:38): I move:

> That the debate on the motion to take the budget papers 2026–27 into consideration be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate on budget papers adjourned until later this day.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (16:39): I thank the initial speakers on the budget take-note motion and in advance thank the speakers to come. As has been recent practice, given the passage of the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026, it is appropriate to move to committee so that members have got an opportunity to discuss issues. Obviously I have given an extensive second-reading speech in the form of a Treasurer's speech in the Assembly, so it is not my intention to reprosecute the budget and all of the policies contained therein. But we do have an unusual situation where I need to address an amendment in my summing-up because it has been proposed as a reasoned amendment, which is somewhat unusual, given if it was proposed as a normal amendment it would be out of scope.

In terms of the ability to move such an amendment, I would put to the opposition that there is an opportunity to move a private members bill. There is an opportunity to have this amendment dealt with as an amendment to a bill that would be probably much more appropriate, which is currently in the Legislative Assembly, which deals with some financial matters, tax matters and the like. It could have been open to the opposition to move an amendment to that bill. Instead what we have is an

unrelated reasoned amendment that is trying to put forward – they do not even want to legislate their own amendment.

The proposal is that the appropriations not proceed until the government legislate to require ministers to publicly report on Treasurer's advances (TA) within 30 days of approval. I would assume that that would take an amendment to the Financial Management Act 1994 (FMA). We dealt with this a little bit last year when we dealt with the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, because we had a lengthy conversation about the reporting. In fact I worked closely with the crossbench, I think led by the Greens, in relation to an amendment to bring forward some of the reporting responsibilities for greater transparency in relation to Treasurer's advances. I do think the discussion around that at that time resulted in the government saying, 'Yes, we could agree to that.' Whereas the opposition's strategy is to move a reasoned amendment, which I was not even shown until I went and asked Mr Welch, 'I am hearing that there's a reasoned amendment. Would you like to talk to me about it?' I asked crossbenchers and the Greens party, 'Do you know anything about this reasoned amendment that apparently is happening?' No-one knew anything about it. When you are proposing to hold up the appropriation bill at least have the decency to back in your strategy and at least have the decency to talk appropriately about what you want to achieve through a reasoned amendment.

The consequences – yes, they are hypothetical, but effectively what you are trying to do is hold up supply. Everything that people welcome in this budget, if you had your way, would be paused: do not pay teachers, do not pay nurses, do not run hospitals, police – do not worry about it. You are proposing to hold up the bill. As I said, it is a hypothetical because we cannot withhold supply, but effectively that is the message you are sending to the public: 'We have a reasoned amendment. We demand that the government do our job for us and legislate something that we would like or we're not going to support the appropriation bill.' I think your strategy is juvenile. You could have actually had a conversation with me about some of these matters, and I would have been happy to have the conversations, just as has been proven with my past conduct with those that choose to perhaps adult in a more appropriate way.

Addressing the amendment, I just want to make some points. Again, I will just repeat some of the past experience with the Financial Management Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. There was an amendment to that bill which added a requirement for the midyear financial report to include reporting on Treasurer's advances approved in the first half of the financial year. As I said, this is an amendment that we worked on. We discussed and got advice on how it could be implemented, and the government agreed. It aligned with my view as Treasurer and the intention of the bill to improve financial reporting and increase transparency over Treasurer's advances. I have never, ever suggested that we should not be as transparent as possible when it comes to Treasurer's advances, and you have seen that I have made changes, in the short time that I have been Treasurer, to come through on that commitment.

On some of the things that continue to be misunderstood, there are a couple of things. Departments are expected to use up funding from appropriations before accessing TAs, even when a new use is approved in principle. Therefore that is why we get this unusual situation with not that many TAs approved in the first six months of the financial year. In terms of the proposed requirement to publicly report on Treasurer's advances within 30 days of approval, it is really misunderstanding how the system works. Putting aside the confusion that would arise if you were required to publicly report on TAs that were never used, never required or indeed perhaps less than what was approved in principle, it would create confusion and it would create financial burden and cost for departments – for what real benefit? TAs in real time could jeopardise commercial in confidence. It could undermine negotiations with vendors. It could cause issues with negotiations that you have with the federal government on bilateral funding agreements. Reporting TAs is provided on a line-by-line basis in the annual financial report, which has more transparency than is provided for funding appropriated to departments. In terms of where these details become public, you have the AFR that comes out in October, and that is where the detail is. As is custom and practice, this year's appropriation bill contains a full reconciliation of

Treasurer's advances from 2024–25, and I know, Mr Davis, last year we had conversations about the appropriations from 2023–24. This year many more of them were in my time, so I am a little more familiar with them and we perhaps may visit those in the committee stage.

It would also be worth just touching on, again, the reason we have Treasurer's advances and how they work. There are different categories. This is where I get feedback from those in opposition saying, 'You've got more than you've ever had.' Well, that is because we report and do things in a more financially responsible way, particularly in relation to major projects. We have the three categories of things that are held in contingency. The vast majority of output and asset contingencies relate to delivery of milestones. As I have said before, when you have a large project, the Department of Treasury and Finance's firm advice to me is, 'We don't give the whole bucket to departments. We wait till negotiations are continued, finalised, contracts are let.' Then you release the money as is appropriate, so that you have got greater control and greater accountability over that funding. It includes funding contingencies upon meeting specified conditions, such as formal report-backs, the outcome of legal or similar deliberative processes – again, as I said, the completion of a particular program of development or those procurement milestones. The other category is future growth allocations. Again, this is something that has been done for some time in relation to ensuring that you withhold an amount of money on the expectation that you might have a change of circumstances. One of the most common ones is in relation to education and allowing for future enrolment growth in schools, for example. And then there is the one that I think actually everybody gets: you would be required to sign off a Treasure's advance in the event of an emergency to ensure that the disaster response was appropriate. I think that one is well understood and people are pretty accepting of that.

It does continue to cause me frustration that there is this expectation or this sense from the opposition that something about future growth allocation and holding on to money in advance of milestones is somehow improper. I contest that, and I will continue to contest that. But as I have indicated, we made amendments to the FMA last year in relation to transparency and accountability, and also in the budget – my first budget – I sought to break down these Treasurer's advances in the manner of reporting so it was clearer and more understood in relation to the different categories and how they are used. Treasurer's advances are just the release mechanism. When you hold back something in contingency, it is only actually called a Treasurer's advance because of the mechanism of going out the door. I think that is what creates most of the confusion, particularly when people refer to a so-called slush fund that I have – that I just get to write cheques out and advance the money as Treasurer. That is just not how it works. I have attempted to explain this in the simplest of terms. It still creates some confusion. I continue to offer further briefings as an example of how the system works, because we are on the same page in relation to transparency and accountability.

What the opposition are proposing to do – as I said, if they put it to me in a more appropriate manner, I could have had a conversation about why it is unworkable and had that debate. But instead it has been thrown in as a frustration or in a manner to somehow stop supply of what can flow in the appropriation. I do not like the strategy. I do not like the message it is sending to the public, that you are attempting to hold up the budget bill. I think there are many other ways you could have advanced this amendment. If you tried to advance it, as I said, it would have been an out-of-scope amendment. I hope that we do not see a practice in this chamber where out-of-scope amendments all of a sudden start appearing as reasoned amendments for every piece of legislation. I can see the clerks shuddering. That is effectively the precedent that you are potentially copying here, I think. I am concerned about the practice, but perhaps I will not provide any more commentary on that, because I do not want to see any more of them come. In relation to that, I hope, Mr Welch, that has given you a little bit of explanation as to why it is not appropriate to put a reasoned amendment. Even if it was, the outcome of this reasoned amendment is misinformed. If you had taken the opportunity to have a conversation with me, we could have had that. You did not afford me, nor anybody else in the chamber, that opportunity. We will not be in a position to support the reasoned amendment for reasons I believe I have comprehensively covered.

Council divided on amendment:

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

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

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (16:59)

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, we might as well start with Treasurer's advances (TA), since it is a hot topic. You mentioned that the amounts put into Treasurer's advances are for meeting milestones and things of that nature. The question is: does that reserve assume all the milestones will be met across all initiatives?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, your question I guess lacks a little bit of detail in terms of milestones. Milestones can mean a range of things in terms of when contracts are let and the like. You might have work packages that are bundled up into one, two, three types of separate projects and things like that. In terms of milestones that meet what is anticipated to be caught by the TA, yes. But you do not necessarily know the milestones at the time of the contingency. This would also be similar to bilateral negotiations with the feds just in terms of – with the national agreement for foundational supports, for example, we have got an allocation for that. That is effectively why our contingency in this year's budget is as large as it is. But we do not know what that is going to look like, so it is a bit hard to be specific in that, because if we were specific, you probably would not have to do it in the way that we do because you would know the information before. We do not know the detail in advance of the negotiations for both a lot of contract negotiations and negotiations in relation to agreements.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Treasurer, for the answer, but that raises other questions. If, say, the operating reserve is an aggregate and you have not disaggregated it, you do not provide any specificity around what that aggregate is made up of –

Jaclyn SYMES: No, well –

Richard WELCH: And you are saying you do not know the milestones and you do not have enough detail on the milestones to total it –

Jaclyn SYMES: Sometimes you might. You said 'all'.

Richard WELCH: I thought it was implied, but I was not clear enough. If you do not know what the milestones are, how do you know that the total, whether in part or in aggregate, is going to be enough for all the milestones you are aiming to meet?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think we are getting there through clarification with each other. Enough money is included in the Treasurer's advance appropriation to meet anticipated milestones. It is often the case that the allocation is a ceiling and less gets used. We do not provide any specificity of the amount provided to each department either.

Richard WELCH: Anticipated milestones – just for clarity again, the total amount held is sufficient for all anticipated milestones?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. Or completion of TEI.

Richard WELCH: But not more? Is there any amount held in excess of that?

Jaclyn SYMES: Many projects have contingency withheld for matters that arise, yes, which is again why often the ceiling is not met.

Richard WELCH: Okay, so there are additional amounts. Are you able to provide the difference between anticipated milestones and contingency funding that you have in that reserve?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think I might need you to explain to me what you mean by milestones and in which particular department and which projects, because as I said, milestones in relation to TAs might be an infrastructure project or a funding agreement.

Richard WELCH: You are sort of pointing to the problem in your answer in that we do not know.

Jaclyn SYMES: What do you mean?

Richard WELCH: We cannot point to anything because we do not have any figures, because they are all aggregated. There is no way to disaggregate by department or by project, so –

Jaclyn SYMES: That is why they are released in account.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Treasurer, when Mr Welch has the call, can you just wait for him to finish before –

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, sorry. I do apologise.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Because Hansard cannot get it down.

Jaclyn SYMES: I do apologise, Deputy President. I just need to bring Mr Welch back, because he is misinterpreting the conversation that we are having, I think. Mr Welch, budget paper 5 details the allocations. The reconciliation is accounted for in this year's budget for 2024–25, for example. The annual financial report has all of the details. So the accountability of how the money is expended is always disclosed.

Richard WELCH: Yes, but that is in retrospect and we are doing appropriations of forwards, so therefore we do not have transparency. Okay, you are saying they are for expected milestones to be met and deliverables to be met, but we do not know what they are – what proportion is actual, what proportion is contingent. We do not have that transparency, so that is why I am asking the question: what proportion of what there is going forward is contingent and what part is for expected milestones?

Jaclyn SYMES: That is not how it is accounted. As I said, budget paper 5 is forward looking; it anticipates all of the categories that I went through before. And again, the point I think you are trying to make is a reprosecution of the reasoned amendment. The arguments against your reasoned amendment are perhaps appropriate here. If you were to outline all of the anticipated costs for a particular project, a particular program or a particular negotiation, you would be undermining the position of the state, because many of these projects, if they are infrastructure, involve contracts and tenders. You kind of do not want to telegraph to the world what you are prepared to pay, because you want to get better value for dollar for taxpayers. In relation to our negotiations with the federal government, you have still got to hold back in contingency. Again, you want to get the best deal you can for the Victorian public. That is why a lot of this is detailed in accounting after the fact.

But we do publish in the papers what has been withheld for those anticipated expenditures. That is then fully accounted for, fully transparent, in a line-by-line item in the appropriate way. Again, as I

said earlier, more transparency is a feature of our budgets in recent times, certainly compared to former coalition governments' reporting of these matters.

Richard WELCH: Look, I think the commercial in confidence and damaging our negotiating position would be a stronger argument if we did not have so many blowouts on all the projects. We are clearly not doing the best –

Jaclyn SYMES: Where?

Richard WELCH: North East Link, West Gate Tunnel.

Jaclyn SYMES: Tell me a recent one.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Treasurer, if you can just let Mr Welch ask his question.

Richard WELCH: What, there have not been blowouts? Clearly the process is not working. I do not want to be argumentative about it, but I think the flaw in your argument is that you have not achieved those things at all. That is why greater transparency over what you are planning to do would be in the interests of the Victorian people.

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Welch has the call. He has the right to make a statement and then ask a question. Mr Welch, if you can get to your question, please.

Richard WELCH: I am happy to move on. In regard to the sale of the lottery licence for 40 years, in which financial year will the payments from that be recognised or received?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is a shame that you left the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), Mr Welch, because I feel as though your FOMO is going to play out in this committee stage. I am more than happy to spend some time on the lottery matter, because the way you have even articulated it demonstrates that you have not actually caught up on how this deal has come into fruition. The mere fact that you have just described it as a sale is probably, first of all, incorrect. So let us perhaps start with the misinformation that your side has been prosecuting, and let us get to the real nub of the issue in relation to how you think it would be –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Can everybody please refrain from interjecting and let the Treasurer answer Mr Welch's question, please?

Jaclyn SYMES: It was not a sale, it was a lottery licence extension.

Richard WELCH: Agreed. It was a licence extension.

Jaclyn SYMES: Very good. In relation to the concern I have about some of the misinformation about the fact that this contributed to the surplus, for example, it is false. It is misinformation and wrong. I can take you through the history of how we got here. I can take you through some of the probity examples in relation to it, and I can also explain how it is taken in an accounting measure. So if you want to ask me a specific question without your commentary, perhaps let us start there so I can be very responsive.

Richard WELCH: All I really want to know is: in which financial year do the funds get reflected?

Jaclyn SYMES: The payment is recognised over 40 years from the commencement of the licence in 2028–29.

Richard WELCH: What amount will be reflected in 2026–27?

Jaclyn SYMES: I will repeat my answer to your question: the payment is recognised over 40 years from the commencement of the licence extension in 2028–29.

Georgie CROZIER: I have just been listening to Mr Welch's questioning around the budget. I am just wondering: in relation to the contingency have there been any requests from ministers for Treasurer's advances? I make that comment in relation to obviously health, because as you would have heard in question time today, I have got hospitals that are asking staff to take leave and cancelling surgery. Services have been cut right across the state, so I am wondering: have they got enough money, or are they waiting for 1 July?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, as is repeated this year, like last year, record funding has been provided to the health portfolio and our hospitals. I think you understand that the model budget process in relation to what hospitals will be provided in the next financial year is in its final stages of being worked through. But it does not involve a TA discussion, no.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you for that clarification at the end because I was –

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry. That was your question.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, it was. So given you did discuss with Mr Welch Commonwealth negotiations, and obviously health comes into play with those negotiations – and clearly there are some discussions around federal funding that is coming forward given the commitments by the federal government – are you satisfied that all of that money will be provided to Victoria on time?

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry, Ms Crozier, are you saying: do we believe that we will receive our federal allocation for health or will hospitals receive their allocation from the feds in time?

Georgie CROZIER: Yes.

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have any advice that it would not be.

Georgie CROZIER: Good. Thank you for the clarification. Treasurer, can I just move to Albury Wodonga Health. In 2022 your government committed $225 million towards the redevelopment of that hospital site, but four years later no-one seems to know where the money is – it certainly does not appear in the budget – and yesterday in response to a journalist an Allan government spokesperson said the money was being held in contingency. New South Wales say Victoria has the business case, and in the past that was always used as the excuse for why the money had not changed hands nor appeared in budget papers. So if it is being held in contingency, why?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, can you give me 5 minutes on that because there has been an update. I just want to get you the most contemporary information in relation to that.

Georgie CROZIER: I would appreciate that, Treasurer, as there seems to be some real confusion, given what the New South Wales government is saying you have. I know the Deputy President two years ago asked for the master plan around Albury Wodonga Health and it has never been provided, and yet New South Wales is saying the Victorian government has the business case. There is just a lot of confusion around this, and now we have got this additional confusion around the contingency. Is there anything else in that contingency fund that should be made public for Victorians regarding this project?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said I just want to check what I can provide you in relation to the latest update. In relation to that project, you are correct: the money was held in contingency and still exists. There is no issue there. I just want to get you the latest update in relation to the timing, and I just want to get confirmation so that I am very clear. I take your point that I do not want to add to any misinformation or confusion, so give me 5; we are just checking.

Georgie CROZIER: I just need some clarification, if I may. In a response to Mr Welch you talked about the anticipated expenditure and how that is held in the treasury funds. It is not necessarily in the budget papers or not forthcoming in the budget papers. Am I correct in my assumption of what you were referring to?

Jaclyn SYMES: Let us try and get on the same page. Yes, the budget contains contingencies. We have indicated what a lot of those are for, particularly foundational supports, but have not articulated a figure at this point in time, as is appropriate. The budget is annual. If you know something is coming, it is prudent to allocate it or account for it in this year's budget so you know that it is anticipated to be drawn down on. You might not know the exact details of that. You might not be in a position to publicly disclose that because you are still working through details that might be jeopardised if the numbers are put out too early – that kind of thing. So it is the anticipated expenses – you have got a fair idea of what they are going to look like, but that is why you withhold it. Does that make sense?

Georgie CROZIER: Yes. Is any of that money held back for election commitments? Will any of that money be held back? It will not be in terms of what you have put in the budget papers, so is it withholding money for those projects that are highlighted in the budget?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. Indeed it would be improper to have an election commitment slush fund in the budget.

Georgie CROZIER: I agree with you, but we are taken by surprise at times in relation to how the financials are administered in the state. The reason I ask that is sometimes the budget papers can say things – I will give you an example – like 'cancer care', and there is not a line-by-line item as there was in budgets of years gone by, so sometimes it can be quite difficult to anticipate what that looks like and what they are getting at. I asked PAEC to ask on my behalf around proton beam therapy for children's cancer. There are cancer treatments. That is why I asked that question around election commitments and whether it is hidden in the budget somewhere, but you have assured me that that is not the case.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am just a bit confused by your line of questioning, to be honest, Ms Crozier. In terms of what is withheld in the budget, it is contingencies for things that will be delivered by government, which is slightly different to a proposal of what a re-elected government would do.

Georgie CROZIER: I understand that, but it can be unclear in some of those explanations in the budget around what it will actually deliver. That is what I was anticipating from you in relation to how that budget funding is allocated and if there is room for it. That is why we asked the questions in PAEC.

Jaclyn SYMES: Is there money left over?

Georgie CROZIER: Yes.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I was explaining to Mr Welch, many of the contingency items have underspends because you get a better deal. You have got to allow for a likely outcome, and it is Treasury – they are usually conservative in that. So there could be money left over, but any money left over goes back into consolidated revenue.

Georgie CROZIER: The budget has funding for community health, but there was a $51 million cut in that budget. What advice have you received as to the impact of those cuts to community health on the acute healthcare system? Can you explain what that $51 million cut was in relation to?

Jaclyn SYMES: Can you give me a source for your –

Georgie CROZIER: Performance statement, page 61, I think, has the reference.

Jaclyn SYMES: The health performance statement?

Georgie CROZIER: Yes – the performance statement, page 61, for health.

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me add that to Albury Wodonga.

Georgie CROZIER: That would be helpful.

Jaclyn SYMES: You would appreciate every department and every line item are not all in my head, but where I can assist, I will try.

Georgie CROZIER: I do appreciate it, thank you. Could I also go to another concern that was raised. If you had time to watch the PAEC hearings when my colleagues questioned the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and my colleague Richard Riordan –

Jaclyn SYMES: I did not.

