Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 16 June 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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Juliana Addison, Martin Cameron, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Wayne Farnham, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Paul Mercurio, Kim O'Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Ben Carroll (from 28 July 2026)

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

Daniel Andrews (to 27 September 2023)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Gabrielle Williams (from 28 July 2026)

Ben Carroll (from 28 September 2023 to 28 July 2026)

Jacinta Allan (to 27 September 2023)

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

Jess Wilson (from 18 November 2025)

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

John Pesutto (to 27 December 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

David Southwick (from 28 January 2026)

Sam Groth (from 27 December 2024 to 28 January 2026)

David Southwick (to 27 December 2024)

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O'Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Anthony Carbines (from 15 April 2026)

Mary-Anne Thomas (to 15 April 2026)

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury (from 13 October 2025)

Bridget Vallence (from 7 January 2025 to 13 October 2025)

James Newbury (to 7 January 2025)

Members of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

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

[1] Resigned 27 September 2023
[2] ALP until 29 April 2024
[3] Sworn in 6 February 2024
[4] ALP until 5 August 2023
[5] Resigned 13 February 2026
[6] Greens until 1 November 2024
[7] Resigned 23 November 2024
[8] Sworn in 4 March 2025
[9] Sworn in 2 June 2026
[10] Resigned 6 January 2025
[11] Died 19 September 2026
[12] Resigned 7 July 2023
[13] Sworn in 3 October 2023
[14] Sworn in 4 March 2025

Party abbreviations

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

CONTENTS

MEMBERS
Shadow ministry 2313
BILLS
Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026 2313
Introduction and first reading 2313
Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Workers) Bill 2026 2313
Introduction 2313
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Notices of motion 2319
PETITIONS
Mornington Peninsula beaches 2319
Lorne Fishermen's Cooperative 2320
COMMITTEES
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee 2320
Alert Digest No. 8 2320
DOCUMENTS
Documents 2320
BILLS
Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 2321
Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026 2321
Royal assent 2321
Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 2321
Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026 2321
Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026 2321
Appropriation 2321
MOTIONS
Motions by leave 2322
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE
Program 2322
MEMBERS STATEMENTS
Police resources 2328
Jenny Kearney OAM 2329
Bacchus Marsh Men's Shed 2329
Barbara Dunlop OAM 2329
Wild dog control 2329
Ovens Valley electorate health services 2329
Riverwalk Primary School 2330
Wyndham Warriors BMX Club 2330
Werribee Bears Rugby League Sports Club 2330
Government performance 2330
Hume City Football Club 2331
Djibouti Independence Day 2331
Andrew Clarke OAM 2331
Arabic Welfare 2331
Karter Evans 2331
Farmer Wants a Wife 2331
Lara electorate youth 2331
Latrobe Valley crime 2332
Albert Park electorate sports facilities 2332
Port Melbourne Migration Trail 2332
Tony Vallance 2333
Dragon Boat Festival 2333
Vermont Primary School 2333
Housing 2333
Mernda swimming pool 2334
Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority 2334
Sydenham electorate roads 2334
Muna Yazdin 2335
Broadmeadows electorate office work experience students 2335
Ferntree Gully Tennis Club 2335
Casey Hospital 2335
Therapy Animals Australia 2336

CONTENTS

Point Cook electorate infrastructure 2336
Margaret Healy 2336

BILLS

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026 2337
Second reading 2337

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Construction industry 2339
Ministers statements: working from home 2340
Construction industry 2340
Ministers statements: working from home 2341
Construction industry 2341
Ministers statements: working from home 2342
Data centres 2342
Ministers statements: working from home 2343
Fire services 2344
Ministers statements: working from home 2345

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Brighton electorate 2346
Lara electorate 2346
Euroa electorate 2346
Bass electorate 2347
Prahran electorate 2347
Bayswater electorate 2347
Melbourne electorate 2347
Preston electorate 2347
Rowville electorate 2348
Greenvale electorate 2348

BILLS

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026 2349
Second reading 2349
Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 2368
Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 2368
Second reading 2368

ADJOURNMENT

Australian Property Owners Alliance 2397
Brisbane Ranges National Park 2397
Mildura pest animal and weed control 2397
Dandenong Hospital 2398
Cost of living 2399
Crime prevention 2399
WRAD Health 2400
Public transport fares 2400
Narracan electorate infrastructure 2401
Camp Road, Broadmeadows, pedestrian safety 2401
Responses 2402

Tuesday 16 June 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Members

Shadow ministry

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:04): I rise to advise the house of changes to the Nationals portfolio responsibilities within the shadow cabinet. The member for Mildura will assume responsibility for the portfolios of water, consumer affairs, disability, ageing, carers and volunteers. The member for Ovens Valley will assume responsibility for the portfolios of racing, liquor and gaming and veterans' affairs. I also wish to advise the house that the member for Morwell will assume the position of the Nationals Whip.

Bills

Equal Opportunity Amendment (Work from Home) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:05): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to enact a right to work from home and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:05): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (12:05): The bill will amend the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to create the right to work from home for two days a week where reasonable. We are doing this because work from home works for families. It saves families time. It saves families money. It gets more parents into work. The reason why we need to protect it in law is because we know bosses want to take it away. Liberals want to cut it, Labor wants to protect it.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Workers) Bill 2026

Introduction

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:06): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Sentencing Act 1991 to widen the scope of when an emergency worker is on duty for the purposes of that act and the Crimes Act 1958 and for other purposes.

Today is an important day in this state. For too long our emergency services workers have been at threat at work, and this government has done nothing to fix it. In fact, on learning that there was a loophole in the law which saw many of our important emergency services workers left unprotected at law, what did this government do? They referred the matter to a committee, which by the way is the Premier's true-to-form way of dealing with every problem – referring it to committee.

We only just found out that the government referred that matter to a committee until at least mid-2027. By the time the committee reports, by the time the committee comes back with recommendations, the government considers them and drafting occurs, we are talking about potentially a two-year delay on action. It is not good enough, and the coalition will not stand for it. That is why the coalition today is moving to introduce an urgent bill. This is not just a bill; it is an urgent bill. We need to see action today. We need to make sure that our emergency services workers are protected from now, from today,

and not only will the bill that we are moving to introduce commence upon royal assent but any matter that has occurred where there are proceedings underway will be retrospectively included, because we know that there are thousands of emergency services workers who report assault every year. That is just the reported cases – thousands.

Jess Wilson interjected.

James NEWBURY: As the Leader of the Opposition said, that number is growing. I would say to the house: how could you not support a bill that sees immediate action? We have seen a number of cases over recent years where our emergency services workers go to work and take a break, perhaps a lunchbreak. They are in uniform, they take a break, they are assaulted while they are having a bite to eat or having a cup of coffee, and what happens to them? We find out that the court has determined there is a loophole so that assault will not be dealt with under the additional protections that should exist for those workers. There should be a special set of laws that protect our emergency services workers from assault when they are at work. There should be a protection, there must be a protection, and a loophole in the law is not good enough.

To learn that when the government discovered the loophole existed they were going to kick the issue to a committee for over a year – before they report to the government, before any drafting is done – is a disgrace. What it tells us is that this government does not want to close the loophole. And every –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

James NEWBURY: Well, we will find out shortly, former Minister for Health, because we are going to be looking to see how every single Labor member votes. How will every Labor member vote today? They must support this. How could you not in good conscience support it? How could you not? These laws will commence as soon as royal assent occurs, and they will be retrospective on any case that is currently in proceeding, as they should be. It does not matter when that assault occurred, these laws will cover those workers. Today is a very important day, and we will test whether this Parliament does the right thing by our emergency services workers or if this government plays politics again and kicks this issue down the road. The law is here: just support it. We can do it today, with resolve. We can pass this in Parliament today. You can pass donation laws in one day; you certainly should be passing these. This must be done today.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (12:11): The government will be opposing this ill-thought-out bill being proposed to be introduced by the opposition, and I will tell you why. This morning I was doing something that no-one on that side of the house has done, and that was pick up the phone and talk to Danny Hill from the Victorian Ambulance Union (VAU). I know, having met with Danny on many, many occasions, that he has written to the opposition –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the member is required to be factual, and Georgie Crozier in the other place has contacted Danny Hill many, many times. Tell the truth.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, I have met with Danny Hill on this matter and many other matters over many years, and indeed when I was speaking to Danny this morning I just wanted to clarify with him the union's position – the union that represents the paramedics in our state. He was very clear that he has written to both the government and the opposition in relation to this matter, and he has not received a response at all from the opposition. That is a fact.

James Newbury: Speaker, I renew my point of order on the member's requirement to be factual. The member is misleading the house. You are misleading the house.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, that is not the way to raise a point of order, particularly around misleading the house. Member for Macedon, I remind you, and all members, that you are required to be factual.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Just on the matter, it is why I picked up the phone today to talk to the secretary of the VAU, because I wanted to be very clear and I wanted to be factual in this place. The facts are this: a letter was written by the union to the opposition, and they have not received a response in relation to this matter. Let us be clear: there has been zero consultation with the workers that this mob over here purport to be supporting.

Any violence against our emergency service workers is completely and utterly unacceptable, and it is why I have, as I have said, met with the VAU on a number of occasions and why, I know, Minister Shing in the other place is continuing that conversation. It is why we are doing the actual real work on this law – which, remember, was introduced by a Liberal government. It was a bungled law with loopholes in it introduced by the Liberal government. Twice we have had to come into this place to work to fix this legislation that was flawed from the outset, and it is why the decision has now been taken by this government that we will refer this very important matter to the Victorian Law Reform Commission. I note that the member on his feet kept talking about a committee. Let us be clear: this is the Victorian Law Reform Commission. We take this matter very, very seriously, and it is why we will take the time to get it right.

Everyone in this chamber needs to be very clear that when it comes to protecting the rights of our emergency services workers, there is only one party that those workers can rely on, and that is the Labor Party, because we will always stand up for working people. We will not do what those on the other side did when last they were in government. We all remember, and I might say the member for Melton knows full well, that those on the other side went to war with our ambulance employees, with our paramedics – so much so that the previous Minister for Health, Mr Davis in the other place, actually engaged a consultant via the public service to set up a fake union to try and discredit the real union. When it comes to protecting working people –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate on the urgent need for these laws. The member has well and truly strayed from that – on relevance.

The SPEAKER: The member for Macedon will come back to the procedural debate.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I said at the outset, the government will not support this bill because it has not been properly thought through and those on the other side have not consulted with the workers who it will most directly affect, and that would never happen under a Labor government. We will always work with our unions.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:16): I also rise to support the member for Brighton's introduction of this bill, the Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Workers) Bill 2026, and I take up the comments of the member for Macedon in the previous contribution about going to war with emergency services workers. I was in Bendigo on Sunday with over a thousand emergency services workers who are at war with the Victorian Labor government in the seat of Bendigo East because they are upset with this government on the emergency services tax that they like to promote over there. So the government should be aware that there is more than just one group of emergency services workers.