Georgie CROZIER: I suppose you had better things to do on a Thursday night. Questions around Armstrong Creek's long-promised and non-existent ambulance station were asked of the minister, and it went around and around in circles. But the question goes to the budget papers themselves. The project first appeared in the budget papers 2023–24 – $30.4 million. To go to your previous answers around anticipated spending and what is provided in the budget papers, the 2024–25 budget revealed that $2.4 million had been spent. The 2025–26 forecast spend was $3 million. Yet in this budget, paper 4, page 55, states the spend to 30 June is just $839,000. So where did the money go from the previous money that had been allocated? Again, I know they are figures over the last four years, but it just shows that there is $30.4 million. Bits and pieces have been spent, and there is no real explanation as to where the millions have gone.

Jaclyn SYMES: This is one project in a very large budget that I am just not in a position to be able to answer your question on with any specificity. But I would have thought that the relevant minister in PAEC with her officials was better placed than I am right now. I would be inclined to direct you back to that minister, but –

Georgie CROZIER: I have tried.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am not inclined to keep a massive list of 'keep going' and of 'coming back to you'. I have already committed to two. As I said, I am more than willing to be of assistance, but I think when it comes down to individual projects that are not delivered by the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF), it is a little bit outside my remit.

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, you would be aware of the reports of corruption on Big Build sites. Have you measured any budgetary impact of that corruption?

Jaclyn SYMES: Did you watch my PAEC hearing by any chance?

Richard WELCH: No.

Jaclyn SYMES: Because I had a bit of this from opposition members, so I dealt with that, and so did the secretary of the department. In relation to the sensitivity analysis that is contained in the budget, a range of factors go into that, but usually that is based on some evidence, some agreement on what should be modelled and the like. As we have already said as a government, any inappropriate conduct, criminal conduct, should be reported to the appropriate officials and acted on in accordance with that. But when we go back to figures that are put around that are untested, unfounded and not backed in with any evidence, doing modelling based on something that has no substance is not a good use of Treasury and Finance's modelling expertise.

David ETTERSHANK: I have got a couple of fairly specific questions. The first one is about Taylors Road in Delahey. Can the government advise what funding has been allocated in the 2026–27 Victorian budget, including forward estimates, for the planning and development of upgrades to Taylors Road in Melbourne's west as part of the $23 million metropolitan roads upgrade program?

Jaclyn SYMES: Not to be contradictory to my conversation with Ms Crozier, the reason I am in a better place to answer Mr Ettershank's questions is that he gave me a bit of a heads-up about some of the topics he would cover. So he gets a level of specificity that I was not able to afford you, because I had the opportunity to have a look at a few things. That is not an invitation for a massive list next year, but anyway –

Georgie Crozier: You won't be in the role, do not worry.

Jaclyn SYMES: I reckon I might be. Funding in this year's budget is certainly contained for Taylors Road in Keilor Downs and Delahey. This is a project that was brought to my attention by the current member but also the candidate, Mr Rasic, who I understand grew up in the area as well. So he was able to really take me through the issues, which I think you are obviously familiar with, in terms of a fast-growing area, council road – where does it fit? Locals do not care; they just want it addressed. I can confirm that funding has been provided in the budget for planning. We have not allocated any money for redevelopment or the like yet, because we need to see what the planning says. But some of the money will also cover re-marking. So re-marking and upgrade planning and development of the road is what is contained in the funding allocation.

David ETTERSHANK: Is it possible, Treasurer, to disaggregate out of that $23 million how much has been allocated for Taylors Road?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, I do not want to be cute, Mr Ettershank, because I know the number, but because it will be tendered and subject to some procurement I am probably not in a position to disclose that publicly at this time. I can assure you it is a substantial amount of money. Planning is not cheap. I think that we will be in a position to perhaps disclose that pretty soon, but I do not want to put anyone in an awkward position. We will do that in due course at this point in time.

David ETTERSHANK: That seems fair enough. You mentioned, I think, line markings and a few other things, but could you outline what specific planning activities and potential works are expected to be delivered from this funding, apart from the line marking?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. The line marking and the planning are both funded. What will be a matter for future budgets is what the planning demonstrates would be the best solution for some of those bottlenecks. I have looked at the maps. It is a complicated area in terms of overhead electricity and potential land acquisition issues. I think the request of the planning process will be to look at all options in consultation with the council, obviously, to see what we can do to best alleviate the congestion in that area.

David ETTERSHANK: Does the government intend for this planning investment to inform future construction funding for duplication of Taylors Road, and if so, when would further investment decisions be considered?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, the funding will look at all possible measures so that there are options for considerations for future budgets.

David ETTERSHANK: Treasurer, can you advise on whether it is the government's intention to declare Taylors Road as a state-managed arterial road – I think you alluded to the council status at the beginning being rather problematic in this area – and how this consideration is being progressed as part of current planning and network development processes?

Jaclyn SYMES: I can confirm that those considerations are under active consideration. The Department of Transport and Planning and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety will consider all relevant network and planning considerations to find the best solutions for the community, which – not pre-empting – certainly may consider declaration of the road, for instance.

David ETTERSHANK: In budget paper 3, page 41, there is the homeless assertive outreach. The 2026–27 budget references funding for the expansion of assertive outreach services to address homelessness, and that is terrific. How much of this funding will be allocated to assertive outreach services in Melton and Brimbank?

Jaclyn SYMES: This was an initiative that a lot of people were really pleased was able to get through the budget process. Certainly within my office it was listed as one of the highlights for my team. The budget does provide funding for nine new assertive outreach teams to engage with people

sleeping rough and connect them to housing support. The budget also provides funding for additional emergency accommodation. My understanding is that the funding for new assertive outreach teams is notionally split evenly between the nine new regions. However, the department retains flexibility to amend each region's allocation according to factors like demand for service or workforce availability.

David ETTERSHANK: I might have misunderstood that, Treasurer. Are you able to clarify how those overlays would fit within the Melton LGA or the Brimbank LGA by any chance?

Jaclyn SYMES: I might have to direct you to the Minister for Housing and Building, Mr Ettershank. The advice I have is that the department has some flexibility to amend each region's allocation, which I assume would be able to consider overlap.

David ETTERSHANK: Could you advise what service outcomes and performance measures will be used to assess the effectiveness of these assertive outreach investments, particularly in places like Brimbank, where there are very high levels of rough sleeping at the moment, which is a great concern to the community as well as the agencies in the area.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, the performance measures are included in the program guidelines for the assertive outreach program and incorporated into each funded agency's service agreement. Guidelines are set out on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing website. I can get you a link, or I can read out some more information that has been provided to me right now, if you would like. You choose.

David ETTERSHANK: I will choose the link, thank you. That would be fine. I am cognisant that there are others who would like to get some questions in. Treasurer, if I may, could I move on to Sunshine station and the Melbourne Airport rail. Can the government confirm if the previously announced investment in the Sunshine station precinct master plan, as referenced in budget paper 4, remains at $143 million, please?

Jaclyn SYMES: This work has now been integrated into the scope for the Sunshine superhub. The total estimated investment, estimated expenditure and estimated completion date of that overarching project will be disclosed when the procurement process is finalised.

David ETTERSHANK: I think I might be able to guess the next one, but could you advise, Treasurer: what are the anticipated delivery stages and timeframes for the Sunshine master plan, including when construction or major works are expected to commence?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is a little contingent on the tender process. Particularly in my new ministerial appointment to precincts, I have got some interest in the area, so I can personally commit to keeping you updated as it progresses.

David ETTERSHANK: I would appreciate that update. That would be fabulous. Can you tell us how the delivery of the Sunshine master plan will be coordinated with the other major investments in the precinct? In particular I am referring, I suppose, to the Sunshine superhub and the Melbourne Airport rail. We are obviously all concerned to see that this is done in a timely and integrated manner.

Jaclyn SYMES: What I might do is just list a couple of the features of the Sunshine superhub, because it goes to, I guess, all of the considerations and interests that have to be taken into account. The superhub will feature a new walking and cycling link, creating better community connections; a new city place plaza with landscaped open space; a new station forecourt with open space and landscaping; two new regional platforms and station concourse; additional lifts to improve accessibility and safety; an upgraded station car park with a dedicated pick-up and drop-off zone; a bicycle Parkiteer – you know what they do; bus interchange upgrades; and security cameras and improved lighting. The specific delivery of the superhub is a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, but we are pretty keen to talk about this project as much as possible. It is a pretty exciting transformation of that area. My mother was born in Sunshine, actually. It is a project that we want to make sure the community are kept abreast of. Certainly in your advocacy, I am more than happy to let you know of each and every development as it arises.

David ETTERSHANK: Can I just get you, Treasurer, if you could, to confirm the timeframe for the completion of the Melbourne Airport rail project?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, Mr Ettershank, I am not able to provide you with that information, but we will keep you updated.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I am happy to ask some questions. For a Treasury Corporation of Victoria loan, what would the loan yield? Is the average yield 5 or 6 per cent for a stereotypical Treasury Corporation of Victoria bond issuance?

Jaclyn SYMES: They vary, based on when they were issued and when they potentially roll over et cetera. I can certainly get Treasury Corp to provide you with a breakdown of any specific questions that you have. It is not something that I have brought with me today.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I ask because I wanted to go to the 'State Capital Program' budget paper, page 16. The government has acknowledged for the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) that its value capture mechanism would comprise existing land and windfall gains tax, infrastructure contributions, a car parking levy on car park owners from 2035 and state-initiated development. The revenue from these five value capture mechanisms will repay up-front state borrowing over a 40-year period. I am wondering what the yield would be on a 40-year loan.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think the simplest answer is that the modelling in relation to the value capture arrangements for the SRL includes any interest payments owing.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just to confirm: the modelling for the value capture also includes interest repayments on the $11.5 billion of value capture?

Jaclyn SYMES: Correct – over the 40-year repayment period.

Evan MULHOLLAND: If I can decipher what you are saying, if we were to go for a 40-year loan period, the interest on, say, $11.5 billion would make it almost 2.5 times the $11.5 billion. So over $28 billion, if you consider the fact that usual 40-year loans are over 6 per cent with the Treasury Corporation of Victoria.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is not really how it works.

Evan MULHOLLAND: What modelling have you done to assure yourself that the value capture mechanism can not only pay the $11.5 billion back from taxpayers but also the almost double that which will almost certainly have to be paid in interest?

Jaclyn SYMES: What I am concerned about is the simplistic way in which you are articulating how you think a loan for a particular project would be treated by Treasury Corp. It is not as though they go and take out a loan for a particular project and have a 40-year mortgage over it like a normal household. They have a range of ways that they issue bonds to the market. You are also assuming that principal would not be paid off over time as well. The way you have articulated and tried to conflate the figures is not something that is supported by the way it would be dealt with in practice by either government or Treasury Corp.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Treasurer, you have said that the value capture is modelled to include interest repayments. If that is the case, what is the value of those interest repayments?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have the modelling on hand.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Are you able to get it on notice?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is not the practice of government to reveal the details of the modelling for these matters, but I am happy to have a look and see if there is anything that would be of assistance to you.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It is of high-level public interest, so I would hope that you are able to get something, because the 40-year loan is exactly what was put in the budget. Now, you have come back and said there are varying ways over lots of different things that Treasury corporation could do to issue this loan. But it literally says in the budget that it is a 40-year loan for the value capture arrangements, so I think it is fair for Victorians to ask how the government plans to deal with that. We can go into the specifics on the value capture mechanisms in a moment, but the question I want to ask is: how much? Given that you have already said, Treasurer, that you have modelled the 40-year loan of the value capture mechanism to take in interest repayments, as a rough estimate we are looking at possibly over $30 billion if you include interest repayments on an $11.5 billion portion of the Suburban Rail Loop over 40 years. So my question is: what are the interest repayments that are to be paid by Victorian taxpayers from the $11.5 billion 40-year loan?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, you have literally asked this question. You are just repeating yourself. What I have explained to you is that the way you are conflating the numbers is not an appropriate way to describe the delivery of this project; however, I have committed to providing any additional information to you in line with your questioning.

Richard WELCH: In terms of the financing of that debt, I just want to know: what is the weighted average interest rate you have applied in the modelling for it?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, you are just repeating the question that Mr Mulholland asked in relation to the modelling, and I said that it is not modelling that government ordinarily reveals in detail, but I will see if I can provide something that would assist with your line of questioning. I have given that commitment to Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The reason why we ask these questions is because it is literally written in all of the government materials, from the budget to the announcement made last year in regard to value capture, that the SRL value capture measures will apply in the six SRL East precincts. The revenue from these five value capture mechanisms will repay up-front state borrowing over a 40-year period. Now, if we were to extrapolate that out, that means that the $11.5 billion portion is actually a lot more. So instead of being a one-third component of the Suburban Rail Loop East, it is actually going to cost over $30 billion. By the time the 40-year term concludes, Victorian taxpayers are up for over $28 billion in interest alone.

Jaclyn SYMES: You are saying that.

Evan MULHOLLAND: But we can only assume. Treasurer, you have said that your modelling mechanism also includes interest repayments. As far as I am aware, that is new information. So how high, for example, does the car parking levy have to be to cover not only the $11.5 billion but the interest repayments on that 40-year loan?

Jaclyn SYMES: At the outset, Mr Mulholland, you keep making claims about figures that I have said you are making up. At the first instance, let us not affirm the detail in your question. In relation to this project, the state is borrowing to fund up-front capital costs for the value capture component of the project funding; we have established that. The revenue generated from the value capture measures supports the borrowing over the long term, and well beyond this budget. So I am talking about matters that are not relevant to the appropriation bill today, but out of respect I am happy to have the conversation.

The value capture goes over 40 years. My budget does not go for 40 years; it goes for four. The borrowing has been factored into the state budget aggregates. Value capture is always retrospective, as governments cannot capture value until the value is created, which goes without saying. In relation to the settings, the five value capture measures you have articulated were very clearly outlined in our announcement in December last year. Value capture is an important measure. It has been used to fund numerous capital projects around the world. It is not the first project in Victoria to do it. This is making sure that you can deliver a generational project that is going to benefit many, many people for years to

come, and value capture is an appropriate way to do it. In relation to up-front borrowings, we have been very open about that. In relation to a 40-year time period to pay that down, interest has been modelled into it. I am not in a position to provide detailed modelling. However, as I said, I will see if there is anything that I can provide on notice that is of assistance to your line of questioning. But again, it is outside the scope of today's bill, because today's bill is for the appropriations, which only are across the forwards.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Do you acknowledge that existing state property taxes like land taxes and windfall gains taxes, as stated on the 'State Capital Program' budget paper, page 16, are not new value that is created but indeed existing revenues that would have gone to consolidated revenue?

Jaclyn SYMES: We are talking about a project that is going to generate hundreds of houses, businesses, educational offerings and job opportunities. There will be more revenue generated out of purely the infrastructure investment, so to suggest that the money would somehow appear from that area without that investment is rather illogical.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Have you modelled or do you know how much hypothecated revenue the government is set to cast aside for SRL East sites from existing land taxes and windfall gains taxes?

Jaclyn SYMES: The SRL does not break down existing land tax by postcode, for example. As I have indicated, the value capture is supported by the fact that there will be more development, more housing and more activity in the centres as a result of this project.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Can I just walk you through a couple of things. You have said that the value capture of $11.5 billion in the mechanism is modelled over a 40-year period to take into account interest, but you do not know how much two of the key components, which you have said the value capture in the budget will raise in revenue that would normally go to consolidated revenue, would raise in revenue. Can you make this math math, Treasurer? You have said that the value capture is modelled with interest repayments over the 40-year period, but would it be a fact that you do not really know how much the mechanism that includes existing land taxes and windfall gains taxes would raise?

Jaclyn SYMES: At the outset I think it is important to put on record that the land tax and all of the existing tax settings in that area do not change. There is no increase to the tax, but what we are proposing to do going forward is to ensure that that revenue stays local. We know that the revenue in that area will be uplifted by the investment and development and delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop. As you have indicated, there are a range of measures that are in the value capture mechanism. You can go and look at the value capture mechanism, the details of which were released last year. It includes land tax, windfall gains tax, infrastructure contributions, car park owner levy and state-initiated development in relation to anticipated revenue over the next 40 years. As I said, it was in December that we released the mechanisms. They were carefully modelled by Treasury to ensure that they raise sufficient revenue over the 40-year period to pay for, as you know, one-third of the capital cost. As I said, there is a proposition here to ensure that the increased value of that region goes to ensuring that that is repaid. That is the level of detail I can take you through in the committee stage of this bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: You have said that the modelling for the value capture mechanism includes interest repayments. Therefore it would be relatively easy to confirm that the total cost of the value capture component would be greater than $11.5 billion.

Jaclyn SYMES: The commitment is to borrow the $11.5 billion and repay it over 40 years.

Evan MULHOLLAND: So it is greater because it is including interest, and therefore the amount that we pay back over 40 years is greater than the actual $11.5 billion.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is kind of how things work. I have taken you through the value capture and how it works. Revenue raised over 40 years will be attributed to ensuring that it goes to the value capture component of this project. If you are proposing an alternative, then that is fine. We are delivering this project in a way that is funded by state government, federal government and value

capture, because that is the way that the government believes is the best way to deliver an amazing project that is going to transform that area and ensure that many, many more people can live in that area and benefit from being able to get around.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I understand that you do not want to admit it –

Jaclyn SYMES: Please do not verbal me.

Evan MULHOLLAND: even though you have practically said it, because you have said that the 40-year loan does include interest repayments, and therefore in a roundabout way you have confirmed that the value capture component is more than a third of the project. I just want to ask, when does the hypothecation of the existing land tax and windfall gains tax actually begin?

Jaclyn SYMES: I refer you to the value capture mechanism materials that were announced in December. It is something that has already been put out in the public domain. This is a project that has some funding elements in this budget – not the entire project, as you would appreciate, because it is a long-term project – and this is a government that is proud to deliver infrastructure projects. It is a project that will be remembered, such as our Metro Tunnel, West Gate Tunnel, Footscray Hospital, Frankston hospital –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I will take up the interjection, Ms Crozier. Ensuring that you build for Victoria and ensuring that you provide the infrastructure that the growing population needs is something that this government is committed to. I know that as an alternative your leader has proposed that you will build nothing.

Georgie Crozier: That is a lie.

Jaclyn SYMES: Of course it is not a lie. The literal consequence of a net cash surplus is no borrowing, which means you cannot build anything.

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: I know none of you have been ministers – I understand that – but if you had any idea how government works, you would recognise that you cannot deliver infrastructure without some borrowing. It is appropriate to invest in productive infrastructure. The alternative is not to build. I know that is your position, but we are talking about the SRL. We are talking about a project that the opposition have said that they will pause, which sacks thousands of people –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Deputy President, I know the Treasurer is not liking the line of questioning from Mr Mulholland, who is asking this on behalf of the Victorian public because of the wasteful mismanagement of the Victorian budget, but the Treasurer has just come in here and made a ridiculous assertion about what we will do.

Members interjecting.

Georgie Crozier: Excuse me, Mr Batchelor, what the Treasurer said was a ridiculous assertion. I would ask you to ask the Treasurer to stop lying to the public about what our plans are and answer the questions of Mr Mulholland.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I do not think that is actually a point of order, but we will bring the Treasurer back to the substance of the question rather than commentary around the opposition, please.

Jaclyn SYMES: The issue, Deputy President, is that Mr Mulholland's line of questioning is asserting things that are not true. He is making up figures and verballing me in relation to what he thinks might happen, so it is only proper for me to ensure that through this debate we are talking about a project that only a Labor government will deliver. I am explaining the value capture mechanism as it relates to the budget, I am explaining why it is important to borrow to build and I am explaining the

contrast of a potential government that have literally said that they will not borrow, which means they cannot build. So, Ms Crozier, by accusing me of lying, you are unaware of the consequences of the policies of your leader.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Of course I am correct. If you do not borrow, you are not building much. That is a simple fact and the position that you have put. I am surprised that the likes of Mr Davis and Mr Welch support this policy, because I actually think they believe in productivity. You know that you have to invest and build in productive infrastructure. Stopping building means that investors go, jobs go. As I said, I am not convinced that your entire party room is on board with not borrowing, because I think you know what it will do to the economy.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Deputy President, again, I do not know that the Treasurer does know what she is speaking about. I go back to what Michael O'Brien did when he was Treasurer with a cash surplus.