I will go back to the member for Macedon's comments about those of us on this side not engaging with Danny Hill. Well, that is simply not true. As the member for Brighton tried to point out in his point of order, we have engaged. In fact members of the Nationals well know that we have had Danny Hill in our party room to talk to us about the issues and to talk to us about the concerns. I hope I have not got Danny Hill in trouble in that, but he is someone that we have a lot of respect for. We understand his passion for emergency services workers. It is a passion that is shared on this side of the house, which is why we are trying to introduce this legislation – because we know that this loophole has been used and our emergency services workers deserve protection. They deserve protection, and they deserve to have simple loopholes closed.

This is something that is quite simple. The member for Brighton has a piece of legislation. It is going to expand the definition of 'on duty' to give the court some clear understanding if an emergency

services worker is assaulted while they are on duty – whether they are out getting a coffee or getting lunch or maybe taking a 5-minute break to pick up the kids from school or something like that – to ensure that they are protected. This is quite simple and straightforward, and yet we have got a government putting it off to a review. Why does it need a review?

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: A two-year delay. It is coming from a government that has a bit of form on reviews recently, a government that says, 'We're going to change the rules on IBAC, but we're going to do it in 18 months.' This is nothing like the complexity that might come from the definition of 'corruption' or the extension of the –

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer to your earlier rulings about being relevant to the procedural debate, and I would ask you to remind the Leader of the Nationals about that.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals to come back to the procedural debate.

Danny O'BRIEN: This is a very important piece of legislation to close a simple loophole that will look after our emergency services workers, whether they are police, whether they are paramedics, whether they are nurses on duty or whether they are firefighters, including the volunteer firefighters who I was with on Sunday and who have certainly got a beef with the Labor government. And they will have a further beef with the government over the fact –

Anthony Carbines interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: 'The same old whingers' the minister calls them. Let the record show that the Minister for Police has just referred to the CFA volunteers and emergency services workers as the same old whingers. Well, that highlights exactly the attitude that this government takes towards our volunteer firefighters and emergency services workers. That is absolutely disgraceful, Minister, that you would say that, calling them 'the same old whingers' after what this government has done to them over the last few years, particularly with the fire services reform.

But I will come back to the issue at hand. We have just heard from the government how little regard they have for our emergency services workers. 'The same old whingers', the Minister for Police called them. This is an important piece of legislation. The member for Macedon just said she does not support it because this bill does not address the issue. She has not even seen the bill. This is a debate about introducing it so that the government members can have a look at it. I know government members are used to being given a piece of paper from the minister's office and being told 'Read that, and don't stray beyond it.'

A member interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is outrageous. You should actually have a look at some legislation at some stage, including legislation that might be introduced by other members of the Parliament, whether that is the opposition, the Greens or anyone else. This government is not interested in that. It is not interested in closing loopholes for our emergency services workers, making sure that they are protected. The heinous acts that some people have committed on paramedics and others, the violence that they have experienced, should not be tolerated. This loophole should not be tolerated. It can be closed. The government could vote for it right now, and it should do so.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:21): I rise to make a brief contribution on this procedural debate, because a brief contribution is all that this political stunt deserves. Any act of senseless violence against emergency service workers, against paramedics, is absolutely deplorable and unacceptable. I think everybody in this house understands that. Every day our emergency service workers bust their gut to respond to emergencies to keep Victorians safe. And then after some incidents of absolutely senseless violence, we have the Liberal Party and the Nationals, the opposition, the clowns that they are, come in here and pull a political stunt like this.

The member for Gippsland South, in the word salad that he just went through for 5 minutes, tried to talk about the fact that they had consulted with the union. We know that they have not consulted with the union on this piece of legislation and on this change. We know that they have not consulted with Danny Hill, because he has told us. They come in here, they pull a political stunt and they do so knowing full well the last time that they were in government they created this loophole. It was them. It was the former Napthine government in 2014 that passed this legislation and created this loophole. They also do so while keeping a straight face, which is the most amazing thing. They went to war with our paramedics when the member for Melton was the secretary. They went to war with our paramedics for four years, and they come in here without any consultation and pull a political stunt like this – and they do it with a straight face. It is absolutely deplorable. We will continue to do everything we can to support our paramedics, to support our emergency services workers and to keep them safe every single day. There is absolutely no way that we should be debating this legislation, because it is nothing more than a political stunt.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (12:24): Imagine you are one of a couple of female paramedics walking down the street – you are just trying to have a short break – but while you are walking along you get assaulted. Both females get assaulted. And when you try to intervene when other women are being assaulted in the street, you get assaulted even more. This happened in Mornington in my electorate. Today we are debating a loophole that has become impossible to ignore, a loophole exposed in Mornington, acknowledged by the government but still waiting for a real legislative fix. That is why I support the member for Brighton's introduction of this bill today. It is a bill that will close this loophole once and for all. It should have the government's support, but already they have said, in advance of even having a vote on this, that they will not support this. They have also made false claims that we have not even talked to Danny Hill from the union. The member for Brighton has made it quite clear that Georgie Crozier from the other place has consulted and has talked to Danny from the union.

We are all sitting in this chamber here on this side of the house, but on the government side there are hardly any at all. They do not want to listen to this important debate here today. It is important: Ambulance Victoria recorded over 1000 occupational violence hazards, incidents or injury reports in 2024–25. This is a live and ongoing threat to the people who arrive when Victorians are at their most vulnerable. Kathryn McCormack's case is why this debate matters. As I raised in Parliament previously, Kathryn was one of two female paramedics assaulted in Mornington in September last year. She was seriously injured and needed surgery and still requires treatment to this day. She had hoped that the offender would be charged with the more serious offence of assault of an emergency worker, particularly because emergency service workers, when they are in uniform especially, face a greater risk. Yet the charge of assault of an emergency worker was withdrawn because the paramedics were not treated as being on duty at that precise moment, while they were on a break. Yes, they were on a break – they were not then treating a patient. But because of this – because of a legal technicality – the law failed to reflect the reality of the job that they were doing.

That failure sits in the legislation itself, but also it ultimately sits with this government, who have failed to immediately fix this loophole. They are looking to fail to do so again today, when we have put forward a reasonable piece of legislation. Under section 31 of the Crimes Act 1958 it is an indictable offence to assault, threaten to assault, resist or intentionally obstruct an emergency worker on duty. The same section imports the narrow meaning of 'on duty' from the Sentencing Act 1991. It says they are on duty when they are 'providing, or attempting to provide, care or treatment to a patient' – not when they are on shift and available for dispatch, not when they are refuelling, not when they are restocking, not when they are on a break in uniform or carrying a radio or ready to respond, not even when they intervene when someone is assaulting women on the streets of Mornington. That is why this cannot be brushed off as some minor technicality about sentencing. Yes, the government has finally acknowledged that something is wrong. After another shocking attack on a paramedic in Reservoir in April this year, the Premier said the government would ask the Victorian Law Reform Commission to review the definition of 'on duty' and ensure there are no loopholes. The VLRC has

been tasked with looking at reform; however, as noted by the member for Brighton, the target date for its report is 30 June 2027 – over a year from now. That is not an urgent fix.

This is something that can be fixed today. It can be fixed today by this government supporting this important piece of legislation put forward by the member for Brighton – we must do so. In New South Wales they have closed such loopholes, and in Queensland they have closed such loopholes. The reform should be simple. We must amend the governing definition so that emergency services workers are treated as being on duty for their whole shift, while they are available for deployment or otherwise carrying out operational functions. We must close the gap for breaks, refuelling, restocking, waiting for dispatch and more. This can be fixed by the government supporting this bill today. They should support it, but they have already said they will not, even in advance of voting on it, which is shameful. At the end of the day, this is about emergency services workers. It is about those two female paramedics walking down the street in Mornington who should have been protected.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:29): We have the best paramedics in the world here in Victoria. Luckily our paramedics do not take the LNP approach to their work. Imagine that: they would rush into a difficult situation shouting and screaming. They would not seek to understand what the cause of the problem is or what the actual issue is, and instead they would ignore the experts around them, like the union, like the legal experts, and –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I renew my previous point of order on requiring members to be factual. I now have Danny's text messages.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to be factual when they are on their feet.

Lauren KATHAGE: As I was saying, I am so glad that our highly skilled and dedicated paramedics do not take the approach of those opposite – choosing a treatment based not on how it will help the patient but on how it will help themselves. That is shocking. Those opposite are choosing a bandaid instead of a bandage. They are choosing to focus just on the leg of the issue and ignoring the rest of the patient. They are not taking a comprehensive view of the issue that needs to be addressed but focusing on themselves.

Luckily our paramedics are nothing like those opposite. They are dedicated, they are highly skilled and they are selfless, and they always have our support. That is why we are taking careful, consultative and thorough measures to make sure that the loopholes created by the Liberals are closed, and not just that but that any other weakness in the legislation is dealt with once and for all, not for our benefit but for the benefit of paramedics, not for a stunt but for certainty.

We know that those opposite like to drop names and talk about facts. But the fact is that what they have sought to introduce today the union know nothing about, because they are doing it for themselves. They are not doing it for paramedics. That is shameful. We will always back our paramedics, and we are doing good, proper work to support them.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:32): *(By leave)* Just very quickly, the Greens support the principle of non-government members being able to bring in bills, unless the content of the bill is so obviously against the Greens' values. In this case we will be supporting the right of the Liberal–National parties to first-read the bill. We are the only Westminster system, as we have said before, the only Westminster parliament that does not have dedicated non-government business time in the lower house. We think that needs to change. We have been very clear about that. For that principled reason, we will be supporting this motion.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:32): *(By leave)* I would just like to quickly echo the sentiments of the member for Melbourne. I support all members in this place being able to bring bills forward for debate unless they are constructed on a basis that is an abuse of the chamber. That is most definitely not the case in this circumstance. This is an important public policy matter, and I think it warrants a proper discussion in this chamber.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (32): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The SPEAKER (12:38): General business, notices of motion 41 and 73 to 74, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

Petitions

Mornington Peninsula beaches

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) presented a petition bearing nine signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that mechanical raking of beaches by councils, including Mornington Peninsula Shire, has caused long-term environmental harm. It destroys vital seaweed habitats, buries and fragments plastic litter, including syringes, and disrupts fragile ecosystems. A supervised 2023 test confirmed mechanical raking was ineffective, financially wasteful, and ecologically damaging. These findings were acknowledged in the Commission for Environment Sustainability Victoria's State of the Marine and Coastal Environment 2024 Report. In contrast, a 12-month hand-cleaning trial in 2024 delivered cleaner beaches, visible foredune regeneration, and the rediscovery of the endangered coastal plant Salsola tragus subsp. Pontica. Early evidence also suggests reduced storm-related erosion, as natural sand berms are allowed to form. The continuation of mechanical raking is inconsistent with State and Federal policies which call for marine and coastal stewardship, biodiversity protection, and the adoption of low-impact solutions for coastlines. Under the Marine and Coastal Act 2018, councils as land managers have a duty to maintain beaches in good condition and to prevent erosion. Mechanical raking undermines these obligations, while sustainable hand-cleaning supports compliance and ensures alignment with the Victorian Coastal Strategy and Australia's commitments under the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to review local council beach cleaning policies to ensure practices align with State and Federal frameworks for marine and coastal stewardship, including the Marine and Coastal Act 2018 and the Victorian Coastal Strategy, and introduce legislation to cease the practice of mechanical beach raking and permanently adopt sustainable hand-cleaning methods that protect biodiversity to secure healthier marine ecosystems, safer public spaces, and more resilient coastlines for future generations.

Lorne Fishermen's Cooperative

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) presented a petition bearing 583 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the proposed demolition of the historic landmark Lorne Fishermen's Cooperative Building in the Victorian seaside township of Lorne. The proposed demolition of the building has been scheduled to take place in February 2026. The decision to demolish the building and replace it with a public toilet block has been made by the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA) as part of the Point Grey Project. The findings of engagement show the local community to be overwhelmingly supportive of preserving the strong and unique character the Point Grey / Lorne Pier precinct with ongoing representation of the historic activities which took place on the site. The site history includes aboriginal occupation as well as maritime, fishing and timber industries. The current GORCAPA plan will destroy the only historic building on the site and denies the important character and history of the site. Independent experts have indicated that the original 1948 Fishermen's Cooperative building is in relatively sound condition and can easily be refurbished. GORCAPA have failed to properly consult with the local community before deciding to destroy the history of the site

Action:

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to prevent the demolition of the original 1948 Lorne Fishermen's Cooperative Building until an independent investigation is undertaken to determine the feasibility and cost of retaining the building.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 8

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:40): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 8 of 2026, on the following act and bills, together with appendices:

Building Legislation and Treasury Legislation (Tax Relief) Amendment Bill 2026

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Electoral Further Amendment Act 2026

Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026

Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General:

Follow-up: Reducing Bushfire Risks – released on 10 June 2026

Reducing the Harm Caused by Distracted Drivers – released on 10 June 2026

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Banyule – GC281

Brimbank – GC281

Darebin – GC281

Greater Bendigo – C301

Latrobe – C154

Macedon Ranges – C147

Manningham – C140

Melbourne – C490

Mitchell – GC281

Southern Grampians – C64

Stonnington – C320

Victoria Planning Provisions – VC311

Wyndham – GC281

Yarra Ranges – GC281

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – SR 65

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 – SR 64

Road Management Act 2004 – SRs 66, 67

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 – SR 63

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 57, 58, 59, 61, 65

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Dairy Act 2000* – Dairy Food Safety Victoria Determination of Licence Classes and Fees for Dairy Businesses 2026

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) (Wetlands Closure) Notice No 3 *(Gazette S274, 28 May 2026)*

PROCLAMATIONS – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Act 2026 – Parts 9 and 10 (except s 223) and ss 7(1), 10, 65, 68(3), 71, 72 and 203 – 3 June 2026; Part 7 (except s 189) – 3 August 2026 – *(Gazette S289, 2 June 2026)*

Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2025 – Remaining provisions – 1 July 2026 *(Gazette S307, 10 June 2026)*.

Bills

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026

Royal assent

The SPEAKER (12:41): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 and the Electoral Further Amendment Bill 2026.

Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026

Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (12:41): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, the Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026 and the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026.

Motions

Motions by leave

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:42): I move, by leave:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Salvation Army has moved to close Foley House in Footscray;

(b) this service provides long-term accommodation and vital 24/7 support for vulnerable men and residents with complex disabilities and medical needs, who would otherwise be in and out of prison, crisis accommodation, in hospital or sleeping rough; and

(2) calls on this government to step in, stop displacements of vulnerable people and provide Foley House with a sustainable funding solution so that they can continue to provide these important services.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

Program

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (12:43): We are pretty enthusiastic to get cracking on the government business program over here. I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 18 June 2026:

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026

Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026

Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026.

In particular I do note for those not from the Ivanhoe electorate that there will be a cognate debate, meaning we can talk about at the same time, if you can manage it, the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill. They are particularly important in relation to a range of matters this week.

I thought I would open the batting and make the point for all members that along with the business program there will be the valedictory speech from the member for Pakenham, which will take place tomorrow, on Wednesday, from about 6 pm. I know you will not be needing any encouragement, but I welcome members to attend for the member for Pakenham's contribution tomorrow. Let us say that her advocacy, as we saw in the great support yesterday here at Parliament, is very significant. I look forward to hearing from her tomorrow and also from the member for Nepean, who will make his inaugural speech in this place – the second inaugural speech that we have had in this Parliament from a member for Nepean. I know that that has been a little delayed, and we look forward to hearing from him on Wednesday.

More broadly on the business program, we will hear more in relation to personal electronic devices. I will just touch on some significant work our government has done more broadly in schools where we have been able to ban devices, which has been world leading and which was done by the former member for Monbulk. The leadership that he showed there in relation to those matters has been very significant and has been picked up by other jurisdictions around the world. There will be further discussion on restricting the use of personal electronic devices in schools.

We are making it easier and safer for Victorians to start a family and delivering on our commitment to making workplaces safer, modernising the regulation of dangerous goods and giving WorkSafe

Victoria the powers they need to enforce compliance with regulations. Those WorkSafe reforms will help businesses to make their workplaces safer. These are some of the most significant changes that have been made around the dangerous goods framework for more than four decades. Many would remember some of those very significant chemical fires in 2018 and 2019, particularly across the north-west of Melbourne, caused by illegal stockpiling. These changes and actions are very significant and will go a long way to keeping those communities safe and holding to account those who do not follow the law.

In debating the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill and, as I touched on, these personal electronic devices – mobile phones and smartwatches – of students in Victorian schools, we are building on the successful implementation of the earlier reforms that have been world leading and picked up by many jurisdictions internationally. I know that independent evaluation of those 2020 reforms found that more students were focused in class and more social during breaks thanks to those reforms. We will be the first state in the country to legislate restrictions on wearable technology in schools, because every child deserves the opportunity for a world-class education. We will deliver the policy settings to best help them focus but also to ensure that teachers are focused on them and engaging directly with them, with not so much a reliance on electronic devices but a focus on instruction and learning that is best provided and can only be provided by the ongoing and dedicated engagement of our world-class teaching profession.

Further to those matters is the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill. I am really keen that we will be picking up work on that, particularly in relation to Greyhound Racing Victoria and Harness Racing Victoria on entity reform and governance matters. These codes, along with thoroughbreds more broadly, employ nearly 40,000 Victorians in full-time work, and we are talking some $4 billion in economic activity that is generated by the sport and industry of racing across our state. It is a massive employer that generates over a billion dollars in economic activity in regional Victoria. We are looking forward to the further ongoing work that we can do there, particularly around integrity structures and the amalgamation of the racing integrity commissioner and the Victorian Racing Integrity Board. We have already seen other jurisdictions moving on these matters at a glacial pace, but this is the further, I suppose, maturation of our entity reform around integrity in racing that was started by my predecessor Mr Pakula and has been followed up. Now is the right time for some further tweaks and reforms, and we will bring those to the Parliament shortly.

I would like to also take this opportunity to acknowledge the member for Ovens Valley on his appointment as the Shadow Minister for Racing. I know that he is a strong supporter of country racing, not only at his local tracks like Wangaratta but others around regional Victoria, and you are just as likely to see him at some of our very significant metropolitan events throughout the year. I look forward to working with him in advocating and protecting and advancing both jobs and investment in racing in our state. I commend the government business program to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:48): I rise to speak on the government business program. I will start in a collegiate way. As the Leader of the House noted, we will have on Wednesday evening, after the matter of public importance, the valedictory speech for the member for Pakenham, tentatively scheduled for 6 o'clock, and then the member for Nepean's first speech at 6:20 pm. We would hope that every member of this place can come into the chamber for both speeches. Both are very important speeches. I am sure that both will be incredibly heartfelt in their own way, and I would hope that the entire Parliament can come together for both of those speeches, both the members of this place and the members of the other place, on Wednesday afternoon.

That is where the collegiality will end on the government business program, because when it comes to this government business program, enough is enough. We will not be supporting the government business program, for many reasons. The government business program has, frankly, become nothing more than some kind of loose guide. We saw in the last sitting week a government business program that absolutely did not reflect the way that this Parliament operated for the week. We saw a rushed change to the program and a desperate attempt by a government in its end of days to ram through a

bill, and that was shameful. You could not only see that did we speak out strongly about those changes in the government business program and what the government was attempting to ram through but see in the days thereafter the effect that it had on the government members. You saw the effect that that had. They could not brief out hard enough.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, I am keen for relevance on the government business program by the Manager of Opposition Business.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business, the member for Brighton, will come back to the government business program.

James NEWBURY: On the government business program, as I was saying, in the last sitting week we saw changes throughout the week to try and suit what the government was doing, so we have no faith that this government has any capacity now to manage a program and do so in an honourable way, in an honest way, and frankly, in a way that this Parliament should use its time: in a transparent way. I spoke about the donation bill before. Of course the government was not interested in transparency there, but we have genuine fears that the government will misuse its numbers over the coming four weeks, and who knows what it might do. I think all Victorians should fear what an end-of-days government tries to sneak through in the middle of the night to ensure that it can ram through terrible changes at law, and that is why we cannot possibly support the government's program. We cannot support a government that misuses this place, where a government business program can no longer be taken on face value. It absolutely cannot be taken on face value, and so we will not support it.