Jaclyn SYMES: You did not build anything.

Georgie Crozier: We did actually. How about Box Hill Hospital?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, these are debating points rather than a point of order. Do you have a point of order?

Georgie Crozier: I am a bit fed up with the Treasurer not understanding actually how a cash surplus works and how responsible management of the budget works.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Treasurer, are you aware if contracts will be let by the election – all contracts for the SRL at least?

Jaclyn SYMES: That is not a matter for the appropriation bill today, Mr Mulholland. You can ask the relevant minister.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It is funny you say that. We have been trying to get an answer on this and indeed tried to at PAEC. The last time we heard anything on this, the last Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop just claimed that all contracts will be let by the election. That was actually Mr Danny Pearson, so two ministers ago. The SRL is in the budget, so I would have thought that was of interest, but I will go to another question. In answer to a question on notice at PAEC about the amount of attributable funding to the Suburban Rail Loop in the government infrastructure investment line item in table 1.1 of page 5, budget paper 2, the Department of Treasury and Finance confirmed that there is a total of $15.1 billion of capital expenditure provisions over the financial years 2025–26 to 2029–30 for the Suburban Rail Loop East project. That is very nearly – almost – one-fifth of what the government spends on all infrastructure, including hospitals and schools. It is enough to keep anyone awake at night. Would you be able to advise, Treasurer, of the year-by-year breakdown of this funding?

Jaclyn SYMES: Over the four years?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes.

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to the $15 billion that has been allocated to the project to date, that relates to the letting of contracts. Obviously you would be aware that tunnel-boring machines are in the ground this year and the like. There are about 3000 people already working on the site. The reason that Treasury were able to provide the figure is that it is actually already public. If you add it up, each of the announcements and the letting of contracts is $15 billion, so I was a little surprised that it was treated as new information because it is just adding up what is already public. In that sense I do not have on me the year breakdown, but it is on the public record as to when those have been let.

Evan MULHOLLAND: This would be a new way of doing things, because in previous years for projects like the North East Link and the Metro Tunnel it would be pretty standard to have it line by line, year by year. Are you able to take it on notice? The budget had a TBC line item. I assume it was because you were waiting on the federal budget. That is over now, and you have provided a global figure. I think it is pretty fair to ask for the year-by-year figure, as in line with all other equivalent infrastructure projects that have been budgeted.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I indicated, the $15 billion obviously refers to the peak construction phase of the project. A lot of the letting of those contracts I believe is available in the public record. In relation to your specific question, let me take that on notice and see if I can assist by seeing what I can allocate per year. As I said, the total has been provided by Treasury officials in relation to the money that has been allocated to the project to date, but that obviously includes work that is ongoing; it is not retrospective.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Minister, can I take you to budget paper 4, page 154.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is not PAEC.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I just want to be helpful. Can the minister advise how many executives within the Suburban Rail Loop Authority currently receive total remuneration packages exceeding $400,000?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, again, the opposition were given the opportunity to provide me with some questions in advance if they had detailed questions about other ministerial portfolios. Mr Ettershank took up the invitation, the opposition did not. I am not in a position to give detailed answers that would be best directed to relevant ministers.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Have you, as Treasurer, approved any salaries exceeding the wage cap?

Jaclyn SYMES: This is information that gets released in annual reports. Again, I always like to be helpful, but if you are going to ask questions when the information is actually disclosed and published elsewhere, I think that is –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, it is not a joke.

Georgie Crozier: We do not get the annual reports when they are due.

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, if you looked at past history, I think you would recognise in my portfolio that people that work for the Victorian Funds Management Corporation, for example – when you are competing with international talent compared to superannuation management companies, you can imagine that perhaps there are –

Georgie Crozier: It's an election year. We deserve transparency.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is in last year's annual report. I can show you last year's annual report. In terms of the forthcoming annual reports, things will be detailed there.

Evan Mulholland: Can I take you to the –

Jaclyn SYMES: Can I answer Ms Crozier's question before I lose my info?

Evan Mulholland: You can answer Ms Crozier's questions.

Jaclyn SYMES: I did not want to lose the info that got sent to me, because I had good answers for Ms Crozier, and now it is hard to find them. Yes, the funding held and continuing for Albury Wodonga has now been approved, and the Department of Health can release that and make payments to New South Wales, who are, I guess, the project managers. That was able to happen because the Albury Wodonga business case from New South Wales supported that. You were concerned about

community health funding. You were concerned that there was a cut: that is not technically true. The decline in funding is because funding for Medicare urgent care clinics from the Commonwealth is now being paid directly rather than through the state. So funding gets –

Georgie CROZIER: How many was it? Three? Three Medicare clinics?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not know, sorry. I am not sure.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I want to talk about the $1.2 billion roads blitz that was announced by the Prime Minister in February in conjunction with the state government. That is part of your budget papers – budget paper 3, page 83. The budget papers list projects and funding for the Calder Park Drive interchange upgrade, the Donnybrook Road upgrade and the Mickleham Road upgrade, stage 2, as part of this program. Do you have a breakdown on what proportion of each of these projects is coming from the state versus the Commonwealth? Given that there was $1 billion from the federal government and $200 million from the state government invested into these projects, can we assume all of those projects share an over 80 per cent Commonwealth contribution?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, some of the questions that you have asked relate to money from the federal government last year, and in terms of the project allocations and the percentages and how that might play out project by project, that is not a level of detail that I have.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Are you able to provide it on notice?

Jaclyn SYMES: I reckon, in the spirit of generosity, I can take that on notice, bearing in mind that the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is probably better placed. But given the money that comes from the feds, Treasury have a fair bit to do with it as well, so how about I take it on notice and see what I can get you.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It does sometimes pay to speak about a particular road every sitting week in the Parliament. I notice that in the federal budget they announced an additional $37.4 million to expand the Donnybrook Road project to include a second bridge over the Hume, but it has been confirmed that the state government only contributed $7.7 million to that expanded scope. If we average that out, we kind of get a peek through the window on what the state-by-state breakdowns might have been for a lot of those other projects. Is it not a fact that the Commonwealth are bailing out Victoria because you are spending one-fifth of the entire infrastructure budget on the Suburban Rail Loop?

Jaclyn SYMES: First of all, it is in no way an indication of project by project in relation to federal and state government splits. For example, Metro Tunnel was delivered without a single cent from the federal government. West Gate Tunnel was without a single cent from federal government. Level crossing removals did not involve any money from the federal government. In fact it is only in recent years that we finally have a federal government that recognises Victorians as Australians and is finally providing us with some infrastructure funding. In relation to the projects that we have had to fund ourselves, it goes a long way to the issue of why we have the debt profile that we did. If we were given our fair share over many years, we would not have had to borrow, because we would have been able to deliver projects in collaboration with a federal government.

Again, you have made a claim about how you think things are calculated. You are wrong. Any indication that there is a 20 per cent contribution from state and 80 per cent from federal on projects is just incorrect. The significant underfunding that we have experienced over many years – it is not just me saying it; it has actually been recognised by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, who finally tried to make amends for that as well. Mr Mulholland, it is good to receive some money in Victoria from the federal government. There are projects that I know that you have advocated for. There are projects that we are delivering in partnership with the federal government, and that should be welcomed.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I was simply making the very obvious assertion that it is a $1.2 billion roads package. The state government has already made the announcement that it is contributing

$200 million to this, and the federal government have said they are contributing $1 billion to this. In fact on the recent expansion of the Donnybrook Road upgrade the federal government announced it was contributing $37.4 million, and I could literally only find on the member for McEwen's Facebook that the state government contributed $7.7 million. I assume that that is the figure that the state government did contribute, so therefore I would assume that the rate is continuing of federal government bailout when it comes to desperately needed infrastructure projects in our growth areas, because we are spending almost one-fifth of our infrastructure budget on the Suburban Rail Loop.

I wanted to go to the Mickleham Road –

Jaclyn SYMES: Excuse me, Mr Mulholland, but yes, members are entitled to make statements, but I should also be afforded a right of reply when they make statements that, first of all, contain wrong assertions but, second of all, need to be challenged in relation to any suggestion that to articulate fair funding from a federal government is somehow something we do not deserve. It says a lot about an alternative government rather than a government that actually wants to attract its fair share from the federal government. We have got a lot of making up to do. We are still very much behind in our allocation from the federal government. We are very grateful to receive funding for projects, finally, but it does not make up for years of neglect led by Liberal federal governments.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I think there is a fair bit of licence on both sides here in interpreting what the other side may say or do or whatever, but I just ask that we conduct this in an orderly fashion. Yes, a member has a right to make a statement; you will always be given the opportunity to respond, if you can just wait until we have the call to respond rather than have an exchange across the chamber. It makes it very hard for Hansard to record what is going on when there are interjections between the shadow minister asking the question and the minister at the table.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Treasurer, this might be one that you would like to take on notice as well, but given that particular project, which is in the budget –

Jaclyn SYMES: Which one, sorry?

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Donnybrook Road project has now been split into two stages: a stage 1 and a stage 2 phase. Can you provide information on when both planning and construction of those phases might be, in terms of a timeline?

Jaclyn SYMES: You talked about how, for the funding for Donnybrook Road, you had to scour the member for Yan Yean's social media to find information. I have got the press release that says:

> Drivers in Melbourne's outer north will soon benefit from safer and more reliable journeys thanks to $45 million in additional funding from the Albanese and Allan Labor Governments.
>
> The Albanese Government's commitment of $37.4 million and the Allan Government's commitment of $7.7 million will progress Stage 2 upgrades on Donnybrook Road.

So I do not know. Maybe we need to get you –

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: You just said you could not find the information until you went looking on the member for Yan Yean –

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, you got the information from Labor members' Facebook pages. I am just reading out the press release, which is publicly available. But you are asking for a level of detail about projects that is best directed to the minister.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It might have been cheeky, but I thought I would ask you, Treasurer, because you have been so kind and because the government has not been forthcoming with this information for my community.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: No, it was in terms of the project timing I was speaking about, Mr Batchelor. Can I ask about the Mickleham Road stage 2 project that was announced as a $250 million project. Given the state only contributed $200 million to the $1.2 billion roads blitz, the state contribution I think probably cannot be that much. Can I ask for you to include that project, to take on notice what the state breakdown might be?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. As you indicated, the $1.2 billion road blitz is a matter for another minister. I have taken on notice to get you as much of a breakdown as I can. But again, these are important projects. You sound as though you advocate for the projects. A lot of these projects can only be delivered by a government that is willing to invest in productive infrastructure, and when you have a policy of no borrowing, then the projects will not exist under a Liberal government.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just to respond to that assertion, the 2014–15 budget invested billions in infrastructure while also delivering a cash surplus, so the argument that you cannot invest billions in infrastructure and get to a cash surplus at the same time is Labor logic – it confuses me. Can I ask about the Western Highway duplication, which is very exciting for people in the growth areas. Are you aware of any change of scope to the Melton-to-Caroline Springs section of the Western Highway? Major Road Projects Victoria states that scope is due to be released anytime now, so I am wondering: when will it be released, and has there been a change of scope to this particular section of the project?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is not a matter for the Treasurer and not a matter for this bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: This might be another one to add to the list, but how much for the Western Highway duplication from Melton to Caroline Springs is the state government actually contributing?

Jaclyn SYMES: I have committed to seeking some information in relation to specific projects and their funding allocations for you. I have already given you that commitment. You now keep asking the same questions. I promise I will look into it for you.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I just wanted to add that to the list of questions that I wanted to ask. That is all from me.

Melina BATH: Minister, this relates to the Wonthaggi Hospital and the West Gippsland Hospital. As you know, the Bass Coast is a growing area, and as a growing area, there are increased pressures on the hospital. The government in 2022 committed $290 million for stage 2 and stage 3. However, in this year's budget there is no funding for those stages 2 and 3. This is budget paper 4, page 56. Can the minister outline what that decision was in relation to not funding stage 2 and stage 3?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, the opportunity to give me advance notice of granular questions was afforded to the opposition and was not taken up. We have just concluded PAEC. I do not mean to sound too frustrated with you, but I have been having this a little bit this afternoon. I would be more than happy to provide information where I can. This is a $115 billion budget, so if you ask me about specific projects that are the delivery responsibility of another minister, it is incredibly difficult for me to give you relevant information. We have just had a PAEC process where individual ministers were available for PAEC members. Both the Nationals and the Liberals were represented on that committee to ask these very, very specific questions. In relation to the health budget, this financial year alone we are providing $32.3 billion – again, the biggest investment ever in frontline care. A lot of that includes infrastructure. It includes delivery of expanded emergency departments. It includes community hospitals. It includes maternity services and the like. But in terms of the specifics of the project that you have asked about, I think that would be best directed to the Minister for Health Infrastructure.

Sitting suspended 6:29 pm until 7:32 pm.

Melina BATH: I went and had a check just now in relation to it, and the health portfolio is a massive portfolio, as you rightly state. In PAEC, I think, for the opposition members, as in the Liberals and Nationals, there were 21 minutes across billions of dollars, so it was very hard to get all of those questions in. I have one other question in relation to the West Gippsland Hospital. Of course in 2022 there was $675 billion in funding towards it, and there is no line item for it in the budget. My question in relation to it and Wonthaggi is: in general terms, when funding was instigated in 2022 and then there was absolutely no line item on those hospitals, what is that reflection and how do people in the electorates actually understand what is happening with these hospitals?

Jaclyn SYMES: As you would appreciate, there is not a line item for every single initiative in the budget. As you and I have both reflected, the size of the health budget is significant, so in terms of providing line-by-line details, it would make it unusable in terms of being able to find detail. As I said, on the detail that you have sought in relation to specific hospitals, I have got some high-level information in the materials that I have brought into the chamber. In relation to the 2026–27 budget, I understand there are upgrades that cover hospitals including Dandenong, West Gippsland and Wonthaggi, but I do not have the specific number. That is something that I will see if I can get for you through the Department of Health.

Melina BATH: I think there was allocated $65 million between West Gippsland and Wonthaggi. I think the hospital was still trying to understand what it exactly was for, so I do not want to put words into anyone's mouth, but clearly $65 million is not what would have been $1 billion if we combine Wonthaggi and West Gippsland hospitals. In your assessment and investigations, could you see where they are at? It might be the case that Wonthaggi is at a standstill, but as you will be well aware, because it has been in the media so long and so often, West Gippsland Hospital – the Warragul hospital – is really in a desperate state. It is standing together with great staff, but that is an absolute desperate situation there, so it would be good to get an update on the new site. I know where the new site is, but where and how and when?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am happy to take that on.

Melina BATH: Treasurer, this relates to Closing the Gap, and it is budget paper 3, page 10. Again I will pre-empt that there was time in PAEC but only 7 minutes. As you can imagine, First Nations people, Aboriginal Victorians and Closing the Gap are very serious and significant issues that I and many others across the board care about. There are multiple Closing the Gap targets the government is not meeting, and I want to understand what specific outcome-based benchmarks the government has set for 2026–27 to demonstrate progress. I put that there is a small amount of funding. There is $2.5 million for Closing the Gap, but how will that address the significant targets that are unmet?

Jaclyn SYMES: You are right. I have just referred to the budget papers 'Advancing Aboriginal self-determination and Closing the Gap', and there is $2.5 million in this year's budget. Obviously there are a number of other initiatives that are complementary to the Closing the Gap initiatives. You rightly identify that we have not met targets that have been set. I was probably closer to this when I was the Attorney-General. Ministers councils often have standing agenda items on how states are going in relation to Closing the Gap, and there is certainly always more to do.

In relation to the details that you have asked for, this would be best directed – I acknowledge that 7 minutes in a PAEC hearing is not a lot to get that information – to the Minister for First Peoples. I am sure that if this was put to her, and I am happy to let her know that you are chasing the information, she would be happy to provide some details.

Melina BATH: This is, I guess, part of the interesting dilemma when there are multiple areas – health, justice, all of that. But in budget paper 3, page 10, there is the Nest, and it is an initiative that Aunty Jill Gallagher has spoken to across the board. Her budget request from Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) was just a little under $55 million. The specific assessment that the government has provided over the forward estimates is $13 million, so I

am interested to understand – is it from the Minister for First Peoples, the Minister for Health or the Minister for Children – what has been left in and what has been left out of that budget request.

Jaclyn SYMES: This was an initiative that I was quite interested in during the budget process. The budget is really big, but there are certain initiatives that you certainly retain more details about than others. The way you have questioned and your understanding of what you believe was presented as a budget bid does not align with my experience of what that budget bid was. Having said that, I do not really want to go into the budget bid processes. It is not something that is particularly appropriate. $13 million enables the project to be delivered. Does it deliver all of the things that would be optimum? Potentially not, but this is a significant investment that certainly delivers on the ability to deliver the project.

Melina BATH: Treasurer, I was not verballing you. I have received a booklet from VACCHO, and it had that figure of $54.9 million in there.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think they were able to break it down for a bid.

Melina BATH: That is right. In terms of the Treasury work, how is the government going to make those inroads to close the gap on those targets where it is not – I guess that is a question, potentially, for the minister, but what role can the Treasurer play in achieving that?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think, Ms Bath, without getting into a policy debate through the appropriation bill, we have put our position quite clearly, in that for a long time governments have had aspirations of closing the gap, and we have not come close to satisfying ourselves that we have done enough or even good in this space. That is why we have taken a different approach. That is why we are standing alongside First Nations people and delivering treaty. It is our view, and it is the view of many Aboriginal Victorians, that treaty itself will bring about much better outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians and indeed for the state as a whole. In relation to how Treasury can play a role, we are supporting the transition of a lot of services and a lot of government staff and departments in relation to the new body that will support the delivery of treaty.

Melina BATH: This is where our goals are the same, but our avenues and routes are different. That will not be the discussion for today, but my concern is there ends up being $2.5 million for Closing the Gap and $13 million for the Nest, for example, and there are tens of thousands of dollars to enable one particular philosophy, and I am very concerned that it will not close the gap. You can comment on my comment, and I appreciate that, but that will be the end of my questions.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think the fundamental position is that doing the same is not going to produce any different results, which is why a different path is the policy that we have taken. I just had some further information in relation to the Nest bid, which probably gives both of us a bit more context: the original bid or the ask was to build 10 – that is what the 55 is for. We have agreed to do two; that is why the funding is less.

Richard WELCH: Treasurer, just a little bit on the Suburban Rail Loop but in particular the community grants under the Suburban Rail Loop: the member for Box Hill has produced social media posts announcing a large number of round 2 SRL community grants funded in Box Hill. That information is not publicly available, so aside from the question of why he got advanced confidential advice that no-one else did, what is the total value of those grants allocated?

Jaclyn SYMES: We do not believe there is any change in this year's budget, so it is not something that was part of this budget's deliberations.

Richard WELCH: The funding is coming out of this year's funding allocations, though.

Jaclyn SYMES: Where?

Richard WELCH: I do not know. That is probably what I am asking: where is the line item for it?

Jaclyn SYMES: That is what I said: I do not think it was part of this year's deliberations.

Richard WELCH: There is no funding allocation for them in this year's budget?

Jaclyn SYMES: Not that I am aware of.

Richard WELCH: So where is the money coming from?

Jaclyn SYMES: It could have been in previous budgets.

Richard WELCH: I do not think it was.

Jaclyn SYMES: You have asked me a question about a grants program. I am not aware of it being part of this year's budget. Again, it is difficult for me to give specific advice on every government program, grants program and funding allocation in the budget. I do not have a recollection of a discussion about that particular grants program, so therefore it is a bit hard for me to give you any further details.

Richard WELCH: I probably at some point will return to that. I will get a clarification, and I will ask a question on it that is more fulsome. Indirectly related to that, we can apply it to all grants that you are doing, there has been concern from integrity bodies that the government has a troubling relationship with grey corruption, and many grants in this case have no direct relationship to the SRL works and have been clearly lined up to be announced and handed over during the election period. These grants have no transparency, are branded with a signature government name and are conveniently announced by the local member alone across the last six months leading up to an election. This in my view is corrupt practice. It fails every probity test and is improper. Will you undertake to ensure that all grant programs that have a branding and a promotional quality are handed over to independent non–policy branded bodies and not given to Labor members to announce and deliver?