In addition to that I do note in the government business program there is no opportunity for private members bills, and we saw a private members bill just opposed for introduction, a very important bill that should have urgently received time for debate in this chamber – but it is not the only one. We know that many members in this place have attempted to move private members bills, and these bills have not been afforded time on the government business program. It is one of the few parliaments in Australia where there is little to no – in this case no – capacity for private members to move items. In other chambers there is a little, but in Victoria there is none. It is an absolute shame, because clearly where the government do not get it right, where they do not support their emergency services workers, as in the case that I raised earlier, you would hope that the Parliament could come together and afford time to a proposed law so the Parliament could it debate under the government business program. You would think that that would be a collaborative way to approach an important, pressing policy issue in this state, but no. So while the government is in such chaos, so unable to manage the Parliament, we certainly cannot support the government business program, and I do not feel that we can support future programs with that in mind.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:53): It certainly feels like end of days listening to the contribution from the member for Brighton, but I do love to follow the member for Brighton. I often refer to him as the fall guy. He is the one that has to stand here in this chamber with confected outrage week after week about the heavy legislative agenda that we put forward here on the government business program. Time and time again he goes ahead and votes against it, and today he is talking about private members bills. We have got a lot on here, member for Brighton, and we are going to get on and do it as the government of the day. There is no chaos on this side of the chamber; today is not an episode of *High Noon*. We are getting on and we are governing for all Victorians. We are going to put through and debate the bills here in this place that we know matter to Victorians, and there are a lot of them this week. It is going to be a busy week, and hopefully we will not have to go through another marathon sitting day-night-morning as we did last sitting week. I have to admit it took me a couple of days to get over that. I am too old to continue to stay awake and do an all-nighter. It has been many years since I have done that.

There is a total of five bills that are being debated here in this chamber this week, and two of them are going to be debated simultaneously. Those of course are the long-awaited Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026, which

will deliver a much-needed overhaul of our legislative framework for handling dangerous goods. I certainly look forward to speaking on these bills later in the week and about what they mean, most importantly for my community in Melbourne's west, where we have a lot of heavy industries that handle and transport dangerous goods and their by-products. I do want to give a big shout-out to some of our big trucking companies, particularly FBT Transwest, who do transport dangerous goods. I know that they take health and safety extremely seriously, whether it is as they are handling those dangerous goods that go into those trucks or indeed the safety on the roads as they transport them to wherever they may be going. Our truckies certainly keep Victoria moving and Australia moving – a big shout-out to them.

In addition to this we have the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026, which makes a number of really important changes to the governance framework for our racing industry. I am sure that many of my colleagues will be keen to speak on that one and the benefits that the industry has for their local communities. No-one is more passionate about the racing industry than the minister at the table, the Minister for Racing – a big shout-out to him and all his passion in bringing forward another great bill before the house.

We also have the Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026, and this makes a number of great reforms that strengthen our health system and how we regulate it. I cannot go past a bill like this one without giving a big shout-out to our nurses and health staff in services in Melbourne's west. One of the highlights, I think, of the eight years that I have been here in this place has been watching Footscray Hospital – the biggest infrastructure spend in the health sector in Victoria, in the gateway to Melbourne's west – rise from the ground up to be just so absolutely magnificent in every aspect and every way that a great hospital should be. That is Footscray Hospital. A big shout-out to all the staff that work there, and I know that the staff are transitioning over from the old Footscray Hospital into the new one. I was there with the previous Minister for Health and the member for Footscray, and the staff were just so excited to work there – best views, best workplace. I have to say it truly is an aspect of what long-term Labor governments certainly invest in and deliver for communities, particularly in Melbourne's west.

To wrap it up, this week we have got the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I believe we kicked off that debate at the end of last sitting week, and I had the opportunity to speak on that one – another really important bill.

All five of these bills are important, and just as important is the legislation that we are introducing into this place, which includes at long last our government's legislation enshrining Victorians' right to work from home. I know the right to work from home has been a conversation that has been popping up in my community and one I have been having with folks time and time again. This is something that they are super excited about, and I cannot wait to get on with it.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:59): I rise to speak on the government business program. Deputy Speaker, I see you have just come into the chamber. You may be shocked, but we will be opposing the government business program today, as the member for Brighton said before. With the government business program we are talking on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, which we did start last week. The member for Shepparton beside me is very keen to hop up shortly and hit off the batting or take the bat as number one for us when it does resume. We have other members on this side who are more than happy to get up and continue to talk on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill. As we stand, the last time we were in this place I think was about 5:30 in the morning when we were all in here, so it is good to be back to business again this week.

We do have the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 as well. We need to make sure, when we are talking about these bills, that we do take care that the transport of dangerous goods across our road networks and through our towns around metropolitan Melbourne and also regional Victoria is being done correctly. I have a lot of trucking firms in the Latrobe Valley

and in Gippsland that cover a lot of kilometres over a week, transporting these dangerous goods around, so we need to make sure that we are putting things in place so that that is being done correctly.

One of the other ones that we are doing is the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026. We are a strong supporter of racing down in the Latrobe Valley and in and throughout Gippsland. The one thing that we do have, which has started up recently – and that I know the Minister for Racing at the table would be well and truly versed on – is our Traralgon Greyhound Racing Club, which has sprung back to life after a little bit of a hiatus with track works. I was fortunate enough to be up there on Friday night to see how it is ticking along beautifully, with many dog races, greyhound racing, but also the amount of people that are actually heading back up to the track to watch it live on a Friday afternoon and a Friday night. Our racing fraternity do encapsulate a lot of people in and throughout the Latrobe Valley, whether it be greyhound racing or thoroughbred racing, so when we are talking on bills, we need to make sure that we are doing our due diligence to make their lives a little bit easier while we are protecting the animals as well. I look forward later in the week to being able to get up and actually talk on that.

Another one that we are doing is the Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2026. I am sure most people in this chamber will be itching to get up and actually talk on health, because health is such a part of our day-to-day life right across Victoria, and we need to make sure that our constituents, especially in the Latrobe Valley, have the very best care and availability to walk into a hospital or to see a doctor. So we need to make sure that any health reforms and amendments that we are doing, no matter how big or how small, at the end of the day make their lives a lot easier and take a bit of the stress away from being able to present at these facilities, because health is so important, along with many other aspects of life, especially for our ageing fraternity throughout regional Victoria too, with their ability to access health care. So a huge shout-out to all our health workers right across the board. As we said, the opposition will be opposing the government business program this week.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (13:03): Well, there is a lot going on, and we have got a lot to get through this week. The member for Brighton might say that this looks loose, but I can say, looking at this government business program, that we have a really important reform agenda right here, ready to go. I am going to have trouble getting very far past the Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2026. I am going to talk about why so many of the other bills are important, but I cannot quite get past the excitement in Cranbourne about greyhound racing. We have got a track that is going in. It is looking sparkling. I have been down a couple of times to inspect, and it is going to be the centre of the universe, if it is not already. I am going to take the opportunity now to thank Andrew Fennell and everyone down in Cranbourne, because Greyhound Racing Victoria is a very important part of my community, it is a really important part of what brings people together, and this legislation before us, which is going to be debated this week, is a really important part of that.

We are going to be giving a legal authority to Greyhound Racing Victoria and Harness Racing Victoria to have a new entity structure, which gives me the opportunity to talk about harness racing. The people who go to the trots – the people who run the harness racing down in Cranbourne – are some of the most rock-solid, hardworking people you would find in Cranbourne. David Scott, who the minister at the table, the Minister for Racing, has met several times, and his wife Linda, are certainly people who know how to bring the sparkling fun and party to anything that is going on in Cranbourne. In fact they are not just bringing what is important to Cranbourne but they are really enthusiastic about the community itself. I just spoke to the whip and said I think I need to hurry up and get on to the opportunity to debate this Racing Legislation Amendment (Entity Governance and Other Matters) Bill, but of course there is so much more than that.

I am going to quickly step back and take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge in a bipartisan way the member for Gippsland East for his approach when he had the shadow ministry role with racing, looking after, on behalf of the National Party, greyhound racing, harness racing and of course the extraordinary other elements of the races that come down to Cranbourne. I was always happy to see

him when I arrived down at the Cranbourne racetrack. I congratulate the member for Gippsland East on his term in this Parliament and say that we will miss him next year.

We are also looking forward to debating the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 and the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026. These will modernise the regulation of transport of dangerous goods by vessel on inland waterways, by road and by rail in a standalone act. Again, this is another example of this government getting on with the important reform that needs to be done to make sure that people can go about the work that is necessary to keep them safe, secure and well paid.

I am also pleased to see we have some more renting legislation being brought by the Minister for Consumer Affairs, the Consumer Legislation Amendment Bill 2026, which will strengthen protections for site tenants of part 4A parks and deliver on government commitments to make renting fairer, more affordable and safer. There is no question that our party – our government – are the party who are focused on rental reforms and making sure that people are able to get access to fair renting outcomes. This is a really important piece of legislation that will strengthen protections for Victorian consumers in the property market and will improve the availability of information on property sales, and it will drive compliance by estate agents and conveyancers with trust account audit requirements. That is also going to improve the experience of those living in owners corporation properties.

I cannot finish this debate on the government business program without acknowledging as well the importance of the member for Pakenham and the approach that we will be taking this week in acknowledging her role here in this Parliament and her role in so many other parts of public life. The member for Pakenham will obviously be delivering her valedictory, and we will all be here for that.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (13:08): I will follow on from that as well, acknowledging the member for Pakenham, who will be, as the previous member said, delivering her valedictory speech. A big shout-out to her for everything that she has done. I have said it before in the chamber and I will say it again: the member for Pakenham is incomparable. She is an inspiration to all of us. I was very glad to take part in the second-ever Freeze Parliament just yesterday. I looked up how much we have raised, and it is over $36,000 that we have collectively raised for FightMND. I think that does go to show that we can be collegiate, that we can be bipartisan and that we can work across and above politics in instances like this, on very important causes. So, yes, we do pay tribute to the member for Pakenham, who will be delivering her valedictory this Wednesday evening, followed then by the member for Nepean, who will be delivering his maiden speech, which we all are very much looking forward to. That will be a great addition to the Parliament – that the member for Nepean will be able to speak post that point in time. It was, I remember fondly, just this term, just over 2½ years ago, that I delivered my maiden speech in the Parliament. It feels like a long time, much longer than 2½ years, I can tell you. But it is an exciting time, and we are glad to have the member for Nepean as part of our team.

Turning to the government business program at hand, as has been stated, the opposition will not be supporting it. As the member for Brighton said, if I can use the term that he used, it has become a loose guide. The government, in their own words, from one of their own members, in the end of days that they are in, are now using the program to loosely indicate maybe, just maybe, what might happen. We can see that it is the case that even when there are matters and legislation that we negotiate in good faith with them, they come to us in bad faith and do not agree to what they have been discussing or negotiating. That speaks to where the government is right now and the government business program. The coalition has lost faith in the government because they are operating in bad faith. But it is not just the coalition; it is the Victorian people. We see it in the polling. We see it in the toing and froing of 'Will they change their leader or will they not?'

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am just keen for the member to return to the government business program, and my point of order is on relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member may have strayed a little bit and will come back to the government business program.

Nicole WERNER: That is why we will be opposing the government business program, particularly when we look at the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. While we are not opposing the symbolic reforms, while we support things like being stricter with the use of electronic devices during school hours – we are supportive of that; that is a sensible measure, a sensible change – what we do not support is the way in which this has been delivered. We know that this was delivered post the time that we were meant to have finished up last week. It happened during that marathon sitting until 5:30 am when the government sought to rush in these dodgy donation laws that disproportionately advantage them but no-one else. That is why we are not supporting the government business program, because this very amendment bill, this education and training reform bill that we are debating today, got started last sitting week in the marathon sitting because of the chaos that is happening in the government. It is scandalous, resuming debate on this.

That is why, as the member for Brighton has said, we are opposing government business. What is happening on that side of the house, no-one can follow. It is strange. It is hard to keep up. There is the media, the toing and froing of everything that is going on. What is the government business program? We do not know, because they are not honest with the opposition. They are not honest with the Parliament as to what they are seeking as to legislate in this place. That is why we are opposing government business. We oppose it because we oppose this government. We oppose the way that they are legislating. We oppose the way they are not being truthful with Victorians. We oppose the way that they are leading with mistruth after mistruth in this chamber, in this house. Victorians have seen it with their own eyes. They have given up on this government. It is the end of days. That is why we are not supporting government business.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Anthony Marsh, Tim McCurdy, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Police resources

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (13:20): Crime is a serious issue for the state. Under the Labor government police station closures have not addressed the rise in crime, with data showing patrols alone are not enough to drive down crime. We must get Mooroolbark police station reopened, and I am pushing for that and for the recruitment of the thousands more police that Victoria needs to help keep communities safer. Mooroolbark police station is now shut four days a week as a result of Victoria Police budget cuts by the Allan Labor government, and the result is a 22 per cent increase in

crime in our community. Mooroolbark and Croydon police stations, and more than 40 others across Victoria, have had their hours drastically reduced, with the government line that this will get more police out from behind desks and into the community to prevent crime.

But the data clearly shows the strategy of closing police stations is not working. Where police stations have reduced hours, crime is up 22 per cent – higher than the statewide average. The types of crime that have gone up where a police station has been shut include car theft, stealing from a car, stealing from a shop, criminal damage, sexual offences and breaching of family violence orders. That is not fair to the residents of Mooroolbark and the Yarra Ranges. It is totally unacceptable. No amount of spin from the Labor government will satisfy people in my community that are suffering crime as a result. Our hardworking local police also deserve better. Where police stations have remained open, crime has gone up, but only by 15 per cent. We must keep our police stations open.

Jenny Kearney OAM

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (13:21): I am delighted to rise to celebrate one of the wonderful things about my community, which is that really strong sense of community spirit. This is absolutely exemplified by the wonderful Jenny Kearney. She was recently given a Medal of the Order of Australia to recognise her 16 years of dedicated service through the Soul Food program. For more than a decade and a half Jenny has been the driving force behind this remarkable initiative, providing meals, groceries, clothing and practical support to local people doing it tough. I was absolutely delighted to volunteer for the last couple of years when they put on a really wonderful Christmas event, providing a warm Christmas lunch for many in the community of Bacchus Marsh.

Bacchus Marsh Men's Shed

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (13:22): I also want to acknowledge the Bacchus Marsh Men's Shed and all of its dedicated volunteers. The men's shed recently built and donated nine handmade game tables to the Blackwood special school's outdoor education centre. These present a wonderful opportunity for people attending that school to play games, connect and engage with each other.

Barbara Dunlop OAM

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (13:22): I would also like to acknowledge Barbara Joan Dunlop of Mount Clear for her Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community and to the arts. She has devoted hours of support.

Wild dog control

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (13:23): Wild dogs are continuing to cause massive damage in the north-east. Speaking with locals in Porepunkah last week, they told me it is not just sheep that are the victims of these vicious predators but there is also strong evidence that young calves are now being targeted by wild dogs. The Victorian government needs to stop protecting these ferocious dogs and cull these killers out of existence. I call on the Minister for Environment to take this problem seriously, because these killer dogs will not stop until they are removed from the bush.

Ovens Valley electorate health services

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (13:23): The Allan Labor government continues to make cuts in the Ovens Valley electorate, this time in allied health. Regional Victoria is walking a tightrope in terms of speech therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Gateway Health in Wangaratta was again targeted by the Allan Labor government as they make cruel cuts to these basic services to the people of Wangaratta and the surrounding community that Gateway Health services. Regional people deserve better treatment by this city-centric Allan government, who continue to turn their back on the 25 per cent of Victorians who call the regions home.

More concerns were raised with me last week around the availability of beds for cancer patients in north-east Victoria. The Albury cancer centre is a magnificent facility that services people on both sides of the Murray River. However, I have been contacted by patients who are concerned about the empty beds and the future use of those beds for cancer patients. I urge the Victorian government to work closely with the New South Wales government and ensure adequate funding is in place to ensure all available beds at the Albury cancer centre are being used to support regional people. Regional people deserve the very best of treatment.

Riverwalk Primary School

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:24): Last week I joined parents at Riverwalk Primary School for a Q and A session about local issues. Around 30 parents joined me to discuss a range of topics. Thank you to Jody Christo for helping to bring together the group. There was a lot of interest in the opening of Ison Road and the next steps for upgrading the Main Road interchange, with many parents acknowledging the benefits of having this new connection for the west of Werribee. School traffic safety was also an important issue. I explained the government's commitment, through a local TAC grant, to improving safety around schools and committed to following up with council their acquittal of this grant. Riverwalk Primary School has created an amazing community of learners, supported by major upgrades from this government. One of the first things that principal Barry Devlin showed me was the open learning spaces the preps were in. I knew we had to find a way to section off classes to help with that move to explicit instruction and focus. I am proud to have secured funding in this year's budget towards this.

Wyndham Warriors BMX Club

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:25): As a proud Werribee local, I know the importance of local sport to our community, which is why a bit over a month ago I was disheartened to see that Wyndham Warriors BMX Club had been broken into. I was quick to get in touch and help them liaise with Victoria Police in the process to retrieve what they could, and I supported the club in applying for an emergency equipment grant, which has been awarded to them. Along with hundreds of other locals I also personally donated some funds towards their recovery. I want to thank the club members, particularly Jordan Morgan, Erin Coleman and Gary Morgan, for their engagement with me and hard work. I look forward to getting on the bike down there soon.

Werribee Bears Rugby League Sports Club

John LISTER (Werribee) (13:25): Finally, thank you to the Werribee Bears Rugby League Sports Club for inviting me down last week. I look forward to working with them on their rebuild.

Government performance

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (13:26): With the polling as it is and the Premier as popular as she is, I want to offer the Allan Labor government some advice today and a few home truths, whether or not they would like to listen. Trust in government is not restored by breaking promises. The cost-of-living crisis is not solved by increasing taxes – we are up to number 67, by the way. The lives of individuals are not made better by making government bigger. A housing crisis is not solved by building fewer homes. Farming communities do not benefit by being slugged with an emergency services tax and certainly are not benefited by making it legal to forcibly enter their properties. A more productive economy is not created by quadrupling land tax bills and more than doubling payroll tax on the people who invest in Victoria. Working families are not able to build for their future when you drive up taxes. Small businesses are not helped by being taxed to death by a thousand cuts. You certainly do not build a state by tearing down businesses and the builders and entrepreneurs who create the jobs. You do not set future generations up for success by handing them $200 billion of debt. You certainly do not solve corruption by ignoring the fact that $15 billion of taxpayers money has been poured into the hands of criminals. The Liberals have a plan to clean up the corruption, to find the money, to end the crime crisis and to give Victoria a fresh start.

Hume City Football Club

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:27): An amazing win on Sunday by the Socceroos over Türkiye in Vancouver, and what a fantastic afternoon it was at Hume City Football Club on Sunday as well – 2000 fans packed in, proud Australians, proud of their Turkish heritage, who watched on the big screen, who belted out both the Australian and the Turkish national anthems with pride. Thanks to Ersan, Haydin, Hadi, Mo and the team for opening up the club and making everyone so welcome.

Djibouti Independence Day

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:27): As Victoria's Djiboutian community marks Djibouti Independence Day on 27 June, I celebrate the growing contribution of Djiboutian Victorians to our multicultural state. I recognise the community's strong commitment to family, culture and civic life and the service of leaders such as Bachir Mohammed, whose efforts bring people together, strengthen community connections and share Djiboutian culture and traditions with our state. I know how much the community is looking forward to a flag-raising at Federation Square and other celebrations on 27 June, and I wish them a very happy independence day.

Andrew Clarke OAM

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:28): Congratulations to Dr Andrew Clarke on being awarded the Order of Australia Medal. This reflects Andrew's exceptional leadership and service to the community through his longstanding leadership of Living Legends in Greenvale and his enduring commitment to equine welfare. Dr Clarke's work has enriched the lives of retired champion racehorses while generating significant benefits for local tourism and the visitor economy in Melbourne's north. Congratulations, Andrew. Your contribution is deeply valued and widely admired.

Arabic Welfare

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (13:28): To Michelle and the team at Arabic Welfare, thank you for the work you do across our community in Broadmeadows, Greenvale and the rest of Melbourne's north. You provide an outstanding service to recently arrived migrants and refugees from across the Arabic-speaking world.

Karter Evans

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:29): I rise today to tell a couple of good-news stories. I want to do a shout-out to the Warragul football club for making young Karter Evans's dream come true of kicking his first goal. Karter Evans is triplegic; he is severely disabled, and Warragul football club and Hallora Junior Football Club worked together to let Karter kick his first goal. But it went further than that. They then reached out to the Essendon Football Club – a club I do not follow, but I will congratulate them – to get Karter onto the MCG to kick a goal on the MCG. That is a fantastic effort from everyone involved. Karter is football mad, and they have made his dreams come true.

Farmer Wants a Wife

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (13:29): There is a bit of a rumour going around my local electorate at the moment that a certain MP's daughter is on *Farmer Wants a Wife*. Who could that be? I hate reality television – I cannot stand it – but I am going to set the rumours straight. Gabbie, who is on *Farmer Wants a Wife*, is in fact my daughter, so you can all tune in and find out what happens. I am not going to give it away. Gabbie is a great, great girl. Anyone would be lucky to have my daughter. They are only human – we have to admit that – but she is a cracking girl. Go, Gabs – all the best.