Jaclyn SYMES: With respect, that question was effectively something that should be put as a substantive motion. You have made an allegation against a sitting member of corrupt conduct, and that is not appropriate use of –

Richard Welch interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: The practice that a member is engaging in, you allege, is –

Richard Welch interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to the accountability, policies and probity of grants, I would expect that all departments and all members of Parliament abide by the appropriate rules, act in an appropriate manner and ensure that integrity matters are something that is at the forefront when they are dealing with public money.

Richard WELCH: In the calculations for value capture and uplift across the SRL precincts, what is the value capture estimated to be on the Box Hill brickworks site?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that level of detail. This is the appropriations bill. Value capture mechanisms were announced in December over a 40-year period, and I am not in a position to give you any more detail than I have already provided to you and Mr Mulholland in the course of the discussion we have been having.

Richard WELCH: I would just like to check a couple of budget assumptions, if I may.

Jaclyn SYMES: In the sensitivities, or what?

Richard WELCH: Yes, I guess so; it would relate to that. First of all, we stated that we had a growth rate of only 1.1 per cent in 2024–25; it is forecast to increase to 1.75 per cent in 2025–26 but then drop again in 2026–27 back to 1.5 per cent. Despite our record spending, is growth flatlining in Victoria?

Jaclyn SYMES: Can you just please specify, were you talking about economic growth or were you talking about the budget forecasts of the budget position?

Richard WELCH: Economic growth.

Jaclyn SYMES: As you would appreciate, we have had a fairly rocky start to this year in terms of the fuel crisis, creating a heap of uncertainty and obviously causing a lot of cost pressures across the spectrum of homes and businesses, and governments are not immune from this. What our budget has done is create forecasts on Treasury's view of what is the most probable outcome of the trajectory using models and evidence from the Commonwealth Treasury, the RBA and IMF. The budget also includes sensitivity analysis with a less probable scenario also contained in budget paper 2. We have had a position of continued economic growth because we have been growing over several years, and we expect that to continue. Even if the war continues for some time, we still are anticipating economic growth based off the resilience of the position that we are starting from. That is not to gloss over the fact that there are challenges, but we are well positioned with a strong economy, and the sensitivity analysis has factored in interest rate rises and other impacts on the budget.

I think one of the assumptions that I took PAEC to in particular was assuming average oil prices will be US $100 a barrel for the June quarter. The assumption is that the average oil prices will gradually decline to $70 a barrel by December and then decline to $65 a barrel by June 2027, which is broadly in line with the path suggested by the oil futures as well, so weaker domestic growth due to prolonged conflict in the Middle East has been considered. The worst case scenario would lead to gross state product (GSP) falling by 0.72 per cent if it was to continue, but it is important to note that rising inflation often means rising revenues, so while we expect expenses to worsen in the first years, we could expect revenues will rise sufficiently in the outer years to offset that increase. The sensitivity analysis, as I said, has a worst case or a downside scenario of $130 a barrel. The analysis, again, is less probable scenarios under all of the information that is inputted – regardless of whether it is $130 a barrel or $200 a barrel, the Australian economy is still expected to grow. So there is a lot that goes into that sensitivity analysis, Mr Welch. It is all contained in budget paper 2. Hopefully I have given you a bit of a snapshot of what is a very thorough analysis that goes to underpinning the numbers that are printed in the budget.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Treasurer, for that explanation. Just to confirm – I will do a two-parter so we save time – you do expect economic growth to slow in 2026–27? Could you confirm what that economic growth would be in per capita terms?

Jaclyn SYMES: The Victorian GSP is falling this year and next. To be clear, the economy is still tipped to grow this year by 1.1 per cent, next year by 1.75 per cent and every year over the forwards. Obviously, as I said, issues from the Iran war and national inflationary pressures are impacting world economies. Because of the position that we are in and because of some of the investments we have made we are resilient in that regard, which is where the sensitivity analysis or the forecasts are able to be factored in, but it does not mean that you sit there and do nothing. It is why we still continue to invest in productivity. We invest in supporting businesses, and a lot of that is through regulation reduction and red tape reduction. They are always ongoing conversations that I am very much interested in. We are delivering a lot of reform in that regard, and we will continue to deliver more.

Richard WELCH: I think I missed in that answer what the per capita GSP is. Are we in a per capita recession right now?

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me give you a bit more detail on that. We can continue the conversation about economic growth, because when there is economic growth it is at odds with your claim that there is a recession.

Richard WELCH: But what is the GSP per capita?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, the Victorian economy is tipped to grow this year by 1.1 per cent, next year by 1.75 per cent and every year over the forwards.

Richard WELCH: So you are not answering the question on per capita GSP. Is that something you are going to maintain? You are not going to answer that question. It is a simple question: what is the state's GSP per capita?

Jaclyn SYMES: What you were referring to is a recession, and what I was trying to point to you was that when you have economic growth –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is exactly what his question was, and that is what I am explaining to you.

Richard WELCH: I will restate the question. Last year the budget papers stated that GSP per capita was negative 0.8 per cent. What is it in this budget?

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me just make sure I have got the number that I can give you. As I said, the conversation that we were having was about economic growth, and I provided you with those details.

I think you were referring to a budget paper that you said had per capita figures in it. I am happy for you to bring me there. Again, you were trying to elicit information in relation to a per capita recession, and that is not right, because a recession is negative economic growth in –

Richard WELCH: I did restate the question.

Jaclyn SYMES: What I am asking you is that you said that in the budget papers there was a per capita figure, obviously. Can you point me to that?

Richard WELCH: I said in last year's papers GSP per capita was negative 0.8 per cent, from memory, plus I wanted to know what this year's figure is.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is what I was asking. You are saying it was in last year's budget papers? I am just looking for the budget papers now. I do not think it is in the budget papers.

Richard WELCH: That is why I am asking you.

Jaclyn SYMES: You can calculate it yourself, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: It is not my job to calculate it.

Jaclyn SYMES: No? I will need to go and look at the figures. You have just said that last year you looked at the figures and you determined the per capita figure. The per capita figure is not published in the budget papers, so I do not have it to hand. It is something that you can go and calculate if you did it last year, Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: I would have thought economic figures like CPI, productivity, debt, GSP and GDP and any other breakdown that comes in for compound factors of economic growth, including GSP per capita, would be at the tips of your and your officers' fingers. It is a rudimentary economic measure, and surely you know what it is.

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to the forecast for 2026–27, you will see in the budget papers a figure for real gross state product, employment, unemployment rate, the CPI, wage price index and population. I am concerned about your leading questions of trying to elicit a response that confirms what you think is a recession. I am not going to do that. We are focused on the real economy. We are focused on the fact that the economy is growing each and every year over the forwards. If you want to go and look at all of these figures, I can provide them to you and I am happy to repeat any of the line items that are in the budget, because that is the budget bill and that is what we are talking about this evening.

Richard WELCH: That is sort of amusing actually because clearly it cannot be a good figure; otherwise you would have mentioned it. It is a pretty rudimentary figure. Okay, someone can go and calculate it, but you should know it and you should be able to just provide it. It is theatre.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Welch, the way you are asking the question, from the tone of what you are asking, clearly you know how to go and calculate it. So perhaps you go and do that. There are a lot of inputs in relation to the figures. I need –

Richard WELCH: You have got the Treasury department to do it.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, if I ask certain questions, I can get a whole heap of answers. I have given you the figures that are in the budget. This is a committee section on the budget, and that figure is not in the budget papers. So how about you ask me questions that are relevant to the bill, because that is the convention of the chamber.

Richard WELCH: Could I get that figure on notice?

Jaclyn SYMES: No, go find it yourself.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, Deputy President, Mr Welch has asked a very reasonable question. The minister has failed to provide it – he has asked for a figure, to be taken on notice, given she has explained that it was in the previous budget papers.

Jaclyn SYMES: On a point of order –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: No, sorry, we are listening to this point of order first.

Georgie Crozier: And I would ask you, Deputy President, to ask the Treasurer to respond appropriately to Mr Welch's request.

Jaclyn SYMES: On the point of order, Deputy President, Ms Crozier has been sitting here and listening to the conversation, where I literally said, 'Mr Welch, I do not believe that it is in the budget papers.' He confirmed it was not in the budget papers. Now you are saying you think it is in the budget papers. Our committee stage is about –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Sorry, we are into debate. This is not a point of order.

Jaclyn SYMES: Was it a point of order or a question that you were asking me?

Georgie Crozier: No, he has asked for it on notice, if you can provide it, is my point.

Jaclyn SYMES: I have said on –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Sorry, can we just deal with the point of order?

Jaclyn SYMES: My point of order, Deputy President, is: on what basis am I expected to take answers on notice for questions that are not related to the budget papers? Ms Crozier is saying that I should take on notice to do some work for Mr Welch –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Sorry, we are debating. Neither Ms Crozier's nor the Treasurer's contributions were actual points of order, and I just point out that I cannot actually instruct the Treasurer how to answer the questions. If Mr Welch wants to ask her again to take it on notice, it is up to the Treasurer how she answers him. We will move on.

Richard WELCH: I am resisting all temptation. In the forward estimates, have all the savings you expected to arise from the Silver review been incorporated? Have they been adopted, and effectively are they now on the forwards?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think you clarified your question, because I was going to ask you what you meant by 'incorporated'. But yes, the Silver review, as you will recall, was off the back of me requesting Helen Silver to undertake an independent review of the Victorian public service in relation

to identifying, in particular, measures of duplication, any discussions with departments about programs that could come to an end, crossover with the Commonwealth and the like. We have not accepted all of the recommendations, but of the recommendations that we have accepted, there are implementation plans for the adoption of the measures that have been agreed, and those savings have been booked.

Richard WELCH: You mentioned before that you were investing in productivity in a climate where you are also forecasting falling economic growth. Is Victoria's productivity going to rise over the forwards?

Jaclyn SYMES: I would refer you to the *Economic Growth Statement* in particular and the measures that are contained in that. Most of that funding for those initiatives was in last year's budget, not this year's budget. Obviously each budget stacks on top of the other regularly, so a lot of those initiatives are underway and continuing. And there are always ongoing conversations, particularly in relation to regulation reduction, which enhances productivity.

Richard WELCH: Yes, but I think you mentioned before how good the modelling is, and of course the modelling would have taken into account a productivity factor over the forwards, which would be afresh because it would be an extra year at the end of the forwards now. So I am just wanting to know what the productivity forecasts are over the forwards, perhaps by year.

Jaclyn SYMES: What I was taking you to were initiatives that tackle productivity. The *Economic Growth Statement* is the long-term plan for boosting productivity. There is funding to support that. We will always commit to enhancing productivity. We have backed that with funding. There are things like a 10-year plan to unlock industrial land, single entry for businesses, export support. Again, as I said, I will continue to point to the number of business regulators, which is something that we hear a lot about in terms of being able to streamline that. We are continuing to work with the Commonwealth, who are certainly taking a lead in this. But to your specific question, we do not forecast productivity in the budget, but the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs can talk to you more about some of the productivity initiatives that we are initiating and putting into practice.

Richard WELCH: Just for my clarity, though, are you saying there is no assumption of increased productivity over the forwards that underpins your budget figures?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, we do not publish the forecasts of productivity, but it is something that we work with the federal government on, and there are a lot of initiatives to work particularly with the business community in relation to supporting those initiatives, so it is not a line item in the budget.

Richard WELCH: Given that our state's productivity has been the lowest in the nation for 10 years, I would have thought that both the forecasts and the policies would have had actual, specific numbers attached to them. You can reel off a list of programs, but it is the efficacy of the programs that you really want to examine; otherwise, they are just programs. If they are not actually resulting in an increase in productivity and you are not measuring it and you are not tracking it and it does not form part of your budgetary process, that is a real gap. I think that is a real gap.

Jaclyn SYMES: I continue to get commentary from the opposition, who make statements about things that they think happen. It is not really my job to continue to correct them, but they state it as a matter of fact, and several of them are just wrong. Perhaps just use this committee stage to ask me questions about the bill.

Richard WELCH: You see, questions like that arise when you do not have confidence in the answers that you are receiving. Any serious economist – and you should effectively be one – would be able to rattle off ad nauseam, down to the 10th decimal place, what they are doing on productivity. They could rattle it off by sector. They could rattle it off by segment. They would know these figures. The reason I keep coming back to them and asking what you consider to be naive questions is because the lack of detail in your answers is really concerning to me. That is why. I do not have confidence in your answers anymore.

I will move on. This is productivity related as well. There has been a 24.3 per cent cut to the trade and investment output next year, equating to $39.5 million. How can you achieve economic growth if you are cutting the investment budget by almost 25 per cent? This is in the 'Department Performance Statement', page 81.

Jaclyn SYMES: There are two claims that you have made in your question. Certainly it is a matter for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, particularly about the initiatives in relation to trade. But what you did point to were concerns about supporting economic growth and productivity through trade and investment, particularly international relations and exports. Again, coming back to what I was taking you through before in relation to the *Economic Growth Statement* and the supports available, particularly for businesses that want to engage on an international level, when we announced that, it was certainly welcomed. I do not have the latest details on how it has been going, but it comes up regularly in the conversations and meetings that I have in relation to the support of people accessing markets for the first time. In terms of productivity, I think people are growing in that sense in terms of the export and ability to access international markets. Again, there is growth in this space, but you are better placed asking for some details from Minister Dimopoulos.

Richard WELCH: I just refer to the Victorian Investment Fund (VIF). Last year's budget said $50 million of this funding would be set aside for a dedicated regional stream to support capital investment and new jobs in regional cities and towns. How much of this funding has been spent on the dedicated regional stream, and how many projects and how many jobs have been created?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, I would have loved to have given you all the details of this program, because obviously as Minister for Regional Development I was involved in a lot of the announcements and the jobs that were created. If you had given me a bit of a heads-up on the question, I would have been delighted to talk to you about the numerous projects that I have had the benefit of working with people on and announcing. I think the last one I did while I was still in the role was in Tongala in terms of an old Nestlé factory that had been purchased and revamped into dairy product manufacturing, employing locals that had had to move to other towns for work – predominantly Shepparton – but more local jobs being available in that area of the state is a great outcome. I am sure the Minister for Regional Development will be delighted to talk to you about the pipeline of investment that is going out the door under the VIF for regional Victoria. I do not have any more details of the money expended and the money left. It was budgeted for in last year's budget. I am sure the Minister for Regional Development, as I said, could talk you through the great projects and job creation in regional Victoria.

Georgie CROZIER: Treasurer, in a response to Mr Welch you spoke about the economic statement and referred to last year's budget underpinning that statement. That statement referred to one of the five pillars being medical research. In last year's budget there were two years of funding for operational infrastructure support – around $24 million in investment – but there is nothing in the forward estimates in this budget. The medical research sector is very concerned about the lack of support given by the government. What impact is that going to have on the Victorian economy, jobs and the overall budget position when there is no further funding, and as they say, 10 medical research institutes will fold?

Jaclyn SYMES: In a sense, Ms Crozier, you answered your own question, because you put it in the opening remarks that there were two years of funding that were provided in last year's budget, which means that the money is still ongoing at this point in time.

Georgie CROZIER: And nothing further.

Jaclyn SYMES: The funding is still ongoing. There is still another year. That does not at all imply that it stops. That is why we do a budget every year. Under your logic, you would only do a budget every four years. Because you do not necessarily know who is going to be in the market, when projects end, and you might be engaging with the industry that want to pivot to another direction, two years of certainty was obviously deemed appropriate at that time. As you have indicated, our *Economic Growth*

Statement has identified med tech as a now and future industry that we are backing. Again, it is a little bit similar to my problem with answering Mr Welch's question. There is so much going on in this space, so much investment, and a lot of people are setting up here. We are actually world renowned for med tech, and that is a reputation that has happened under our government and something that we are committed to maintaining.

Georgie CROZIER: Treasurer, you clearly have not met with the sector. You clearly do not understand their concerns. You clearly do not understand that the uncertainty that your government is providing to this sector means that they have no certainty about their ongoing capacity and viability. I find your answer astounding, and I hope that those listening also do, because what they have been requesting for years is that certainty. You have just literally written them off. I am going to move to my next question, because I am just shocked.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: No, she has written – you have written –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, sorry. Let the Treasurer answer.

Georgie CROZIER: Have you met with them? Have you met with the sector?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The Treasurer has the call.

Jaclyn SYMES: This has been a feature of today's committee: opposition members make a statement and then go, 'I'm going to ask my next question,' because God forbid I might like to respond to just ridiculous claims. Ms Crozier, you are very, very welcome to engage with Minister Carroll as the minister for med tech, but when you look at projects like AstraZeneca and Moderna, both now operating as CSR in relation to med tech –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: You asked about investment in –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, the Treasurer without assistance.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, we have a dedicated Minister for Medical Research, something that I do not know if other states have. Do you have a Shadow Minister for Medical Research?

Georgie CROZIER: Me – it is me.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am glad you are meeting with stakeholders as shadow. There is investment in med tech. There is investment in and ongoing support for the sector. There is certainty because there is funding in the budget. In relation to further questions about the commitment of this government, Minister Carroll would be delighted to talk. He is very passionate about this portfolio. Our millions of dollars of investment in relation to these matters speaks for itself. Of course regular engagement with ministers and their relevant stakeholders is important. I am sure Minister Carroll has met with the stakeholders and talked to them about the record funding we are providing and of course the funding that they would like to see in the future.

Georgie CROZIER: I am quite shocked that you actually do not understand what I am asking. There are 14 medical research institutes in this state, 10 of which are at risk of folding because there is not that certainty that you have just said there is. There is not. You have just cherrypicked a couple of names like Moderna and med tech. You have not actually understood the sector, and that concerns me. I will leave it at that, because I think we are going around in circles, and I will move to my next –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Deputy President, the committee stage of a bill is not an opportunity for members to grandstand; it is to ask questions about the bill – in this case the appropriation bill. I know Ms Crozier would love to join PAEC, but if she is not on it, could she please confine these remarks to the bill at hand and the fact that we are in committee stage?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members can make statements, so I do not uphold the point of order. I think we need to move on.

Georgie CROZIER: I will move on, because I have got other colleagues that need to ask questions and we do not need to be here all night, but I am stunned by the minister's last response. I would like to go to a question relating to your statement, your speech, where you promised foster, kinship and permanent carers around $400 more a year at the lowest level. However, the budget allocates only $3.6 million in the first year, which divided across 14,509 children in foster, kinship and permanent care, based on this year's budget, delivers just $256 per child in care. I ask: has all the money that the government is relying on in funding been disclosed in relation to these children that require this funding? Based on the 2025–26 expected outcomes it will be 12,804 children at $281 each, so it seems to be going backwards. Could you just provide some clarity around this?

Jaclyn SYMES: Certainly what I said in my budget speech was something I was really keen to make sure people heard about. I think somebody asked me earlier about the Nest. There are certain initiatives that are particularly memorable in the conversations that I had to get them through the budget, and I was very keen to see an increase for foster carers. I would have loved to have done more, but where we got to was to ensure that we could deliver the funding uplift to what I announced. In relation to the way you have asked the question, I might make sure I can provide you with information that backs up the commitment that we have made. It is certainly something that we want to make sure everyone can access. If it is not clear in the budget from your calculations, let me get you some more information so that you can have another look and let me know if you still have any remaining concerns. It is something that I am very proud to deliver, so I would not want there to be misinformation that people are missing out.

Georgie CROZIER: I think that would be helpful given there does seem to be some concern. I raised this, and you might need to provide that assurance for clarity as well – the $15 million that is allocated over four years, I understand, is to respond to increasing cost-of-living pressures for Victorian carers. Is that the full and complete funding for the carer allowance indexation increase, or does it combine with other existing funding?

Jaclyn SYMES: Could I just clarify, Ms Crozier – I think it is just the increase – you were talking about which allowance?

Georgie CROZIER: It is budget paper 3, table 1.12, under 'Responding to increasing cost-of-living pressures for Victorian carers'. That is what it is in reference to. I think there is $15 million allocated over four years; there is $3.6 million, I think, for the first year. Is that the entire amount of money that is allocated to that, or is there other existing funding?

Jaclyn SYMES: That is just the increase.

Renee HEATH: Treasurer, I am going to start with the cuts to youth justice. It is reported in the department questionnaire, in question 3, page 31, that the youth crime prevention and early intervention project has seen its funding for 2025–26 drop by $1.3 million, with that funding rephased into the 2028–29 budget. Given that there is a crime crisis now, why isn't the government spending that money now?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not get many questions from you, so I am happy to have a conversation. I am trying to be helpful in this committee stage of the appropriation bill. It is fair to say that members are kind of treating it like PAEC and asking very portfolio-specific questions, which I am happy to try and answer, but again, there are relevant ministers that will have greater detail. But you have asked about youth justice, and I think it would be worthwhile my talking about the violence reduction unit (VRU) and the funding in this budget that –

Renee HEATH: On a point of order, Acting President, my question is specifically from the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) questionnaire, question 3, page 31. It is specifically about the drop in funding by $1.3 million.

Jaclyn SYMES: First of all, you have just articulated you are talking about a departmental questionnaire, which is certainly in the remit of PAEC, not actually in the remit of the appropriation bill that we are discussing this evening. It is literally a PAEC question that you are asking me. I reckon it was one that was prepared for PAEC that perhaps did not get the opportunity to be asked. However, you talked about funding in youth justice, and I was going to point out this year's budget invests $33.5 million in the violence reduction unit, which goes towards new programs that identify and disrupt youth crime patterns early and stop crime before it starts. The violence reduction unit is modelled on international expertise, and this funding boost that we have provided in the budget is ensuring that it has a permanent home in our justice system.

You talked about youth programs. In addition to the $33.5 million, the budget provides funding to continue a range of existing early intervention programs, including almost $9.5 million to boost Blue Light Victoria's youth mentoring program and $5.124 million for the youth crime prevention program. I reckon – again, being helpful – the VRU is actually in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, so that is where you will probably see some of the cost shifting from DJCS to DPC. When you articulate something as a cut, I would urge you to look at the total funding across government for the initiatives that you are interested in in the youth justice portfolio, particularly given it is split across DPC and justice these days.

Renee HEATH: The reason I asked questions so specifically was because the three priorities in this budget are literally 'Easier', 'Safer' – so it is about community safety – and 'More affordable'. Given that it is one of your government's priorities – in fact you have said it is the highest priority – that is why I asked. Regardless, the youth crime prevention program is receiving $19.9 million in next year's budget, but it only expects to service 330 young people. By my calculations that is over $60,000 a person. Do you think that that is the best value for money?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am going to start with responding to your claim that because of the title of the budget papers you have full remit to ask anything that you think fits in under the term 'Safer', because we are looking at the appropriation bill. It does not have the wording that you articulated as being why you think you can ask questions that would be well suited to PAEC. You have got your questions from a PAEC questionnaire that you are putting to me. Again, the opposition were invited to give me a heads-up of any really specific details that they wanted. No-one did. The crossbench did. I was able to answer a specific roads question for Mr Ettershank because he asked me to be prepared. When you ask specific questions that are better placed for a minister, without having given me the courtesy of getting the information in advance, it is very difficult for me to know every detail of every other minister's portfolio. I am more than happy to try and help, as I did. I answered your question. I explained why it is probably not a cut. There are two portfolios that deal with youth justice, but you are now asking, again, granular detail about numbers in a portfolio that is –

Renee Heath interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, but then you have asked about how that will be rolled out. I am not the minister that is responsible for the delivery of the program. I have probably cut you off a little bit. Ask me another question and again I will continue to try and answer, but you will get the same answer if they are a little bit detailed. I apologise, it is just that this has been a pattern, and I cannot just take a whole heap of questions on notice, because it is not really the purpose of this bill. This committee is associated with a particular bill, so could we just keep that in mind whilst I continue to try and be of assistance.

Renee HEATH: You did say that it has been a pattern. This has been a pattern with us. We cannot seem to get answers out of anyone, because it is always shifted. That is why when something is in the budget paper – you were telling Mr Welch before, give me a –

Jaclyn SYMES: Not the budget paper – the bill.

Renee HEATH: No, you said before, 'Give me a budget paper, something in the budget paper,' and he could not when you were – what was it, the GDP or –

Richard Welch interjected.

Renee HEATH: GSP, sorry. Now I am and we are getting handballed off again. My question was about the $19.9 million that is allocated in next year's budget. I was speaking about how it is expected to service 330 young people – that is over $60,000 per person. What is worse than that is it only expects that 45 people will successfully complete the program, so that is over $420,000 per person. How can you, as the Treasurer, justify this expense for a program that is only expected to have a 13 per cent success rate?

Jaclyn SYMES: You are asking me about a particular program that is in the remit of another minister, and I am sorry, I did not even catch the program – you just said a $19.9 million program. I am not in a position to give you any further details. Again, I am happy to help, but that is not my remit and I do not think it is in the bill.

Renee HEATH: I will go to the victims of crime financial scheme. One of the recommendations from PAEC last year was that the department introduce a timeliness performance measure for victims of crime to receive payments under the financial assistance scheme within 30 days. I note that the department has instead introduced other performance measures, both of which the department has failed to meet its targets in. Why has the department chosen to do this?

Jaclyn SYMES: This is not my department.

Renee HEATH: I am going to move on now to a different topic, one that I have not been able to get answers on, but under the list of initiatives in your budget for the community safety package – and if you are interested, it is page 6 of budget paper 3 – it states that funding is provided to deliver serious consequences to perpetrators of violent crime and keep the community safe. Is enough being done in this area, and do you think that there actually are serious consequences for violent criminals?

Jaclyn SYMES: You have literally asked the Treasurer for an opinion on a policy that is delivered by another minister – that was your question. It is just not relevant to this bill. I know you are interested in these issues, but you gave me a budget reference. Perhaps you could have asked it in PAEC or got your representatives to ask it in PAEC. It is just not even relevant to this bill. You just asked me whether I think a policy is effective. It is not an appropriate use of committee questions to ask me an opinion on the effectiveness of a policy.

Renee HEATH: We did ask the minister in PAEC and got no answer. I asked you when you were the Attorney-General and I got no answer. You can sort of see why we are –

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Renee HEATH: You cannot see? All right. Well, how does the government balance these commitments and these statements with the continued reductions in sentences for prisoners, including emergency management days?

Jaclyn SYMES: Dr Heath, I cannot answer your questions. They are not even remotely related to the appropriation bill. This is not an opportunity to ask every question you would like to ask government, just because I am the Treasurer and some things cost money. It is not a question that you should be putting.

Renee HEATH: On the environment, the state government applied for and was awarded $3.3 million from the federal government on 4 November 2022 under the coastal risk mitigation program. The state government finally released their plan, which included this funding, on Christmas Eve last year. What was the hold-up with releasing these funds, and where have these funds been sitting for the past three years?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think you have just asked me about a funding allocation that was provided by the federal government in 2022. I kind of understand your question, but I do not know why you are asking it in the appropriation bill committee. I just do not.

Nick McGOWAN: Treasurer, page 11 of the bill refers, obviously, to the Department of Health budget. Is any of that budget to be expended on the construction of Maroondah Hospital?

Jaclyn SYMES: I appreciate your interest in the matter. I think this is a question that you might actually have asked the Minister for Health – did you, I think?

Nick McGOWAN: I have asked a similar question.

Jaclyn SYMES: I pay attention. Her answer will be the same as my answer, because we are engaging constructively in relation to the hospital in Maroondah. There are active conversations in relation to potential for PPPs and market-led proposals. Those conversations are ongoing. But that would be why there is no direct provision in the budget, other than my confirmation that there are active discussions in relation to the future of that.

Nick McGOWAN: Just to confirm, there is no money in this appropriation bill for any construction; does that likewise apply for the forward estimates? Because that certainly seems to be the case, based on what is in the budget to date.

Jaclyn SYMES: No.

Nick McGOWAN: In the forward estimates that is the case.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think a little bit of the problem I had with the way Ms Crozier articulated her question was in that she said because there is funding for two years, we will not have funding in years 3 and 4. That is not an accurate picture of how budgets work. Similarly, it is the reverse for you in relation to the question you are asking: just because there is no provision now or in the forwards does not mean that it cannot be in a subsequent budget before the end of the forwards.

Nick McGOWAN: You might be able to help shine some light on a question that was asked at PAEC but does clearly relate to the appropriations. We did not have much success with the minister, so I think your capability in this space, with no disrespect to the minister, particularly when you were the previous minister, might assist greatly. We did try and attempt to get an idea as it relates to the appropriations bill of the quantum of the budgets for – you know where I am going here – the SES, FRV and Forest Fire Management. Now, these are things that the government has given regularly at every PAEC I could ever recall in fact, except this year, it seems, because the minister was either unaware or – I cannot explain it. Perhaps you can assist the chamber certainly in respect to the appropriations and obviously the environment budget, which I will come to in a moment – but emergency services for the time being.

Jaclyn SYMES: The funding provided for emergency services in this year's budget sits at more than $2.4 billion. As you would appreciate, that is what is forecast in the budgets. A bit similar to where we started the conversation today, in the event that there are events, often that allocation is supplemented by Treasurer's advances.

Nick McGOWAN: I appreciate it is $2.4 billion. What I am trying to understand is the actual budget for FRV, because it is quite a significant agency, and obviously I am the shadow minister for that agency, as opposed to the other agencies per se. Can the Treasurer advise the house in respect to

the appropriations? What portion of the appropriations relates to FRV budget, notwithstanding it is an estimate?

Jaclyn SYMES: The FRV budget is around a billion dollars a year.

Nick McGOWAN: I appreciate that, based on last year's annual report but also the budget expenditure. Is the Treasurer able to provide a precise amount of the estimate that these appropriation bills are based on? I respect that it is a billion dollars, but is it $1.1 billion, $1.4 billion, $1.3 billion?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am wanting to give you as much information as I can. As you have identified, the budgets when it comes to emergency services are kind of reliant on a full reconciliation in their annual reports, because there is a lot of unpredictability in relation to where they finally end up. But you want a bit more substance about what is expected to be expended to FRV, and I think where I can take you is the expected allocation from the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. As you would appreciate, that is a fund that significantly contributes to the budgets of FRV, SES, CFA and a range of other bodies. In relation to what is forecast for this coming year to go to FRV directly from the ESVF – and I have to be very clear that is not their total funding; we have fallen into a trap of a lot of misinformation, claims of cuts and the like, and there are certainly no cuts – the FRV budget for next financial year will have a contribution of around $829 million directly from the ESVF, and that is a boost from last year's allocation from the ESVF. As you would appreciate, it is a new fund that has replaced the fire services property levy, but it is helping to ensure the budget allocations for our emergency services agencies.

Nick McGOWAN: Can the Treasurer provide, likewise, figures for the ESVF estimates, as we will call them, or the projections, for both the SES and for the CFA?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. The 2026–27 ESVF will deliver for the CFA $358 million and for the SES a total of $102 million. It might be worth putting on the public record that compared to last year for the CFA, it is $46 million additional and SES is $29 million additional. And the figure I provided to you earlier in relation to Fire Rescue Victoria of the $829 million is an extra $68 million compared to last year's ESVF provision. Again, ESVF provision calculations are a point in time on an estimated baseline funding. It is not the total funding. They all receive significantly more funding from that. If events happen, they are supplemented et cetera. But hopefully that gives you a bit of an indication of the secure funding source from the ESVF for those agencies.

Nick McGOWAN: I apologise. Can I add Forest Fire Management Victoria? In the absence of my colleague Melina Bath here today, I am sure she would be interested in the figure for that as well.

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have those details on hand, and I can explain why. The three agencies that I have detailed have legislative percentages. Everything else is not as prescriptive. So I do not have that figure today, because they are under a different arrangement, effectively, to the calculations that are legislated to provide for those other three agencies.

Nick McGOWAN: I am going to get a little bit granular here, as you would like to say, and I like the saying, so if you do not know the answer, then I am appreciative of that fact. In fact, if I had known previously, we could give you some questions – that would have been useful for both you and me. But nonetheless, in respect to the education appropriations on page 7, I understand that Heathmont East Primary School are to receive a portion of funding under these appropriations, and that is in the quantum of $500,000. Can I confirm with you that that is the correct amount?

Jaclyn SYMES: I reckon I can get you that answer. Give me a second.

Nick McGOWAN: If it assists the Treasurer too, can I also ask with regard to Marlborough? They have money for planning, but it is not clear through the appropriations bill, certainly, that that sum is again $500,000. But it is bundled together; notwithstanding this is not the appropriation bill, it is bundled together in the budget. So it does not make it clear to me in either the budget or the appropriation bill whether that is correct or not.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes. I will see if I can get you an answer, but what you have identified is – it is not uncommon to have a bucket of money for maintenance projects, portable allocation, modular allocations and some of the smaller work, again, because to list it all in detail is perhaps a little bit onerous for budget papers. We do the larger school upgrades by line item, generally. The smaller ones that have been preannounced as going to receive something out of a bucket do not always have a dollar figure put on them. For example, in my electorate, Broadford Secondary are getting modulars. I do not actually know the cost of those modulars; I just know that they are in the bucket. So I can try and get you that information. Are your figures based on what the schools have told you?

Nick McGOWAN: If it assists the Treasurer, your party's candidate was able to make phone calls on the day of the budget to the schools and advise them of the amounts.

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me get confirmation. We have got an education adviser that I know will know that off the top of her head. There is a bit of a lag in terms of us seeking that information from her, but if it comes through, I will let you know. If not, I will get back to you.

Nick McGOWAN: I thank the Treasurer for her answers and for her undertaking. With respect to the contingencies, this is always an area that interests me greatly. I know with respect to FRV and the ongoing industrial disputation there that the firefighters have not received a pay rise for five years and the corporate for six. Is there any allocation in these contingencies for the settlement of that EBA?

Jaclyn SYMES: I cannot provide a breakdown of contingencies, but I can confirm that contingencies include provisions for EBAs. We have got a few to hopefully settle before the next budget, and there is provision for EBAs in this budget.

Nick McGOWAN: Just to clarify – and it may be my lack of understanding in this space – I would assume that every year an authority like FRV is provided with its budget. Perhaps I am wrong here, but that would likely include the capacity for them to pay their increases or their CPI – whatever it is that is agreed under their EBA. But where there is no EBA agreed, does government year on year provide that, or does it accumulate in terms of that liability going forward and get paid out at the end when there is a settled agreement? I am specifically talking about the FRV, obviously.

Jaclyn SYMES: The provision of funding for all agencies ensures that they can meet their obligations for wages and conditions. In relation to EBAs that have not yet been finalised, that is generally held in contingency in central government and provided to reflect the changes.

Nick McGOWAN: Based on government wages policy, do you have an estimate? It is hard for me to tell from the appropriation bill, but do you have an estimate of what that liability might look like? Is that accounted for in the appropriation bill, should that matter be concluded this financial year in respect to the FRV's outstanding EBAs? Obviously it is a sizeable amount – it is five to six years worth of negotiations and EBA outcomes.

Jaclyn SYMES: I believe I answered that question in indicating that there is a contingency provided in each year's budget that is in anticipation of EBAs that you would anticipate or hope are settled prior to the next budget.

Nick McGOWAN: I appreciate that. Perhaps I did not put that as well as I could have. Do you have a quantum that you have allowed for FRV specifically in those contingencies? That is probably what I am asking.

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry. I caveated my original answer to you that we do not provide a breakdown in relation to those matters.

Nick McGOWAN: Is that a government decision not to provide that, or is that a policy of some sort? Just so I am clear.

Jaclyn SYMES: In relation to EBAs, they are negotiations. If you telegraph your prepared envelope, it might undermine the negotiations.

I have an answer for you on Heathmont East Primary: $495,000 from the Capital Works Fund.

Nick McGOWAN: I will leave you with Marlborough, if I may, if that is okay. I believe it is the same quantum or thereabouts. I have spoken a lot in this place – perhaps more than any other member – about toilets. While you may not draw a direct parallel with this appropriation bill, I am sure I can find one, regardless of which page I turn to. We all need them. That is the sad reality. I am just hoping you can perhaps enlighten me, or indulge me even, because I did see that there is $700,000 – I did not go for any puns even – for toilets, I kid you not, at Coburg Lake Reserve.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes.

Nick McGOWAN: I thought you might know about this. I will have it as an as open a question as I possibly can. How did they possibly manage to get their $700,000, and what is the key to that? Because clearly I am missing it?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am somewhat familiar with that project, Mr McGowan. I am not familiar with the design of the facilities, but the budget contains a range of community facilities that are funded in the budget. Rochester pool is probably my favourite facility that is funded in Northern Victoria. I am always happy to hear from members about their particular projects and the things they would like to be considered in the budget, and I am more than happy to continue to hear your advocacy about the important infrastructure that you would like to see in your electorate.

Nick McGOWAN: I am not sure if you have answered my question. I have been trying for some time – for some years, for that matter – without any success at all for a single toilet at Ringwood East train station. But I have made my point. I shall move on to Go Fishing Victoria. Go Fishing – I know; I shake my head every time I think of this too – I am assuming includes the fishing rods, and if it does not, I do not know where that belongs. On what basis are we giving out to children, yet again, thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of free fishing rods this year under the appropriation bill?

Jaclyn SYMES: I have managed to be pretty good with most of your questions. I am not across the detail of what is contained in the fishing initiative that is being funded in the budget. Obviously the Victorian Fisheries Authority are being merged with the Game Management Authority, and there is provision I think in relation to their joint activities and what the future will look like in terms of what their specific programs are and what they are providing in relation to the funding that they are provided. I do not have that level of detail, but the new minister is pretty enthusiastic about fishing. I have seen a picture of him in waders, and he seems to be much more across the detail of what is in the fishing allocation in the budget than I am. I reckon you could ask him, and he will let you know what is in store to encourage people to go fishing in Victoria.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. While we are talking about killing animals, because I know your government specialises in it and takes it to the next level – no disrespect to you, but that is a fact –

Jaclyn SYMES: I have actually got more. Someone has sent me some details on fishing.

Nick McGOWAN: I will take the details on fishing, please, because I would welcome that. But while you are at that, I will not even talk about koalas or wombats. Perhaps I will let you answer that question first on the fishing rods. Why don't we do that?

Jaclyn SYMES: I have just been advised that in relation to the fishing allocation, it is to stock fish in Victorian waterways, including Arcadia and Snobs Creek, and you can find that in budget paper 3 on page 64. It is mainly about fish stocking. If anyone has been to Snobs Creek, it is actually fascinating. I could facilitate a visit, I am sure, if you are interested.

Nick McGOWAN: I will think about that. I will leave with this last question and then hand over to somebody else for a while, while the minister recovers from my questions. I do notice there is the fox bounty in here, so I will give you one more animal question here.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am surprised it has not come from Mrs McArthur.

Nick McGOWAN: Have you not gone there already? I might have stolen your thunder here. Do we have a figure for how many foxes your government would like to kill this year – or pay to be killed, rather? I should be specific, because there is a significant appropriation here yet again for that effort.

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have a target number on the amount in bounties that is expected to be paid. But yes, each and every year we fund the fox bounty. It is an important initiative to regional Victoria in particular, and it is another feature of this year's budget. The Minister for Environment should be able to get you some information on performance measures, but I do not have that level of detail, except my ongoing support for the fox bounty.

Bev McARTHUR: Treasurer, I have read your budget speech – over 2700 words, but not a single mention of small business. Why?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is a very expansive budget. It covers a lot of stakeholders and a lot of interest groups. I could not possibly mention everybody in my speech. I think I did mention business, and I would not exclude small business from the term 'business'. I think that would be rude. I am a very big supporter of small business. In fact that is underpinning a lot of our economic growth. We have more businesses opening up in Victoria than in any other state. The figures are quite impressive. They are significantly above other states. I think it is 123,000 in the past five years. Let me have a look. In terms of our support for business creation, business investment and small business, it is certainly something that is a feature of the budget and a feature of the government's interest.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, small businesses are mortally offended that they did not get a run in your 2700 words. But moving on, $19 million has been allocated to new initiatives described by the Victorian government's own budget website as 'cutting red tape for small businesses'. Minister for Small and Family Business Natalie Suleyman could not answer this question; in fact she palmed it off to you. Why does reducing red tape require spending more taxpayer money?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am sure I could get you a lot of detail in relation to the ongoing regulatory reform piece. A lot of that is being led by the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs and his department, but obviously there is an interface with Treasury, particularly in relation to things such as business insurance reductions, which will happen again in July in relation to reducing costs for businesses. That would be one component of cost because it is forgone revenue, so that would make up some component of that figure. In relation to other initiatives that we have funded in the budget, whether it is this year or last year, there are lots of initiatives that would support small and medium businesses: assistance in accessing global markets is a conversation that we had a bit earlier, business regulators are being halved and there is the replacement of outdated processes in terms of digital accessibility and streamlining licences and approvals. There is a level of investment in relation to making some of those changes. A bit like my answer to some of the other questions today, the granular detail is not necessarily easily accessible for me, but I think your question is a good one. I am happy to provide a bit more detail on notice for the specific breakdown of the $19 million, but I think I have given you a taste of what that would be made up of.