Lara electorate youth

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (13:30): Last week I met with some of the brightest young students in the Lara electorate who are taking part in a youth advocacy program. At Northern Bay College I met with Khan Qasimi, Besmillah Haidari, Muhammad Habib, Dilraj Singh, Ehler Yar, Shukria Husseini, Zeinab Husseini, Sataish Ismail, Nyedholi Luak, Abdullah Junaid and Abdul Aziz. These students

pitched their ideas about how to reduce drug and alcohol harm in our community and also the importance of making community sport accessible for all families, including those who cannot afford expensive fees.

At North Geelong Secondary College I met with Chloe Sumayang, Da Eh Ku Wahku, Donat Bienfait, Ibrahim Mayondo, Origen Reeyar Gyi, Halima Shee, Suhail Jamshidi, Teemoo Ji, Faisal Haidari, Elizabeth Elizabeth, Nargis Hassani, Anna Beh, Ku Moh and Ehp'saw Dahdait. Students there also pitched ideas about community sport, including the need for more sporting facilities that support a wider range of sports, and ideas about how to improve access to mental health support for young people, particularly people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

These incredible students are all studying English as an additional language, and many are from refugee backgrounds. The students all have their own story about their journey to Australia, the challenges they faced and the challenges they have overcome. They are proud of their journeys and their achievements. I am so immensely proud of them and the contribution they are making to their schools. A big thank you to Nestor Estampa from CatholicCare, who leads this program.

Latrobe Valley crime

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (13:32): Residents in the Latrobe Valley have ongoing concerns over the crime rates that we are experiencing. We have one of the highest crime rates outside of metropolitan Melbourne. Whether it be stolen cars, assaults, break and enter or retail theft, our crime numbers are through the roof. We now have cars that are being driven into shops. I want to highlight two of the most recent that happened in Traralgon. There was a ram raid on a tobacco shop in Church Street on Saturday 13 June. On Wednesday 20 May there was a ram raid on an Indian restaurant, again in Church Street in Traralgon. Retailers and people right around the Latrobe Valley are concerned about the spike in crime in general but in particular the ram raids that we are starting to see more of now. We are led to believe that there are a lot of criminals being funnelled from metropolitan Melbourne and pushed into the regional areas, and I think it is no coincidence that these crime rates have spiked and they have also gone through with these ram raids. The people of the Latrobe Valley are wanting some more police on the beat, and that is what the coalition will do: bring in 3000 more police when we win the election in November.

Albert Park electorate sports facilities

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:33): It was such a delight to be able to join Middle Park Football Club and South Melbourne Women's Football Club for the completion of two lovely modular relocatable pavilions. They were built by Modular by SHAPE in Kinglake, so they were built off-site, they are totally flexible and they can be moved around the park as needed while the Albert Park pit building is being redeveloped. I should say there will be seven indoor courts, two more than were there previously, with higher ceilings so that you can have different kinds of games. It is really fantastic. I do want to do a shout-out to Helen, Nicole and Theo from South Melbourne Women's Football Club for all their work in liaising with Parks Victoria, Sport and Recreation Victoria and Development Victoria, and also Megan and Jason from the Middle Park Football Club. Both clubs are really thrilled and already getting great enjoyment out of those pavilions.

Port Melbourne Migration Trail

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (13:34): I also want to do a shout-out to the Port Melbourne Business Association. We have worked in with them and they have got a grant of $96,000 for the Port Melbourne Migration Trail. It is a really gorgeous trail celebrating First Nations history and also the many, many generations of migrants who have come through Station Pier. It is really lovely to have the artwork and the stories that need to be told, so good on them. Also to Mike Stevens, who is the current president, and Paul Littmann, who was also part of the vision.

Tony Vallance

David HODGETT (Croydon) (13:35): Today I would like to acknowledge and congratulate Tony Vallance from Building Better Brains on his well-deserved recognition at the Australian Counselling Association excellence in counselling awards. Tony was awarded the 2026 ACA Excellence in Counselling Community Impact Award in recognition of Dads Chat, an initiative that he facilitates in collaboration with Building Better Brains and is proudly supported by Yarra Ranges council and Maroondah City Council. Through his work as a clinician Tony identified a gap in support for dads and male carers. In response he developed Dads Chat, a five-part strengths-based workshop series that brings dads and male carers together to share experiences, learn from one another and build supportive networks. The program provides practical parenting tools and guidance through discussions on communication, emotional wellbeing, child development, parenting styles and the power of play. In doing so it helps dads and male carers strengthen relationships with their children whilst providing them with the skills, knowledge and confidence to navigate the challenges of parenting. Dads Chat has made a significant contribution to the wellbeing of local dads and male carers, providing a welcoming space where they can connect with others and feel supported within their community. This award is fitting recognition of Tony's dedication to strengthening families and supporting dads and male carers across our community. I congratulate Tony on this outstanding achievement and thank him for the positive impact he continues to make.

Dragon Boat Festival

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (13:36): Duānwǔ ānkāng. I rise to acknowledge dragon boat festivities held across our community and recognise the many organisations that work tirelessly to preserve and share Chinese culture here in Victoria. The Dragon Boat Festival is a celebration of history, community and tradition. It reminds us that Victoria's multicultural success is built on people maintaining their cultural heritage while contributing to our shared future. I was delighted to join members of the Chinese community in celebrating this important occasion, including the dedicated volunteers and members of the Chinese Association of Monash, the Chinese Senior's Education & Skills Development Association and the Hunan Association of Victoria. These organisations do so much to support seniors, strengthen community and business connections and ensure that culture, language and traditions continue to flourish for future generations. Their contributions enrich not only the Chinese community but all Victorians.

Vermont Primary School

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (13:37): On another matter, I was delighted to recently welcome year 6 students from Vermont Primary School to Parliament to learn about civics, democracy and the important role our institutions play in shaping our state. At a time when democratic institutions are being tested around the world it is more important than ever that young people understand how our system of government works and the responsibilities that come with citizenship. I was also pleased that this year's Victorian budget delivered $15 million towards stage 1 of the Vermont Primary School's master plan, delivering modern learning environments for generations of students to come. I did have to gently tell the year 6 students that while they may not get to enjoy the new facilities themselves, they can take pride in knowing that the future generations of Vermont Primary School students certainly will.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (13:38): Imagine your landlord calling you 10 times a day or showing up at your doorstep unannounced to bully you into leaving your home. That is what public housing residents in Victoria are being subjected to by this Labor government. Under this disastrous plan to demolish and privatise all of Victoria's public housing towers, residents have told us that they have been bullied and harassed into so-called voluntary relocation. Residents have been pressured to sign documents at their doorstep without access to lawyers or interpreters, been given verbal promises that were not reflected in the documents that they were signing and been made to feel like they would

be homeless or out of pocket if they did not agree to moving. A parliamentary inquiry found that this government had engaged in significant coercive and misleading practices to relocate residents. Not only is this Labor government kicking residents out of the homes that they have spent their lives in, it is making the housing crisis worse for everybody, and it is doing it in a deeply harmful and misleading way. They seem to think that they are beyond accountability. That is why the Greens this week are referring the government's treatment of public housing residents to the Ombudsman, because public housing residents deserve dignity and respect as much as they deserve a safe and affordable home.

Mernda swimming pool

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (13:39): Mernda needs a pool, and 56 people made a submission saying exactly that to the Whittlesea council as part of their budget process. Thanks to Nicole, Ben, Ann, Jim, Tim, Maria, Jenette, Neville, Chanelle, Alex, Danielle, Jitender and Hope, who did that. Council are meeting very soon, and they say in their agenda that there will be a meeting in August where they will decide the future of the Mernda pool and they will decide if they can afford the pool, they say. They have received as much money – and in many cases more money – from the state government for a pool as other councils across the state. And those other councils have managed to build a pool, like the pools in Northcote, Bacchus Marsh and Brimbank.

Kathleen Matthews-Ward interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: And Fawkner. Thank you, member. And the councils have gone on to build the pools with those commitments. Why can't Whittlesea? I encourage the community to keep raising their voice in calling for a pool for our community. Council has received as much money as other councils, sometimes five times as much money as other councils who have managed to build a pool, so our council need to get on and deliver what they have promised for our community.

Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (13:41): I rise today to again highlight the frustration of my local Polwarth community about the outrageous admissions in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings recently, when the Minister for Environment made it clear that the income from the new $130 million visitor centre at the Twelve Apostles will in fact be used to help bankroll the operations and maintenance of the Great Ocean Road and its facilities. The community was led to believe that, if the visitor centre was going to charge admission fees and tax visitors to the region, they would be new funds that could be spent in the community to enhance existing services and add new attractions to the region to help grow tourism across the south-west and along the Great Ocean Road. But we have since found out that the current government's model, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, is running at a loss. It ran at a $6.1 million loss last year, it is running at a loss again this year, and the money from the visitor centre is going to be used by this government to top up the shortfalls of an organisation that has not been set up to succeed by this government. Further to that, I was able to bring to the Parliament this week a petition of some 538 people in the Lorne community who were disappointed that the demolition of the old fisherman co-op has occurred. It has now occurred, and it is important that the government builds, in its replacement, a structure and provides a service that the community can be proud of.

Sydenham electorate roads

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (13:42): Taylors Road is a road that carries over 22,000 vehicles per day and is the feeder to a whole lot of new estates in my electorate. The congestion is so frustrating to commuters and to local residents, and I want to assure our residents that I am working hand in hand with Melton City Council in doing what we can to get this road upgraded. I acknowledge Melton City Council is calling for a full declaration of this road, and that is why we have made a commitment in this year's budget to fund the next stages of planning for this road to become a better place. I want to acknowledge Melton council's significant investment to date in this road, the $15 million that they have put into the Plumpton and Taylors roads intersection upgrade and the launch of the Taylors Road

corridor upgrade plan, which includes the signalisation of Taylors Road and Sinclairs Road and the duplication of Taylors Road between Westwood Drive and City Vista Court. I will continue to work with the mayor of Melton City Council and those councillors that have worked so hard on this to seek further co-investment opportunities to deliver this work sooner. I know how important it is to my local electorate, because when we work together, we get better outcomes. Perhaps the councillor for Jackwood ward could learn a thing or two about working hand in hand instead of attacking.

Muna Yazdin

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (13:44): Today I pay my respects to Muna Yazdin. Muna was so loved in our community. For 20 years she worked at Hume Libraries, running both the Arabic and Assyrian story times, celebrating culture and our precious languages and making people feel both welcome and connected. Highly respected and known for her warmth, compassion, dedication and tireless work, Muna was deeply involved in community and also a valued volunteer at Gowrie Broadmeadows Valley. She will be greatly missed, and I pass on my sincerest condolences to her grieving family, friends and colleagues.

Broadmeadows electorate office work experience students

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (13:44): I am fortunate to have six work experience students doing placement with me over May and June. In May Tugra Uzun from John Fawkner joined me for eight community meetings and for walk to school day at Corpus Christi and Broadmeadows Primary to discuss road safety on Blair Street. Rushil Raina from Penola and I also visited schools, including the magnificent new tech school for Broadmeadows; John Fawkner and their fabulous new buildings; Glenroy College, to celebrate their million-dollar state budget funding; Moomba Park, to announce their new music room; and Roxburgh Rise, with the member for Greenvale, to talk to the grade 6 students and their dedicated teacher Rob Merlino. And we loved visiting Broadmeadows Special Developmental School to check out the new gym, performing arts centre and art and food tech spaces, delivered through a massive $20 million investment from the state Labor government. This week I have the pleasure of hosting Trisha Le and Rudra Nayak from Hume Central, and I am looking forward to hosting more young people next week with Allaiza Serna and Elif Eskin joining me.

Ferntree Gully Tennis Club

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:45): Huge congratulations to the Ferntree Gully Tennis Club, which has officially been awarded Most Outstanding Club or Centre at the 2026 Victorian Community Tennis Awards. This recognition is so well deserved and reflects the incredible efforts of players, volunteers, coaches and families who have built one of the most welcoming, inclusive and vibrant clubs going around. Their all-abilities tennis program is without a doubt the best. I have had the absolute joy of visiting and watching their Thursday night sessions, and I can tell you I have never witnessed a program in a community sporting club quite like it. There is no question it makes a real difference in the lives of its participants and their families, and I thank them for creating this program, which goes from strength to strength.

Casey Hospital

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:46): It was fabulous to join the Minister for Health, the Minister for Health Infrastructure, the member for Narre Warren North and Mr Galea and Mr Tarlamis from the other place on the weekend at Casey Hospital, where works are now underway on the major expansion of Casey Hospital's emergency department. Unfortunately I have visited that emergency department as a parent twice in the past year and a half, and I know how much this new ED is needed and will be valued by the community. This upgrade will deliver a dedicated mental health zone, a private children's emergency department zone and the capacity to care for an additional 52,000 patients per year. This is what Labor governments do.

Therapy Animals Australia

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (13:46): Finally, many in this place will know Bailey, the chief therapy dog, from visits here in Parliament. I am lucky enough that he visits my electorate every Friday at Sassafras Primary School, where I got to have pats with him last week. He is doing wonderful work there with the students and staff. I believe he is coming in this week. We all know how gorgeous he is.

Point Cook electorate infrastructure

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (13:47): We are delivering in Point Cook, and I want to tell the community a little bit about some of those things. The Point Cook Road and Sneydes Road intersection was completed in 2025. Traffic lights have been put in, and it is much safer for our community. The Point Cook Road and Central Avenue intersection works are underway right now. Traffic lights will go there too – again, a dangerous intersection that we are making safer. Over at Williams Landing station, one of the most popular stations in the state, we are putting in a lift to the station, previously not there on the Point Cook side, as well as a Parkiteer to make sure your bikes are safe. Level crossing removal is also happening for our community, with the Maidstone Street level crossing removal underway. We are seeing the pylons go up and the foundations around that site. The Queen Street cycling bridge and pedestrian bridge has just got started. We are going to see more works very soon. Werribee Mercy emergency department is being duplicated. It will be open this year, and we committed $95 million in the most recent budget to it. Point Cook community hospital is well underway and growing up and up on Dunnings Road. The Wyndham law courts, the largest outside the CBD, have been built and opened across our community, and the Point Cook police station will be opened later this year. The Werribee irrigation district – 5000 megalitres are being saved because of it. New schools – Yurran P–9 and Ngurraga specialist school. Alamanda and Saltwater have building upgrades. There is so much going on in our community.

Margaret Healy

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (13:48): I rise today to pay tribute to Margaret Healy, a woman of extraordinary character, deep compassion and lifelong service to others. Margaret grew up in Essendon in a large, close-knit Irish Catholic family. It was those roots in community, faith and care for others that shaped everything she went on to do. She built a distinguished career as a social worker with the Department of Social Security and later Centrelink, rising to the position of national manager – social work. Her contribution to Brian Howe's landmark review of social security in the 1980s earned her a public service medal, recognition she wore with characteristic modesty.

But Margaret's commitment to social justice extended well beyond the office. She was a devoted member of the Essendon branch of the ALP, and I am proud to say she worked tirelessly on my own election campaigns alongside those of Judy Maddigan, Justin Madden and Bill Shorten. Her particular gift was organising the pre-polling rosters – methodical, reliable and always cheerful. She stood on the line across two decades of elections, sharing in our victories and our disappointments with equal grace. She was, right to the end, deeply engaged in the state of the labour movement, never short of frank and fearless advice for those who needed to hear it. What those who worked alongside Margaret remember most was not the role she held but the person she was: patient, kind, generous of spirit. She was someone who gathered the stories of people's lives and made them feel seen and valued. She was a devoted mother to Anthony, Catherine and Elizabeth; a beloved grandmother to eight grandchildren; and a loving partner to her husband John. Margaret Healy believed that a life well lived was a life in service to others. By any measure, hers was exactly that. I offer my deepest condolences to John, to her children and grandchildren and to all those who had the privilege of knowing her.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (13:50): When this bill was last up the hour was long. We were, I think, into the early hours of Friday morning, and I wanted to hold back my contribution because it is such an important bill. It has a lot of elements: how we are recognising First Nations communities as the first educators of Australia, improvements to the teacher registration framework and restrictions on personal devices in Victoria's schools. These are key elements and reforms in this bill that come on the back of 12 incredible years of reform in education outcomes in the state of Victoria, because Victoria truly is the Education State. We have invested in thousands of teachers and education support staff, we have supported principals and we have built new schools, and when people think of Victoria, they think of the education and support that their kids get to thrive into the future.

It is why many of the NAPLAN results that we have lead the nation. It does not happen by accident. It is one thing to say something about education. It is another to have it ingrained in your soul and in your being. It is why we support our teachers and education support staff. It is why we invest in TAFE. It is why we have reformed early childhood education, because every Victorian child, regardless of their circumstance and regardless of their postcode, deserves the very best opportunities. That is in everything that this government stands for, everything that we do each and every day as a focus and a frame, so when we see a bill like this come forward it is instinctive that so many members of the government would speak on it and would have a connection to education outcomes.

I want to particularly recognise and spend a bit of a time on the introduction of a statement of recognition for the unique status of First Nations people in Victoria. This for me was quite moving at St Louis de Montfort's Primary School the other day in Aspendale. They do the Little Long Walk every single year. If you have seen the St Louis hall, it is a grand hall with a capacity of about 700 or 800 people. The student population there is a good 550 to 600 in a given year, and the kids put together the stories of First Nations people, the Bunurong people in my community. They have First Nations leaders, as the first educators, describe what would have been in the Carrum Carrum Swamp and talk about the language – Moorabbin as 'mother's milk' as its translation, or Mordialloc, which is truly around a flat creek by the sea. These are words that exist as our suburb place names that are taken from First Nations language and culture. It sustained life for tens of thousands of years, the Carrum Carrum Swamp.

A beautiful element of Port Phillip Bay that I love sharing and detailing with our kids is the fact that 8000 to 10,000 years ago Port Phillip Bay did not have water in it, or it had very little water in it. It was a flat hunting plain that sustained life into the future. You see the eyes of our kids light up when they imagine what they see and look out to each and every day, a feature of our community going up the Nepean Highway. When you hit that point of the Mordialloc Creek which is Bunurong land, Wurundjeri country, and you look out, you can imagine what that would have been. When you come through Mordialloc you know that for many, many years it sustained life and community. Tragically it was one of the last sites of First Nations contribution onsite in Attenborough Park before people were moved onto missions at Coranderrk in Healesville. You get an understanding then of our history and its significance and why it is so important that we recognise that and respect that.

As I said to those kids and as I say when I talk to students across our community, this is Australia's history and something that we can all be proud of and celebrate. It is something that we can turn to and love and appreciate. We might not have a feeling of that connection until we learn it or embrace it, but that is truly who we are. That is the hallmark of us. It is not divisive. It is something of love and pride and respect and appreciation that is all Australians. This is the history of our nation and

something that we can love and cherish. That is why responding to this recommendation, that is why respecting the recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, that is why committing to treaty is so very important in Victoria.

It is not about division; it is about loving the journey of our nation to what we are, a truly inclusive community that respects First Nations people as the true first educators and healers of country and land and waterways. It is then recognising that 7.5 million people were born somewhere else. We have built this country on the back of people coming from somewhere else, making a fist and life of it, paying their taxes, building their houses, educating their kids, creating jobs, creating businesses and doing better for themselves and tomorrow, along with those that have had generations of significance here and connected through. That is truly the beautiful element of what it means to be an Australian and what it means to be in our community and country. When I look at something like this bill which enshrines that into the Department of Education, when it connects with something so important as how our kids understand this country as it has come to be, it fills me with great pride and great hope that we can all be part of that journey and that understanding, that respect and reconciliation.

When I was Parliamentary Secretary for Schools we got to talk a lot about devices in schools. I think out in your community, Deputy Speaker, we had a chat with student leaders around what that would mean. I love having a chat with student leaders about their understanding. Decisions we make in this place affect Victorians each and every day. This decision affected our students like we had not seen before, and we needed to get their understanding at that time. Some were uncomfortable about that mobile phone and devices change. The Deputy Premier at the time, James Merlino – a magnificent education minister and leader in Victoria – carries on that service now. That was something that was a bit contentious at the time. But when you speak to students about the mental health and wellbeing load, the respite they get from not having the devices attached to them each and every day makes a big difference. It is a big change. Having that more streamlined across our government, independent and Catholic schools makes sense.

A lot of those independent and Catholic schools have already gone towards that. They have seen the examples in government schools. They have seen the change that has happened, and the results speak for themselves – the mental health and wellbeing respite and the support that that provides going forward to really have that structured learning environment. We know about the formative brain development time as well, that the relationships for our teenagers are so significant in forming those connections, learnings and understandings and changes of life. To be able to do that organically without the impact of devices, to be able to work through problem-solving and reconciling things rather than being confined to our devices, is everything we hear about in terms of the impacts of social media on our kids these days. To broaden that out, to make sure that that restriction and the policies are in place for our schools, to make sure we are adhering to that, that we are aware of different changes in devices and AI and everything that comes with that and the pressures on our kids, is really important as well.