Bev McARTHUR: I have an appetite and enthusiasm for a taste of what might be forthcoming, because we would want to be sure that the $19 million will go directly towards reducing or eliminating existing regulations – not for grants, not for training programs and not for industry promotion but the actual removal of pointless regulation.

Jaclyn SYMES: I have got more details now. Some other initiatives that were specifically around helping businesses to succeed and thrive: a great initiative called the Industry Capability Network is a program that helps businesses engage with government projects – so procurement assistance, effectively – making sure that local builders and local suppliers are benefiting from government investment through projects or being able to provide clothing or catering and things. There is a program that is dedicated to ensuring that people know how to access the opportunities to bolster their businesses through government programs. It is something that we should really focus on, because we

are spending taxpayer money, and if local businesses can benefit from that spend, that is something that I certainly support.

There was an allocation of funding for the skills solutions partnerships, a program to design and pilot new training approaches in priority areas, including AI leadership and technology adoption. Again, there was a lot of feedback from businesses concerned about not being able to access AI and innovation and feeling a little bit behind in that space. Making sure that we have got support to gain those skills and reskill people that feel as though they need to ensure that they can stay in the workforce are in some of the programs there.

A program that I started originally as Minister for Agriculture is the $1.6 million to back the local beverage sector and continue the Drink Victorian program, promoting local produce in the state and more broadly so that more and more in that sector get to benefit. There is the Small Business Activation Fund, which is delivering local initiatives to create business opportunities. That is a grants program for business organisations and chambers to really help them ensure that they are providing the best possible support to small businesses in their particular areas. Then there is a small allocation for dispute resolution services for small businesses.

Bev McARTHUR: But this money was specifically referred to for cutting regulations. You have described to me a whole lot of programs that are training or grants or facilitation or whatever. That is all different to cutting regulations. I asked: what amount of that $19 million was going directly to eliminating existing regulations? I specifically said not for grants, not for training programs and not for industry promotion but for the actual removal of pointless regulation. That is what we are interested in. That is what small business is interested in. How is this $19 million going to be spent to cut regulation? Why do you need to spend money to cut regulations? You just put a red line through the regulations, Minister.

Jaclyn SYMES: If only things were that simple, Mrs McArthur, that would be great. In relation to the specific $19 million, it was funding new initiatives aimed at cutting red tape, supporting business capability and transition and levelling the playing field. There was a range of initiatives under that particular line item; some of them I took you through. You have expressed interest again in red tape reduction and getting people out of the way, effectively. We certainly hear feedback from small business about numerous interactions with state government, local government permits and the like, and that is why we funded the *Economic Growth Statement* in last year's budget, which is a four-year program committed to removing red tape. It is about putting a red line, as you said, through a lot of the regulators, combining them and the like. That is work that is well underway. I am very happy to update you on that work. It is a collaboration between me and the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs. As I said, there is constant feedback that less regulation will lead to greater productivity, less frustration and more money in the pockets of small business. I am very happy to provide you with as much detail as possible at another time.

Bev McARTHUR: I would be very grateful for an update on the regulations that you are managing to put the red line through, because the Business Council of Australia found that a cafe owner in Victoria needs 37 separate licences and approvals to commence trading, 12 more than in New South Wales. I do not know whether you can name a current state regulation that will be removed in 2026–27 or else perhaps comment on the fact that there is an area that will look forward to seeing a massive amount of red line activity, because you cannot have a situation where to pour a cup of coffee you need 37 separate licences and approvals. Do you agree?

Jaclyn SYMES: We absolutely agree on reducing the number of business regulators. We have a commitment to halve them by 2030 – that is down from 37 currently. You asked about examples of some of the initiatives that have already taken place. There have been initiatives in relation to liquor licensing to stop the duplication of having to go both local and state, so we have certainly acted in that regard. Again, I am quite familiar because of the crossover between Treasury and the similar stakeholders to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, but I am always looking for initiatives. I

would be very happy to hear your suggestions. I have got to say it is not as easy as just putting a red line. There is safety, there are considerations about children – there are a range of considerations and some of them do not necessarily mesh that well together. There are some that are kind of obvious and others that we are working through – their roles and where they could go and what is required. Obviously health and safety are important, and disability access is important. There are a range of things that we know businesses need to comply with. We want to make that as easy as possible. I am very happy to talk to you about business regulation reduction. As I said, we have a team within government that look at this on a constant basis, so I would very much welcome any of the ideas that you have.

Bev McARTHUR: I look forward to sending you a long list. I am sure that will be great. Now I just want to go to rural and regional chambers of commerce. It is in budget paper 3, pages 62 and 65. There is $1.2 million in one-off funding for the Small Business Activation Fund. Why has the government failed to provide further funding in future years?

Jaclyn SYMES: It is not an indication that funding will not be provided in future years just because it is not a feature of this year's budget, so to say that they will not be funded is not necessarily accurate. This is an initiative that I think I took you through before. It is about ensuring that small businesses can be supported through local business organisations, chambers and industry associations – and actually councils have the ability as well to access this funding to help small businesses to grow. The initial allocation of $1.2 million is provided for in this budget. As is the normal case, if the initiative is successful and if it is something that was an ongoing priority for chambers, I am sure that is something that I will hear about to consider in next year's budget to re-fund.

Bev McARTHUR: Minister, you would understand that a chamber of commerce or a local business group or industry association would find difficulty in building a serious support program when the government funds it for one year and then provides nothing else across the forward estimates. That is a concern – that they will not be able to even make use of it, just knowing that they have only got funding for one year and it may not continue. There is no guarantee that it will continue.

Jaclyn SYMES: Just to be clear, Mrs McArthur, this is a grants round. They are targeted grants to specifically those organisations that you and I have listed. You can apply for between $5000 and $100,000. It is a one-year grants program. If somebody funds something in particular, there might be the opportunity to say, 'We would like an additional grants round next year, so could you, government, please consider another round?' Or it could be that a particular organisation says, 'Well, we would just like you to fund it as an ongoing program,' and it might fit somewhere else within government. So there are a range of ways. If something is really good and warrants ongoing funding or another year of funding, that is all part of subsequent budgets.

Bev McARTHUR: Can you tell us how much of it would go directly to rural and regional chambers of commerce, this $1.2 million one-off grant funding?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that level of detail. I am not the responsible minister for the allocation of the funds or the consideration of the grants. That would be Minister Suleyman, and perhaps you would like to ask her for some detail in relation to that. But given the active chambers of commerce particularly across regional Victoria, I am sure that they will certainly be interested and attract a significant portion of the allocation. But as I said, that is a matter for the relevant minister.

Bev McARTHUR: You can understand there is concern in rural and regional chambers of commerce about the criteria and who will determine how it is distributed. Commerce Ballarat, Victoria's second-largest chamber, was forced to terminate a staff member two months ago because of funding shortages. It is even worse elsewhere. Do you have a plan to keep regional chambers viable over the forward estimates?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think the fact that we have a dedicated fund for these types of organisations would indicate our appreciation of the value that they provide to their business communities. In relation to the specifics, again that is a matter for the minister for small business.

Bev McARTHUR: The budget includes an allocation of $5.4 million to implement a local government fair jobs code and create a new regulatory body within the department. At the ALP state conference Paul Hamer said the code will be mandatory. When can we expect legislation to be brought into the Parliament on this matter, Minister?

Jaclyn SYMES: I appreciate your question. It is not a matter for this bill, not a matter for the –

Bev McARTHUR: It is on pages 44 and 45 of budget paper 3.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, but this bill does not talk about the legislative program. In relation to the legislation and the timing of the legislation, that is not a matter that I can answer in the context of an appropriation committee stage.

Bev McARTHUR: So why do you need $5.4 million to establish a new regulatory body? We just talked about cutting regulations in the last piece of conversation. But here is a whole new regulatory body you are going to commit to with $5.4 million of money. Why do we need another regulatory body?

Jaclyn SYMES: You are asking me for an opinion on a policy matter for another minister. Again, I am happy to try and be helpful, but if you are after details about how that will be operationalised, I would direct you to the minister.

Bev McARTHUR: I can see there are a lot of questions that are going to have to go to the minister on this, and I am sure it will be a very interesting discussion that the local government sector will be having with the minister over his fair jobs code advisory committee, for example. Is that still active, do you know, Minister?

Jaclyn SYMES: With respect, Mrs McArthur, we have gone pretty well to date, but your last three questions are certainly not within the remit of the bill. They are more appropriately put to responsible ministers. We can try and keep within questions that I am happy to try and answer, but you have gone a bit too far. They are just not a matter for this bill or for me, as Treasurer.

Bev McARTHUR: I appreciate your cooperation in this matter, Minister, and we are getting there. We are going well, Minister, but we will not give in, I might tell you. This is a matter – I guess maybe it was a saving. Local Government Victoria executive director Mike Gooey was missing from the PAEC hearing. But was he forced to resign, was he terminated or was his contract not renewed? I mean, was that a saving within the budget expenditure area – to terminate Mr Gooey?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not play a role in the witnesses at PAEC.

Bev McARTHUR: Let us go to the windfall gains tax. You expect to receive $97 million from the windfall gains tax in 2026–27. That is a 75 per cent increase compared to the revised estimate for 2025–26. On what basis do you expect to achieve this windfall?

Jaclyn SYMES: I appreciate your question on windfall gains tax. This is a policy that was brought in and effectively designed to capture a fair share for the community where property values increase solely because of the actions of the government. It is only fair and reasonable for our community to benefit from that, as opposed to it being retained by one person, for example. The revenue generated from that tax can be quite lumpy, because it is only activated in the instance of zoning changes, so that is how the modelling is forecast.

Bev McARTHUR: I am well aware of how we arrive at windfall gains tax, with rezoning giving a 50 per cent uplift but going into consolidated revenue – not even hypothecated to the area where the

windfall might have been achieved from. But what we are interested in is how you can estimate that there is going to be a 75 per cent increase in this tax. On what basis do you expect to achieve it?

Jaclyn SYMES: As you have indicated, it is only triggered when properties are subject to a rezoning decision, and that would also factor the ups and downs because of the size of the potential property – obviously smaller properties bring in smaller revenue than larger properties. But it is based on fluctuating rezoning decisions. It is Treasury advice; it changes year on year depending on the properties that come under a rezoning decision. One year there can be a lot of rezoning; the next year there might not be as many projects that reach completion. There are also delayed payments that Treasury are aware of based on the application of deferrals from people that have been activated in previous years. That is how Treasury effectively model the inputs, and they are generally pretty conservative in their estimates. But as I said, there are factors such as land size decisions and the coming on of deferrals.

Bev McARTHUR: I think Treasury or whoever does this calculation is being overly optimistic, because you only got $15 million last year and a 75 per cent increase is quite incredible.

Jaclyn SYMES: Seventy-five per cent of $15 million is not near enough.

Bev McARTHUR: No, $97 million you are going to get, which is a 75 per cent increase.

Jaclyn SYMES: We will see.

Bev McARTHUR: Anyway, good luck. Minister, what percentage of this revenue uplift will come from local government? You charge local government a windfall gains tax if they rezone their own land, so what percentage is going to come from local government?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that information, nor would I be confident that it would be broken down by Treasury in relation to particular owners.

Bev McARTHUR: Just by way of information, councils tell me that they will not rezone land because they do not want to be hit by this massive tax liability. Do you agree that this tax is holding back housing development?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am always happy to hear from local councils that have projects that they would like to discuss with government. I often have conversations about tax settings with a range of stakeholders, so I am more than happy to have those conversations with anybody that you would like to direct to me. Can I just point out in relation to this appropriation bill that we do talk about revenue from windfall gains tax but this is not a tax bill in terms of any changes to tax settings. But I certainly invite advocacy. The Property Council of Australia and UDIA, for example, raise suggestions and bring matters to my attention on a regular basis, and I am certainly happy to receive those.

Bev McARTHUR: That is very good to hear. The growth areas infrastructure contribution was set up to fund the infrastructure growing suburbs need, including libraries, swimming pools and community facilities. It is now being diverted to fund public transport projects. What proportion of bus funding in 2026–27 came from GAIC?

Jaclyn SYMES: What we have in relation to this year's budget for GAIC is that based on the current estimates there will be an allocation of $174 million from GAIC revenue to projects which include critical bus investments in the Melton South and Casey growth areas, safe and accessible stations and construction of new schools. This is an increase on the investment of $162 million in the last budget. Of the $174 million that is allocated to the initiatives that I outlined I do not have any further breakdown other than the initiatives that are funded under that allotment.

Bev McARTHUR: I think there is concern that the GAIC revenue that accrues from a development, given it goes into your bottomless pit, does not end up funding the necessary community facilities et cetera in the area from which it is gained. Anyway, I will just pass that on by way of information, or you may like to comment.

Jaclyn SYMES: A feature of tonight's committee stage has been statements and then 'I'd like to move on,' whereas I kind of want to respond to some of the things that you have been saying. GAIC funding will only ever be used for the benefit of growing communities in which it is collected. It remains restricted to the benefit of seven growth area councils: Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell, Whittlesea and Wyndham. The planning reforms at the end of last year streamlined GAIC so it is easier and faster to give councils and the state more flexibility to respond to changing local needs. Funding can only be spent outside the suburb of collection when a direct, measurable link to the same community is proven, including when key infrastructure is best delivered nearby rather than within tight growth area boundaries. An example of that is delivering a train station or a road link in the neighbouring suburb. Your statement alluded to the fact that there is consolidated revenue grasp of this; GAIC funding, as I said, can only be spent as I have articulated.

Bev McARTHUR: The Victorian Local Governance Association's 2025 councillor census found that 98 per cent of councillors surveyed believed councils are undermined by limited financial resources. Moorabool shire estimates cost shifting to be $900,000 a year; West Wimmera, nearly $3.5 million; Mitchell shire, $5 million; Banyule, $6.7 million; Stonnington, $20 million – the list goes on. Do you accept that cost shifting from the state is a major financial issue for local governments and their sustainability?

Jaclyn SYMES: I appreciate your advocacy for local governments, Mrs McArthur, but you are asking about a matter that is outside the scope of the bill.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. There are significant regulatory and compliance initiatives for councils – we talked about them a bit before. There are gender impact assessments, fair access policies, health and wellbeing strategies and deliberative community consultation. The new fair access policy for sport and recreation facilities will cost one metro council over $60 million. What funding will government provide councils to deliver these state initiatives?

Jaclyn SYMES: That is not a level of detail that I have. You would be best placed to take up this conversation with the Minister for Local Government.

Bev McARTHUR: I would like you to advocate to the Minister for Local Government that you might support publishing an annual cost-shifting report, like Queensland and New South Wales do. How do you feel about that, Minister?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mrs McArthur, again, this is not the opportunity to ask me – you are the shadow minister, aren't you?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes.

Jaclyn SYMES: This is the feature of today. I recognise that I am viewed as a vessel for all government departments and ministers. This is a bill that is somewhat broad, but can we stay within the remit of my Treasury portfolio and this bill, despite the fact that I have stepped out of it considerably? Can we come back, please?

Bev McARTHUR: Treasurer, I will step back and ask you about the Bellarine link, or Geelong Ring Road extension. Planning began –

Jaclyn SYMES: That is not stepping back.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, it is. It began in 2017. A preferred alignment was identified, consultation has been undertaken, and the government's own project page says a business case has been completed. Yet nine years later the 2026–27 budget appears to contain no construction funding, no delivery timeline and no clear statement of whether the project is proceeding. Can you tell us whether your government intends to fund the Bellarine link, and if not, has the project effectively been cancelled?

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry, Mrs McArthur, I might have given you the indication that I would have more information. I do not have information on that specific project. You will have to take it up with

the Minister for Roads and Road Safety or the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Again, I was in a position where I could give detailed information to Mr Ettershank about a road because he gave me advance notice, so I was able to prepare that, but in this instance it would be quicker for you to raise it with the relevant minister.

Bev McARTHUR: I will put it in writing, Treasurer. That will be good. Well, here we go. Budget paper 4, page 76, shows that $16.7 million of funding has been stripped from the Western Highway Ararat bypass and $18.8 million is being spent on the Beaufort bypass. That is a $35.5 million cut in total taken out of that bypass. The budget papers state that this money has been reprioritised to the Western Highway duplication. It looks like you have run out of money, Treasurer, and you are robbing Peter to pay Paul. Can you confirm that as both projects are allocated just $500,000 each in the 2026–27 budget and the completion dates are now listed as 'to be confirmed', you have now effectively mothballed these badly needed projects?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, the level of detail in relation to the status of projects is best directed to the relevant minister.

Bev McARTHUR: I have got news for you, Minister: the relevant ministers never answer the questions. Can you put a bomb under them or something to make sure they do answer our questions? If it is dealt with in the budget or it is not dealt with in the budget, can they please lift their game?

Going to school funding, budget paper 4 shows that 12 months ago the government projected it would spend $129.2 million acquiring vital school land in the 2026–27 financial year. This year's budget shows that allocation has been slashed to just $61.2 million for the exact same period, so more than $60 million in planned land purchases has been delayed or pushed back. Given the population growth across parts of the state, can you tell us which specific school sites – or take it on notice – have had their land acquisition delayed because the government cannot manage its capital program on time?

Jaclyn SYMES: We are a government that has invested in more school infrastructure than any other state. It is around 100 brand new schools that we will deliver in a very short period of time. Land acquisition – you asked in relation to specific schools. A lot of land acquisition is for new schools, so they are schools that do not currently exist. This is, again, a matter that would be better directed to the Minister for Education, but in relation to the allocation of funding for schools, there is land acquisition, there is planning money, there is modular money, there is upgrade money, there is maintenance money and there is a provision for engagement with the private sector on the delivery of new schools through PPPs, which again would pick up some of those potential new opportunities which may indeed cross over with some of the planned acquisition sites.

Bev McARTHUR: We will just realise that $60 million has been cut from the school acquisition program.

Jaclyn SYMES: I explained it could be filled by the PPP program.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Treasurer, did you wish to make a further statement?

Jaclyn SYMES: No. I have already answered it. It is just that I get editorialised.

Bev McARTHUR: Can you tell us why the budget has failed to allocate funding for the promised PET scanner for Warrnambool, leaving patients in my region still being required to travel to Geelong or Melbourne for essential diagnostic imaging?

Jaclyn SYMES: Again, I have tried, but I am not able to necessarily provide a level of detail in relation to an individual project for an individual health centre. But you know who sits next to me, so I reckon she will probably get you a bit of information.

Richard WELCH: Final stanza from me. I would like to ask some questions about the TAC, just about the financials. We are repatriating $1 billion in capital from the TAC. Are you at all worried

about whether taking $1 billion out, roughly – $1.108 billion – will lead to higher registration costs and reduced benefits?

Jaclyn SYMES: Absolutely not, because in relation to dividends and capital repats, it is appropriate to explore that opportunity for the benefit of Victoria, but you always have to ensure that there is no impact in relation to the running of the entity or its impact on bills or the services that it provides. When you look at the TAC in particular, because of basically the management of their funds and the investment returns, we have been able to ensure that we could distribute some of the upside of that to other government programs for the benefits of, as I said, communities. These are payments that provide a return to the state as a shareholder bearing the risk associated with the investment operations of those agencies. As I said, they can only be taken when organisations are profitable, and they do have the benefit of reinforcing the commercial focus of the organisation, ensuring that they operate with efficient capital structures.

Richard WELCH: You say the right things there certainly, but in the last years the patient experience score has declined below the target and the TAC satisfaction target has also dropped from 7.15 out of 10 to 6.9 out of 10, so that is inconsistent with the idea that it is not having an effect on their services. Are you concerned that perhaps we are not being true to the standards and services of the scheme and they actually need this capital?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I indicated, organisations whose dividends can be reallocated within the state budget have to be profitable, so this is not reducing their operational money in any way, and it ensures that, as I said, there is not basically an accumulation of money that is not being expended because it is above their operational needs. In relation to the TAC, there is nothing unusual about government receiving dividends, and as I said, there is due consideration for their operations. Their profitability is certainly an important factor before these measures are taken.

Richard WELCH: In the forwards it is showing that the dividend expected to be paid by the TAC is $1.108 billion, as we said, but then the forecasts for 2027–28 show a very modest dividend of just $8 million. Why so much in one year and so little in the next year? It is sort of curious how that has been determined.

Jaclyn SYMES: Let me get the exact wording. It is so it does not turn into a repat.

Mr Welch, basically what is sitting in the account, how the funding ratios work – a decision was made in relation to the health of their budget this year to take the dividend this year and forecast next year, which we have confirmed next year.

Richard WELCH: That makes me curious further, because if it is based on the health of the budget, is the budget going to be very, very bad next year that we are only taking $8 million and really good this year that we can take $1 billion? You said it was based on –

Jaclyn SYMES: What is available now. It is not going to carry through to next year.

Richard WELCH: Okay, so it is an accumulative fund, and when it reaches a certain threshold you will take it at a threshold level.

Jaclyn SYMES: As you would appreciate, these decisions were based on the advice that I received from the department in consultation with the TAC. It is appropriately, as reported, what the dividend is for this year's budget, because of the health of their position. Their current funding ratio obviously is very healthy. A lot of that has got to do with the good efforts of the VFMC in relation to the investment of the funds, which means that we are in a position to take the dividend now.

Richard WELCH: How long did the $1 billion reservoir take to accumulate?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have with me the list of previous dividends, so all I can confirm is that in the upcoming budget the ability to obtain the level of dividend that we did was based on the health of their position at this point in time.

Richard WELCH: In the process of establishing the amount to be transferred, was there consultation with the TAC? Did they have a view, or were they just told what it would be?

Jaclyn SYMES: There is certainly ongoing consultation with DTF, there is correspondence between me and the minister. Obviously we need to receive advice from the TAC in relation to their financial position. As I said, dividend payments are only ever made in relation to when there are consistent profits and their financial position and long-term financial sustainability are also considered. Of course this is information that we have to obtain from the TAC. I was talking before about the funding ratio, and I have got a little bit more detail here that might assist your question: as at 30 June 2025 TAC's insurance funding ratio was 153 per cent, above the upper limit of the preferred range of 100 per cent to 145 per cent. Allowing for the proposed payments to the state and the TAC's approved investment in road safety initiatives, the TAC's insurance funding ratio is expected to move towards the midpoint of the preferred range over the forward estimates period. We can really only determine that through engagement with the TAC.

Richard WELCH: That was a good answer, thank you. I just want to ask a couple of questions on WorkSafe. If you want to reference budget paper 3, page 95, 'Boosting return to work support and creating safer workplaces', what specific programs are funded under boosting return to work?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not have that level of detail on me, Mr Welch. However, I am conscious that Mrs McArthur asked about the program detail of a small business program of which I was able to provide because somebody could get me a reference to that. But in relation to your question, the WorkSafe programs, I think it would be best, unless somebody can give me a screenshot in the next little while, to refer it to the minister for WorkSafe, who is responsible for the delivery of the programs. I have not been involved in that process.

Richard WELCH: I think it is because I did not ask nicely enough. I was watching; they were asking much more nicely than I am. You live, you learn. You know, it is a great opportunity. I guess the answer may be the same – which industries or worker groups are being prioritised within that program? Same answer. How is WorkSafe Victoria's performance assessed in relation to the government's broader, safer objective in the budget?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am going to cut you a deal. I have got the return-to-work programs. My team is saying if I want to give you the answer, even though the minister should answer it, we will give you that. I will give you that answer and ignore the last question that you asked me. All right?

Richard WELCH: I win both.

Jaclyn SYMES: All right. As it comes through, we will get the return-to-work programs and I will provide them to you. Does anyone else have any questions before I get back to Mr Welch?

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes.

Jaclyn SYMES: Do you? You look as though you are kicking back there.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Jaclyn SYMES: Pursuant to standing order 4.08(1)(b), I declare the sitting to be extended by up to 1 hour.

Just triple-checking that for you, Mr Welch. I might ask Mr Mulholland to step in, and I will get you that information as it comes to hand.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I just have a few questions on the extension of the Lottery Corporation's exclusive Victorian lottery licence. At PAEC the Department of Treasury and Finance accepted that the receipt of the $1.145 billion affects net debt. Is that still the Treasurer's view, and does the $1.145 billion cash receipt reduce net debt by $1.145 billion, all else being equal?

Jaclyn SYMES: I think we covered a little bit of this earlier. In relation to the licence extension for lotteries, as you have indicated, we addressed some of this at PAEC. Yes, there is an impact on net debt, not an impact on the surplus as has been claimed.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Okay. Was the timing of this transaction influenced by the 2026–27 budget?

Jaclyn SYMES: No, Mr Mulholland. I am not sure if you tuned into my PAEC hearing, but I was able to take the committee through the history of this transaction, which commenced in June 2024. So any suggestion that this was rushed or brought in as a budget measure for this year would be an inaccurate description.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It is more like: was there any reason the deal had to be booked in the budget this year given existing licences did not expire until 2028? Why was a 40-year extension granted two years before the existing licence expired?

Jaclyn SYMES: This is usual practice, to extend licences. This is actually a usual timeline for this type of process. As I said, that is what has happened in similar transactions, and it is not unusual in any way.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Would you be able to, Treasurer, either now or on notice, point me to similar examples that you reference?

Jaclyn SYMES: Rather than me rattle off examples that I am pretty confident on in my head, as you have said I could take it on notice, I might take the opportunity to do that, because I can probably be a little more thorough in a written response. But these are the usual timelines for this type of process.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The usual timelines I understand with the two-year part, but what is not a usual timeline, I and I think most observers think, is a timeline of 40 years for an extension.

Jaclyn SYMES: This is a curious position for you to take, Mr Mulholland. For some reason you think that 40 years is strange. I am not sure how you are forming that view given other states have gone longer than 40 years for their extensions in relation to similar transactions. I am a bit curious how you think that 40 is unusual. We decided on a 40-year extension on the advice of Treasury analysis that it represented the optimal term. New South Wales and South Australia have also granted 40-year lottery licences. Queensland negotiated a 65-year licence. So I would have thought that your position would only stand had we done something that was less than 40.

Evan MULHOLLAND: How many potential market participants were contacted during the June 2024 market sounding process?

Jaclyn SYMES: DJCS and DTF undertook a comprehensive assessment of the public lotteries market, including market sounding of potential interest in the next licence from both domestic and international industry participants and their ability to deliver lotteries. The work was overseen by an independent probity adviser and the independent review panel that was appointed under the Gambling Regulation Act 2003.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Does the Treasurer accept the agreement restricts future Victorian governments from increasing lottery tax revenue for decades?

Jaclyn SYMES: What you seem to be overlooking is the deal that we have secured in relation to this extension. It is a good outcome that took many years to eventuate. In relation to comparing it to other outcomes, it is a really good deal compared to what other states have achieved. $1.145 billion is the highest price ever paid to operate a lottery licence in Australia. It represents a premium to revenue after tax multiple of 6.1 times, compared to New South Wales, four times; South Australia, 4.7 times; and Queensland, 3.6 times. We make no apologies for ensuring that we got a good outcome for the Victorian community.

I think the other issue that has been overlooked is that the licence extension provides certainty for small business operators in this field because they are still dealing with the same provider or the same operator. As I said, it is the highest price ever paid, but the funds are invested into the Hospitals and Charities Fund, which is all about supporting world-class health services. So this is a good outcome for Victorians when you compare it to similar transactions in the country.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Did the Department of Treasury and Finance advise that the Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2025 was necessary to enable or facilitate this 40-year extension?

Jaclyn SYMES: I have provided a lot of information about a particular matter in relation to the question that you have asked. You have asked about something that happened before my time, and I do not have that information, nor is it relevant to the bill specifically. However, I have been attempting to provide you with a lot of information in relation to the lottery licence extension because of the public interest, so I have gone through answers numerous times. But again, we are straying outside the bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Was the Treasurer aware that a former ministerial chief of staff associated with this policy area later worked as a lobbyist for interests connected to the Lottery Corporation?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, you are asking a question that is not relevant to this bill, but I would like to answer it, because the answer is no, I was not aware that a former adviser had gone to this particular outfit. But again I would point to the timeline. These negotiations, or even discussions, started in 2024. I understand that the individual that you are inquiring about left government some time before that. There are strict lobbying guidelines in place that, on my inquiries, were adhered to in relation to abstaining from these discussions.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Did you or any of your staff personally meet with, speak with or correspond with the Lottery Corporation or its directors, executives, agents, advisers or lobbyists about this extension?

Jaclyn SYMES: Not to my knowledge, no.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Has the Department of Treasury and Finance advised on the risk that a future Parliament or government could seek to overturn or amend this deal?

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, I think I have been quite generous with my time and efforts to respond to your questions in relation to a particular matter that is outside the scope of the bill once you get into the level of detail that you are attempting to. If you are trying to elicit information about the consequences of a coalition government potentially cancelling a deal, then you might want to seek advice yourself.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I think it is relevant, and I wanted to ascertain whether there was risk priced into the agreement and if there are compensation clauses if legislation changes the arrangement. That legislation also could be future gambling harm legislation, for example.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, you are talking about policy and legislative changes. That would be a responsibility for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. Again, I would ask you to come back to the contents of the bill. I have provided quite a bit of detail, and I think we could move on.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Was the government aware the Lottery Corporation would announce the transaction to the ASX at the same time the government publicly explained it?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Did the government require the Lottery Corporation to keep details confidential until budget day?

Jaclyn SYMES: It was appropriate for the notification to occur on or before budget for obvious reasons.

Evan MULHOLLAND: So that is a yes?

Jaclyn SYMES: It would not have been appropriate for the notification to come via a budget paper.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I just want to go back to one question I asked before, because I did not quite get an answer. I think I almost did. I just wanted to ascertain how many companies were involved in the market sounding.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I have explained, the information that I have is there was market sounding of potential interest in the next licence from both domestic and international industry participants and their ability to deliver lotteries, so conversations with people, organisations and companies on the level of ability or capacity to deliver such services.

Evan MULHOLLAND: But they were both domestic and international?

Jaclyn SYMES: That is my advice, yes. As you would appreciate, it was not within my remit, but that is the advice that Treasury have provided me.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Treasurer, isn't it the truth that the government changed the law, avoided a competitive tender, locked in tax protection for the incumbent and booked a $1.145 billion receipt in time to keep the projected net debt below $200 billion?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Mulholland, I have given you a lot of information today. The conclusions that you are attempting to draw are not accurate.

Gaelle BROAD: I would just be interested if you can provide some detail. The budget talks about a $73.4 million investment into a number of intersections, and there are two that I am particularly interested in: the Calder Highway and Maiden Gully Road intersection upgrade in Maiden Gully and also the Howard Street–Midland Highway intersection upgrade in Epsom. Of that $73.4 million, are you able to provide how much has been allocated to each intersection?

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry, Mrs Broad. Again, I have had conversations with members tonight about detailed specific projects. You will need to ask the relevant minister. There is not the ability for me to have every single project at my disposal.

I will just answer what I promised to Mr Welch, because he asked so nicely. There are four initiatives: a third-party service provider to run a pilot to support family members following a workplace fatality; supporting recovery and return to work following mental health injuries in the Victorian public sector; increasing WorkSafe's compliance capability and capacity, including hiring additional inspectors; and a package of return-to-work programs focused on frontline public sector workers like police, teachers and nurses.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 10 agreed to; schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (22:19): I move:

> That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (22:19): I move:

> That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Adjournment

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (22:20): I move:

> That the house do now adjourn.

Armstrong Creek ambulance services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (22:20): (2530) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the minister to explain what has happened to the promised Armstrong Creek ambulance station, account for the discrepancy in project spending and provide a firm timeline for construction and completion.

Jaclyn Symes interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, there is a bit in this, but I am putting it into context, Treasurer. Few projects better illustrate the gap between Labor's election promises and Labor's delivery than the Armstrong Creek ambulance station. The project was first promised before the 2022 election, with more than $30 million allocated to deliver a new ambulance station for one of Victoria's fastest growing communities. In the 2023 budget the government formally funded the project and told local residents it would improve ambulance response times and better support paramedics across the Geelong region. Three years later, not a sod has been turned.

At the recent budget estimates hearings the minister and departmental officials revealed that the project remains mired in uncertainty. All they could confirm was that the first site has been discarded, a second site is challenging and now they are looking around. It was farcical. Do yourself a favour and read the transcript as the minister and her departmental head babble on about it. It was just quite extraordinary. When asked whether the station could be delivered by the end of the next financial year, they just went on about something else. They could not provide a guarantee. This is another episode of *Yes Minister* if ever there was one.

The people of Armstrong Creek and the surrounding areas of Geelong were led to believe this station was on its way. Instead the government is trying to work out where it will go. The latest budget papers have pushed completion back to 2028–29 and show that less than $1 million has been spent on a project allocated more than $30 million. We just asked the Treasurer in the committee stage here about that money, and still there were no answers on where on earth the money is. Even more concerning, there appears to be a discrepancy between what was reported as expenditure in previous budget papers and what is now recorded, raising questions about where some $2 million in previously reported spending has gone. For a government that never misses a photo opportunity when making a promise, it is remarkable how difficult it has become to find evidence of progress when it comes time to deliver. As my colleague in the other place Mr Riordan said during the budget hearings:

> You could almost wallpaper this room with the amount of photos that Labor politicians took in front of promises –

for this community –

at the 2022 election.

It is time for the minister to come clean and tell the people of Armstrong Creek and the surrounding Geelong area when, or perhaps if, they can expect their ambulance station.

North East Link

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:23): (2531) The North East Link, M80 and Eastern Freeway upgrades are due for completion in 2028. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on the benefits that the North East Link will bring to the local communities in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region once the project is complete.

Police resources

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (22:23): (2532) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. The action that I seek is for the minister to ensure that police stations in the Whittlesea police service area are fully staffed and to return the Mernda station to being open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. My constituents in the Yan Yean district were shocked and outraged to learn that the police station in Mernda will be reduced to being open just two days a week. This is the second time within six months that opening hours for police stations in the area have been reduced, and the community has had enough. Opening hours at stations in the area were first cut on 2 November last year, when Mernda and Epping stations were closed completely on weekends and only open between 10 am and 6 pm on weekdays. Mill Park was left as the only 24/7 police station, but after the latest rounds of cuts to opening hours, Mill Park station will only be open from 1 to 9 pm on weekdays and 10 to 6 on weekends. This leaves the entire area without a single 24/7 police station, and nowhere for residents to seek safety at night or on the weekend. I am thinking particularly of the many women who I have heard from who say that domestic violence typically occurs at night or on weekends, and they may need to leave the house at a moment's notice. Where are these women supposed to go if the police station is closed?

In December last year a woman in a car stopped at an intersection and was approached by a man who attacked and damaged the car. The woman was frightened and drove off and then pulled into the car park of Reservoir police station, only 100 metres away. She got out of the car and tried to enter the police station to seek help, only to find that it was closed and unstaffed. Worse, the man had followed her car and then cornered her in the police station car park, attacking and slashing her with a knife. In the very place where this woman had gone to find safety, she was left alone and defenceless because the station was closed.

The government says that taking officers off the reception desk leaves them free to be on patrol. But on the very first day that reduced hours came into effect in Whittlesea, residents called 000 at 12:45 pm to report an intruder trying to break into multiple homes in Donnybrook but did not receive a police response until 3:40 pm. Hardworking officers are doing the best that they can in difficult conditions, but the Labor government is not giving them the resources and support they need. Under Labor, crime is up, but police stations are closing because Jacinta Allan has failed to fix the staffing shortage. Constantly changing the opening hours confuses the public and leaves them worried help will not be there when they need it. This is unacceptable for the community, and my constituents deserve better.

Dingo protection

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (22:26): (2533) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for confirmation that dingoes in north-west Victoria will remain protected and be excluded from any future dingo unprotection order. Last week my office was sent a photo of a deceased dingo that had been struck by a car and discarded on the side of the road like rubbish. A dedicated wildlife rescuer attended the scene, covering the dingo with flowers and

foliage as a mark of respect. She described the devastation and overwhelming grief she felt in that moment when she placed her hand on his still-warm body as 'brutal'. She said:

> The fact that we even have dingoes roaming within our community is something truly special. To have witnessed the beauty of this magnificent, healthy animal, only to then find him dead on the roadside, feels like a profound loss to our community.

I could not agree more. That same day I came across commentary attempting to reduce the profound significance of dingoes to one of so-called genetic purity. There is a growing narrative that focuses narrowly on the idea that dingoes must be 'pure' to be ecologically valuable. This misunderstands both conservation science and how ecosystems actually function. The author is very passionate about dingoes, but modern genetic research increasingly shows that while some hybridisation with domestic dogs has occurred, much of it is historical. There is little evidence of widespread ongoing hybridisation and first-generation dingo-dog hybrids make up less than 0.5 per cent of the wild canine population. Importantly these animals are still functioning as dingoes in the landscape. They play the same ecological role, helping regulate prey populations and maintain ecosystem balance. Conservation that is framed solely around genetic purity risks ignoring the ecological function entirely. Indigenous knowledge systems have long recognised dingoes as part of a living, interconnected landscape, not as a problem to be purified out of existence. Reducing them to a genetic debate alone risks repeating a very colonial pattern of oversimplifying complex ecological relationships. As the National First Nations' Dingo Declaration states:

> If it looks and behaves like a Dingo, it is Australia's Dingo.

In north-west Victoria this debate is particularly concerning given the current minister has not yet confirmed the security of future protections. Communities deserve clarity that dingoes will continue to be recognised for their ecological and cultural value, and I call on the minister to ensure that existing protections will not be quietly wound back.

Carer support

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (22:29): (2534) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Recently the Kensington community came together to care for our unpaid carers with an amazing lunch. It was a beautiful afternoon, but more than that it was a timely reminder of the incredible people who routinely put their lives, careers and personal needs on hold to look after the people they love. As I have said in this place before, this is something deeply personal for me. I know firsthand the profound mix of love and dedication and the immense challenge that come with the responsibility of caring for a family member. It is a round-the-clock commitment that demands physical, emotional and financial sacrifice. There are over 750,000 dedicated carers across Victoria who provide essential support to their families and communities, often behind the scenes. They are the quiet heroes of our community. Supporting a parent with dementia, a partner with a chronic illness or a child with a disability, their devotion and care are unconditional.

I am particularly mindful of our young carers, who play a vital role in supporting family members or friends whilst trying to balance school, work and a personal life. They take on significant responsibilities, often at a young age, providing emotional, practical and sometimes medical assistance. Younger carers are often forced to grow up fast, advocating for those that they care for, but too often it is without someone there to advocate for them. They face unique challenges, including deep social isolation and limited time for their own education and basic self-care.

Our local organisations and community groups in the Northern Metropolitan Region do an outstanding job of creating safe spaces for carers to connect, share their lived experience and take a well-deserved break. Grassroots events like that in Kensington show exactly why localised support networks matter. They give our hardworking carers a precious moment to be looked after instead of always being the ones looking after others. We must ensure that every carer right across our vibrant communities in the northern suburbs knows that their government sees them, values them and supports them. The action

I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how the Allan Labor government is continuing to support carers within Kensington and across the broader Northern Metropolitan Region.

Data centres

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:32): (2535) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, and it concerns how Victoria decides which data centres and AI investments succeed in our state. Victoria needs this investment. We want data centres coming to Victoria. We want the high-skilled jobs and the value of the secondary industries that will come off the back of them. In recent days there has been a run of reporting that presents the three or four one-off deals as some kind of triumph of strategy, but on closer examination this is evidence of the absence of a strategy.

In the first three months of the year former minister Danny Pearson held 12 meetings with data centre and AI firms. Thanks to reporting in the *Age*, we saw the nature of those meetings – wining and dining, going to the tennis, giving handshakes and smiling and nodding. But what is painfully clear is that the entire strategy for a critical part of our future infrastructure is being done by the former minister making phone calls and personal interventions and sending precisely the wrong signal to investors in that we do not actually have a system, we have a person doing personal interventions. It is not scalable, and it certainly is not optimal for maximising the benefit of investment or securing the right deals for Victoria.

There are clear jurisdictional differences in data centre attraction between Victoria and the rest of the nation. What the data centre industry tell us is they want clear planning rules, transparent approval pathways and certainty on power and water. New South Wales has published exactly that. Victoria offers hospitality and access to a select few. It is because of this that we are losing out on potential investment. A system built on relationships with individuals rather than rules and a system is fragile. It changes the moment the minister changes, and they just have. It leaves Victorians with no way of knowing whether these deals are being struck in the interests of someone else or of the state itself. The action I seek from the minister is to publish a transparent rules-based framework for data centres and AI investment so that investment in this state is won on its merits and published rules and not on who you know.

Woodland Street, Essendon

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (22:34): (2536) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I am seeking is for her to pause the tree culling on Woodland Street and meet with Moonee Valley Sustainability and Essendon residents to discuss smarter, sustainable solutions for road safety. The Department of Transport and Planning intends to remove up to 20 mature canopy trees on Woodland Street, which is a state-managed road. These are trees that provide important habitat and urban cooling, and they form part of a wildlife corridor connecting Napier Park to Moonee Ponds Creek. At a time when our urban environments are getting hotter and tree canopy, vegetation and the native wildlife they support are being lost at an increasing rate, we should be doing everything we can to protect established canopy trees. Trees can significantly lower the urban temperature, which makes it safer both inside and outside people's homes and reduces pressure on energy bills for cooling. The safety lens through which this is being viewed positions the trees as a nuisance and being in the way of bitumen and cars. Instead local residents have come up with creative and thoughtful ways the trees could be kept and safety actually enhanced for all road users, including cyclists, pedestrians and car users. Once these trees are gone, they cannot be replaced. I would urge the minister to pause the tree removal before it is too late and to genuinely engage with local residents to work on a solution that suits everyone's needs.

Women's sexual and reproductive health

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (22:36): (2537) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health Harriet Shing. Green whistle Penthrox is now available at all women's

sexual and reproductive health hubs. The action I seek is an update on how this rollout is improving pain management and healthcare experiences for Victorian women using IUD procedures.

Bendigo rail line

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (22:37): (2538) My adjournment is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for Public and Active Transport. The minister will be aware of recent correspondence from the Golden Square Action Group regarding the Bendigo to Melbourne train service. The railway line carries well over 2 million passengers each year. It notes that since 2007 the fastest Bendigo to Melbourne service has slowed by 12 to 14 minutes – that is 14 per cent – and the typical average service has slowed by about 20 minutes. The original promise of a reliable 80-minute Melbourne to Bendigo service has never been delivered, and the line today sits further from that goal than in 2007. Their research indicates that over the last 10 years Bendigo and the Bendigo train line have received less than half of the transport infrastructure funding compared to similar-sized Ballarat and less than one-quarter of that received by Geelong, and these shortfalls have not gone unnoticed by the community. They also note that the Victorian government has, for a number of years, committed to the long-term goal of delivering trains every 20 minutes in the peak and every 40 minutes off peak to Bendigo. As far back as 2019, the then minister and now Premier in the budget committed to a business case for track upgrades between Bendigo and Kyneton to enable this 40-minute off-peak frequency. This commitment was reiterated in the regional network development plan. The Golden Square Action Group is deeply concerned that despite this commitment now being seven years old, no outcomes from this business case have been publicly released and no decision on next steps has been announced.

The community and local council are being asked to plan for a growing Bendigo without certainty about the fundamental capacity of the rail corridor that connects it to Melbourne. The Golden Square Action Group are calling on the Victorian government to publicly release the outcomes, findings and recommendations of the capacity study for the track upgrades between Kyneton and Bendigo without further delay; confirm the government's position on whether and on what timeline the necessary track upgrades will proceed to enable 40-minute off-peak services; make clear how the Kyneton to Bendigo capacity upgrade interacts with and supports the planning for the reopening of Golden Square and other stations such as Harcourt; and commit to a staged investment program with clear milestones for increasing Bendigo line frequency to the levels articulated in the regional network development plan. The action I seek is for the minister to respond to the concerns raised by the Golden Square Action Group, and I look forward to the minister's reply.

Firearms regulation

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (22:39): (2539) My adjournment this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is that she accepts the recommendation to introduce a cap on the number of firearms a person in Victoria can own. Firearm ownership in Victoria is not a right, it is a privilege, and that privilege must always be subject to the overriding objective of public safety. After the Bondi tragedy the Allan Labor government commissioned Ken Lay to conduct a rapid review of Victoria's firearm laws. Mr Lay, a former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, was chosen by this government to provide serious, independent and practical advice on how to keep Victorians safe.

On the key recommendation that directly confronts private stockpiling of weapons, Labor has blinked. Rejecting a cap on firearm ownership is a total capitulation to the gun lobby. It is political cowardice, and it puts short-term electoral calculations by the Premier ahead of community safety. Victorians are entitled to ask why anyone needs dozens or even hundreds of firearms. The review reportedly found that some recreational hunters in this state own up to 68 firearms, while some sports shooters own over 200. 288 – that is not a modest allowance for a genuine purpose; that is, stating the bleeding obvious, a private arsenal. And this is happening in homes and places that are not currently scrutinised across the state. A cap is a commonsense public safety measure. It does not demonise every licensed firearm owner, but it recognises the obvious. The more guns there are in the community and the more they are

concentrated in private hands, the greater the risk of theft, diversion, misuse and catastrophic harm, as we have tragically seen in this state.

Instead of showing leadership, the Premier has blinked. The Premier has chosen to protect herself from gun lobby backlash rather than protect the community from foreseeable risk. And this is what happens when a government loses sight of public safety and doing what is right and is more interested in trying to grab on to marginal seats. The Greens have been very clear: Victoria should reduce the total number of firearms in circulation, both legal and illegal; licence holders should have to establish a genuine reason for every additional firearm that they seek to acquire; exemptions should be narrow, evidence based and limited to genuine occupational need, including primary production and pest control; and any transition should be backed by a properly funded amnesty and buyback so excess firearms are removed from circulation safely and fairly. The Premier simply cannot claim to take this review seriously while rejecting one of its most important recommendations. The action I seek is that she reverse this reckless decision, accept Ken Lay's recommendation and introduce a legislated cap on the number of firearms a person in Victoria can own.

Southern Metropolitan Region train services

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (22:42): (2540) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. The 2026–27 Victorian budget provides for $77.5 million to increase train frequency on train lines across the state. These frequency increases will be rolled out on both regional and metropolitan lines. We in the Southern Metropolitan Region will be significant beneficiaries of this, with additional services being delivered on the Belgrave, Lilydale, Alamein and Glen Waverley lines. Rail services on weekday evenings will increase from every 30 minutes to 20 minutes to the end of each of these lines. This means that trains will run every 10 minutes onto the Ringwood lines. The action I seek is for the minister to provide information on how these services will benefit passengers on these lines.

Kangaroo control

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:43): (2541) It is fortuitous that the Minister for Environment is in the chamber tonight, because my matter relates to East Gippsland and the community there. In particular the action they seek is an urgent intervention by the environment minister on the proposed kangaroo cull that is associated with the East Gippsland Water permit. Now, this probably comes as no surprise to you, Minister, but usually I like to make light of these kinds of issues at the end of the day. We have all had a long day, particularly today, but there is no light to be made here of these matters because, sadly, the reputation of your government is in tatters when it comes to the environment portfolio, having had four ministers in four years – you being the fourth. I congratulate you on being the minister. I hope you succeed, perhaps where the others have failed.

Perhaps you can start with this, because these particular constituents from East Gippsland rightly raise a number of matters which I will now reiterate and raise with you. The first and foremost relates to the lack of evidence regarding kangaroo population numbers. This should not be a surprise to you, because consistently in this state in the last four years the state as the actor, in fact – much less giving permits to others – has consistently used a 'shoot first and ask questions later' approach when it comes to our native wildlife. I need only remind you of Budj Bim as one terrible example of that. I need only point to French Island, where currently as we speak there is another example occurring – another massacre of our native wildlife under this government's watch. Point 2 is that there is no demonstrated evidence of significant harm or proper trial of nonlethal alternatives. This is required under the conditions of the permit, but there is no evidence that that has actually taken place – that they have looked at relocation. I will continue. Point 3 is the lack of transparency regarding the alleged property damage. This is important because this permit not only conflates the purported damage done by kangaroos but also relates it to deer and foxes and other animals without ever actually citing the evidence that supports that point. Point 4 is the concerns raised regarding the previous kangaroo kill numbers in Gippsland. There are serious issues here in respect to the health of those populations but also the actual kangaroos

that ended up being killed, literally. Point 5 is there is no transparency regarding permits or nonlethal management measures. It remains a serious concern for those locally. Point 6 is the lack of meaningful community consultation. This has become the hallmark of this government, sadly, when it comes to the environment. There is no meaningful consultation with those that would be affected, those who know the land the best, those who own the land, those who see it every day and those who do have some legitimate concerns with respect to foxes, with respect to deer and other invasive species that are non-native. In particular and in addition to that, some of the questions put by the community are: if the cull proceeds, where are the shot kangaroos proposed to be left; what will be done with the shot kangaroos; how much taxpayer funded money is being allocated to this cull; and would these funds not be better spent on low-maintenance wildlife exclusion fencing and long-term mitigation measures? These are legitimate questions that demand answers.

Public transport fares

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (22:46): (2542) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Treasurer. The action I seek is for the Allan Labor government to introduce taxes on big banks and corporations to pay for the services that everyday Victorians need and deserve. This week, on Sunday 31 May, free public transport across Victoria ended for almost 7 million Victorians. Did it really have to, though? It has been well documented during this period of free public transport in April and May that patronage and ridership has surged. An article by the University of Melbourne shows that 78 per cent of people agree that free public transport is popular, especially with the rising cost of living, rising costs of housing and fuel costs.

The Greens want to make public transport free and frequent permanently, and we want to do this by taxing the ultrarich corporations raking in their billions. We are talking about the wealthiest businesses in the country: the big four banks, the coal and gas giants and the gambling industry. Together they have raked in billions of dollars in pure profit in just the last year alone. For too long this Allan Labor government and other major political parties have let the rich get richer while everyday Victorians are getting left behind, not just in financial terms but in health outcomes and in opportunities to thrive and prosper. People are having to forgo so much in order to pay more for rent, more for groceries, more for their power bills and more just to survive, with so many thinking twice before filling up the car, buying fresh food or turning on the heater now that winter is upon us. It is about time big businesses pay their fair share. Treasurer, you and your Labor government can make this happen.

Energy policy

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (22:48): (2543) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is an update on the midday power saver. Solar is so good you will soon get 3 hours of free power every day, even if you do not have panels on your roof. The Liberals have been telling us for years that solar does not work – now nearly half of them have solar panels on their roofs saving money every single day.

Donnybrook Road upgrade

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (22:48): (2544) My adjournment is addressed to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and President, it concerns your and my favourite topic, which is Donnybrook Road in my electorate. I know you, President, but also the clerks are probably sick and tired of hearing me talking about Donnybrook Road every single week, but we have had some slightly good news because it was revealed in the federal budget that they have gone back to the well and found another $37.4 million to build a second bridge over the Hume. That being said, the state government only contributed $7.7 million to that same thing – after they realised, based on the community consultation which I spoke about in this chamber, that their B-grade option to just blow up the Mitchell Street roundabout was not going to work. You actually need to duplicate it and have a second bridge over the Hume to alleviate the traffic issues. What my community are more concerned about is the timeline; they want to know when their traffic headache is going to end. I regularly receive

correspondence from my constituents about this, so I would like to take the opportunity to read some of that correspondence into *Hansard*. Aylin from the Olivine estate says that:

> As a new mother, I have lost count of the number of times I have been forced to turn around or sit in traffic for hours because of boom gate failures and the ongoing chaos on Donnybrook Road – all while my baby screams and cries in the car. What should be a normal commute has become unbearable.

Again, the government is not going near level crossing removal as well. Cathy from Donnybrook calls it a nightmare and says her family are being forced to leave their community as a result.

Dinuka from Donnybrook wrote to me to say:

> Every day, residents are dealing with severe congestion, particularly around Donnybrook Road and … single-lane choke points … simply cannot handle the rapidly growing population in the area. What should be short local trips are regularly turning into long, stressful commutes.

Joban from Donnybrook wrote about how this is affecting their daily life:

> As a working parent, I am struggling to manage something as basic as dropping off my child to school while also getting to work punctually.

Kifarkis from Kalkallo said:

> Every day, residents experience extreme delays simply trying to exit Kalkallo towards Donnybrook or return home via Donnybrook Road.

That is just an example of the daily correspondence I get regarding Donnybrook Road. Again, this is a government that is spending almost one-fifth of our entire infrastructure budget on the Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs, and this is what my residents have to put up with. So the action I seek is for the minister to – as my constituents are asking – provide a clear timetable on when construction on stage 1 and stage 2 will begin.

Middle East conflict

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (22:51): (2545) My adjournment is to the Premier. It is fair to say that Trump's disastrous excursion into Iran has dominated headlines since it began. It has effectively overshadowed any coverage of the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) ongoing genocide in Gaza, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and global fuel prices diverting attention from the fate of the Palestinian people. It is both revealing and tragic that it took a video posted by Israel's far-right ex-criminal national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir boasting about the kidnapping and assault of activists in the Global Sumud Flotilla to refocus our gaze on the horror and illegality of Netanyahu's actions in Gaza. What we saw on our screens – peaceful activists, including 11 Australians, handcuffed and subjected to cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment – was only a fraction of what these people suffered while being unlawfully detained. Melbourne activists and one of my local constituents, Violet Coco, described their treatment at the hands of Israeli forces:

> After being kidnapped from international waters, every participant on our boat was stripped of our layers, pushed to a dark torture chamber where five Israeli soldiers waited to beat and abuse us …
>
> We were then subjected to days of starvation, dehydration, extreme cold, stress positions at gunpoint in the blistering sun for hours, sleep deprivation and more.

Other activists spoke of witnessing the sexual assault of protesters. If this is what happens to Westerners under the scrutiny of the international media, one can only imagine what horrors tens of thousands of Palestinians, many of whom are children, are subjected to in Israeli prisons without such scrutiny. The relentless assault on Gaza by the IDF continues unabated while millions continue to starve due to the Israeli government's illegal blockade.

Victorians are rightly outraged by these actions and are calling for the Victorian government not only to condemn Israel's treatment of the flotilla activists but to take action against the Israeli government. So I ask the Premier: what meaningful actions, including sanctions, is the Victorian government taking

to express the outrage of Victorians at the treatment of the flotilla detainees and the ongoing genocide in Palestine?

The PRESIDENT: I am just thinking about the actions, Mr Ettershank. I set a standard at the start of the term. If your action was to call on the Premier to advocate to the Prime Minister to take action, given it is foreign affairs – and I respect it is a very sensitive topic that you are speaking about. We are happy to review your action if you like, or you may want to change your action for the Premier to advocate to the Prime Minister to do the actions that you called on, if that is okay with you.

David ETTERSHANK: Could I just make a couple of points?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, sure.

David ETTERSHANK: Firstly, very early in this term we called on the government to cease its trade relationship and the defence MOU, which the government duly did I think in December 2024. The government also maintains specific trade relationships with the State of Israel, so I think it is within the scope of the Premier. The third point would be: we have already seen other governments, both local governments and state governments, take actions against, for example, the purchase of Israeli products, so there are actions that are available to the government in responding to these actions.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Ettershank, like I said, we are happy to review *Hansard*. I am not trying to be difficult. I am just wanting to make sure that you do get an action through. We will leave it as it is, and we will review it and get back to you if we see a problem – that is, if it does not adhere to the standing orders in terms of what an adjournment can be – if you are happy with that.

Western Highway

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (22:56): (2546) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – not foreign affairs – and the action I seek is that the minister restore full funding for the Ararat and Beaufort bypasses, publish a clear delivery timetable for both projects and confirm when the Western Highway duplication between Ballarat and Stawell will finally be completed. The 2026–27 state budget has cut $35.5 million from the Ararat and Beaufort bypass projects on the Western Highway. The Ararat bypass has been cut by $16.7 million and the Beaufort bypass by $18.8 million. Both projects have been reduced to just $500,000 each in 2026–27. That is effectively mothballing two critical road safety projects for another year at the very least. The budget papers say this money has been reprioritised to the Western Highway duplication from Ballarat to Stawell, but that explanation raises more questions than it answers. The total estimated investment for that project has been changed from $656 million to 'to be confirmed', and the completion date remains to be confirmed. It seems the government cannot say what the project will cost, it cannot say when it will be completed and it definitely cannot say when the Ararat and Beaufort bypasses will be built.

What are local communities supposed to make of this? It is completely disrespectful, quite apart from dangerous, given the road safety requirements. The Ararat and Beaufort bypasses are not luxuries; they are safety, freight and local amenity projects on one of Victoria's most important road corridors. They would remove heavy vehicles from town centres, improve local safety and support regional freight and tourism. The duplication between Buangor and Ararat would separate traffic on one of the most dangerous single carriageway sections of highway in this state. In the 10 years to June 2025 the Western Highway between Ballarat and Stawell recorded 171 crashes, 21 fatalities and a hundred serious injuries. In just eight months between November 2024 and July 2025 seven people were killed on the Western Highway near Ararat. Those figures should shock the government into action. Instead Labor has stripped funding from the bypasses and left both projects on life support. The action I seek is simple: restore the funding, publish the timelines and deliver these long-promised road safety upgrades for western Victoria.

Illicit alcohol

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (22:59): (2547) My matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs regarding the growing threat of illicit alcohol in Victoria and its links to organised crime and escalating violence within our communities. The illegal manufacture and sale of counterfeit alcohol not only undermine legitimate businesses but also pose serious risks to public health and safety, with the increasing involvement of organised crime groups in Australia contributing to a rise in associated criminal activities like firebombing. The action I seek is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to work with the Minister for Police and Minister for Community Safety to outline immediate measures to introduce to crack down on the illegal alcohol trade, detailing how the government will strengthen enforcement, disrupt organised crime networks and ensure stronger protections for Victorians from the dangerous consequences of illegal alcohol.

Recent findings reveal something deeply concerning: counterfeit alcohol, particularly vodka, containing methanol levels more than 10 times the legal limit is being sold in Melbourne bottle shops and licensed premises. These products are often identical to legitimate alcohol products, meaning Victorians are being unknowingly exposed to substances that can cause serious illness, blindness and even death. This is no minor compliance issue; it is a serious public health and safety issue. The illicit alcohol market is now estimated to be worth more than $760 million nationwide, and Victoria is increasingly becoming the focal point due to its soft approach on crime. What is most alarming is the trade is not operating in isolation – it is increasingly linked to organised crime, which is using profits from illicit alcohol sales to fund broader criminal activities.

These are not isolated incidents; they are part of a growing pattern of organised crime behaviour spilling into public spaces that the Allan Labor government has failed to address. The combination of rising crime, reduced police capacity and a rapid growth in illicit markets is creating a dangerous environment for our community. Victorians deserve to feel safe when they walk into local venues to they purchase products and when they go about their daily lives.

Responses

The PRESIDENT (23:01): I call on the minister to take into account the conversation I had with Mr Ettershank on whether that action adheres to the standing orders. We will review it.

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (23:02): Thank you, President, for your generosity. There were 18 matters raised today, two of which are to me and 16 to other ministers, one of which you will be reviewing. I will ensure that they are all passed on for written responses in line with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 11:02 pm.