The other part is there is nothing more fundamental than the safety of our kids and our community. The Victorian Institute of Teaching does an extraordinary job. Sadly, for the tens of thousands of incredible educators that we have who support our kids each and every day – the more than a million Victorian students that get that support and that uplift from the best education in the nation, arguably in the world – we do need to ensure the safety and support of our kids each and every time. How do we deal with risk in each of its elements and make sure that where there are teachers or education support staff that breach the incredible inherent trust and support that our kids deserve, the Victorian Institute of Teaching has the support that it needs? How do we make sure it has the resources it needs, and not the administrative burden when it needs to be flexible and nimble in supporting and caring for our kids, rather than the ongoing 30-day bureaucratic timeframes for them for refreshing an interim suspension. We need that streamlining where there is no additional information to make sure that our kids are safe and supported in their school environment, that people who have breached that inherent

trust and obligation are restricted and that there is not any bureaucratic overload on the Victorian Institute of Teaching; that is fundamental.

This is a bill that goes to the heart and soul of what Victorians know. We are the Education State in Victoria. We lead the nation in so many attributes of NAPLAN. We invest in our teachers and in the tens of thousands of education and support staff, and we back our principals in. We are not about cuts, like those opposite, not tearing down education each and every time. We know those opposite. If the orange and blue come together, what a terrible colour that would look like. I mean, the Nationals will be extinct. The Nationals will be like *Jurassic Park*; we will not see any more Nationals anymore. It will be the orange and Liberal coalition, with a deputy opposition leader Jess Wilson, the member for Kew. That is what it would be. That is what we will see.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. WorkSafe has confirmed it has not investigated Women in Construction. How can the minister look Victorian women in the eye and say WorkSafe is protecting them on the Big Build when a company owned by a serial domestic violence abuser was operating on those sites and WorkSafe did not even investigate?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:02): Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. Let me make it very clear that WorkSafe has been in contact with Victoria Police over this matter and that Victoria Police, as the relevant agency, are taking this matter seriously. I myself as the WorkSafe minister call out any type of sexual harassment or misogyny in any workplace. Women in –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker –

A member interjected.

James Newbury: I take personal offence.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear. I do not know who it was.

James Newbury: It does not matter.

The SPEAKER: Order! Was there a member who said something inappropriate to the member for Brighton?

A member interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Macedon, I seek a withdrawal.

Mary-Anne Thomas: I withdraw.

James Newbury: On relevance, the Deputy Premier is debating the question. This question went to WorkSafe not investigating, and the Deputy Premier has not even touched that issue.

The SPEAKER: I will give the minister an opportunity to answer the question. He has only been on his feet for a short time.

Ben CARROLL: I will answer it again: WorkSafe have been dealing with Victoria Police on this matter. This is alleged criminal activity. This is disgraceful activity, what has happened with Women in Construction, and we will make no apologies for having zero tolerance and doing everything we can to support women out in the workplace. We will compare our record of supporting women in the workplace to yours any day.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): The minister told budget estimates and the chamber just now that the government has, and I quote, a 'zero tolerance' approach to illegal behaviour. How does the minister's claim pass the pub test when WorkSafe failed to investigate Women in Construction, a company run by a serial domestic violence abuser?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:04): I will let the opposition leader know again that WorkSafe has been in contact with Victoria Police and, as appropriate, Victoria Police are doing their investigations, as they should.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): We know that working from home works. We know it works for families, it works for parents, it works for the economy and it works for the broader community. Why does it do this? Because it means less time stuck in traffic and less money that families have to spend on fuelling their cars, on tolls and on parking. It also gives valuable time back to parents. It can mean more time for the school run and more time for dealing with those family matters. Most importantly, it saves families money. It is estimated that working from home can save working people up to $5000 a year. That is putting money back into the household budget at a time we know families need that support. That is why, alongside being good for families and saving time and money, we know working from home is good for the economy. It lifts workforce participation rates, particularly for women. It helps get women into the workforce. It also means workers are more productive. Workers report that and employers report that as well.

That is why our Labor government is locking in people's right to work from home, introducing legislation to make it a legal right here in Victoria. If you can do your job from home, you will have the right to do so for two days a week. It is for full-time workers, part-time workers and regular casuals as well. You have got to ask the question: why do we need to do this? We know that around the country there are bosses who are trying to take this opportunity away from workers and Liberals who do not support it and want to wind it back as well. Well, we back workers. We back them to save time and money, and we back them with their right to work from home. We will continue to do this work by making it law from 1 September.

Construction industry

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:07): My question is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. WorkSafe's campaign tells Victorians 'Don't cross the line'. A CFMEU-backed construction worker with a history of stalking and violent offending locked a female colleague in a site storeroom at the Footscray Hospital project, smoking ice in her face while she was trapped inside. How can the minister look Victorians in the eye while criminals on the Big Build consistently cross the line and face no WorkSafe prosecutions on his watch?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:07): The shadow minister spoke about crossing the line. Let me tell you why this is a very important campaign that I launched. Crossing the line is about making sure that every –

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Ben CARROLL: What was that? Are you kidding? Talk about crossing the line. You should be supporting this campaign because this is about making sure that every worker goes to work and comes home from work safely. We take a zero-tolerance approach. If it is a young person on the check-outs, they get the respect. If it is a tram driver, they get the respect. Under our government we fund WorkSafe and we fund the TAC because there is nothing more important than people coming home safe, whether on the road or from their workplace.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Eildon, when you ask your question, I ask that you be quiet and not yell across the chamber.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:08): The minister just said the government funds WorkSafe; it is actually not funded by the government. The minister says workplace safety is non-negotiable. Isn't the truth that under Labor Victorians are told 'Don't cross the line' but under the minister's watch Labor's mates on the Big Build know they can cross the line and face no WorkSafe prosecution?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:09): They say they are the party of family values. They have never found a worker they have wanted to sack, and that is the truth of it.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Deputy Premier is desperately debating the question.

The SPEAKER: Deputy Premier, come back to the question.

Ben CARROLL: I will start where I began. There is a zero-tolerance approach. There is no place for violence, aggression or sexual harassment at any workplace. We are very proud of the crossing the line campaign, and we stand by every cent that we have invested in it.

Ministers statements: working from home

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small and Family Business, Minister for Employment, Minister for Tourism) (14:10): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government's right to work from home is working for Victorian small and family businesses. It is pretty clear working from home makes sense, because if you want to grow the economy it starts with our local communities – at the corner store, the baker, the newsagent or the drycleaner. We are already seeing the benefits. It means neighbourhoods are busier during the week. On our main streets, businesses are putting in their time and effort to grow their business, employ staff and provide to their local communities. That is why working from home is so important. We know that working from home saves Australians an average of $110 a week. That is over $5000 every year. It is also providing Victorians the flexibility and the savings to get out there and back small and family businesses. We are backing working families, and we are also backing our small and family businesses. That is why we have deferred the start date to 1 July 2027 for small and family businesses to make sure they have the time to adjust and to be correctly informed of these changes. I tell you the only flexibility Victorians will get from those opposite is their flip-flopping and their cuts, even cutting the Victorian Small Business Commission.

Members interjecting.

Natalie SULEYMAN: That is right. On this side of the house we are backing Victorians, backing our small and family businesses and backing our local communities.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): My question is to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. The minister said that $138 of chocolates on a government credit card did not pass the pub test, but what standard is the minister applying when $15 billion has been siphoned off the Big Build by criminals and bikies yet WorkSafe cannot point to a single current prosecution involving violence on these projects?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:12): I think the opposition leader should update her talking points because we all know Mr Watson has been on the radio recently and has clarified that that figure itself is in dispute. Having said that, to the opposition leader's question, I made it very clear with a question the other day that the public servants that did spend that money needed to repay it and it did not pass the pub test.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): Isn't it the case that, under the minister's watch, bikies and criminals on the Big Build have crossed the line but WorkSafe has not secured a single conviction relating to that violence?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:14): I remind the Leader of the Opposition that WorkSafe is an independent authority under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and actually always has been an independent authority. I will leave them to do their job and get on with what they need to do.

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, this is your last warning.

Ministers statements: working from home

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (14:14): Families are facing new challenges. The cost of living is not just putting pressure on the hip pocket, it is putting pressure on the clock. That is why today Labor has introduced legislation to enshrine the right to work from home in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, making Victoria the first place to do so. Under these new laws, Victorians who can do their job from home will have the right to do so for two days a week. No matter if you work from home full time, part time or as a regular casual, you can do it. Working from home works for families. It puts more than $5000 a year back in the pockets of families as well. That is money to help with the cost of fuel, groceries and the bills. It gets more parents, more women, more carers and more people with disabilities back into the workforce. And as we mark Men's Health Week, it is worth saying that financial stress and work pressure are amongst the biggest drivers of poor mental health for men and fathers, and working from home can help ease that, which is why we are locking it in for good. There are those in this chamber who would strip this right away before the ink is even dry.

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, there are a lot of people that would love to see you work from home on your side, mate. The One Nation–Liberal coalition –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will only say this once to the minister: you will address the Chair, not across the chamber. Members will cease interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Thank you for your guidance, Speaker. The One Nation–Liberal coalition are gearing up to cut the right to work from home.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister should know that he cannot use a ministers statement to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I remind members and ministers that, when they are on their feet during question time, a ministers statement is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. It is okay to compare and contrast with previous governments.

Paul EDBROOKE: On the point of order, Speaker, if it assists the house, I am willing to table 'James Newbury makes call to cut WFH' from the *Herald Sun* last year.

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order, Minister.

Data centres

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:17): My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. The Victorian government has been working very hard to attract hyperscale AI data centres to Melbourne. These massive structures consume enormous amounts of electricity, predicted to be 8 per cent or more of the state's electricity by 2030. One project proposed for Plumpton would consume more electricity

than Victoria's largest power station, Loy Yang A, can provide. Is it the case that Victoria's coal-fired power plants will be running for longer because of this government's push to attract data centres?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:18): In one word, no. The reason for that is that our record investment in renewable electricity is ensuring that we have sufficient electricity supply, the replacement electricity, to be able to meet all of our needs in this state. It is no surprise that on this side of the house we are absolutely committed to economic growth and we are committed to transitioning our energy supply so that Victorians, whether they are businesses or whether they are households, can continue to enjoy the lowest wholesale electricity prices in the country. We can do both, and that is exactly what we will be delivering.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:18): I thank the minister for her answer. Backup generators in data centres are a new source of greenhouse emissions and air pollution. NextDC's growing data centre in West Footscray uses diesel backup, while the proposed Plumpton project would have gas turbines. Gas companies are even joining the data centre lobby group Data Centres Australia, and there is a real risk that data centres will reverse previous gains in weaning Victoria off fossil fuels. So will the government require data centres to run off 100 per cent new renewable energy and to use batteries for backup, rather than fossil fuels?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:19): I thank the member for the supplementary question. There is no doubt which side of the house actually has the record of delivering the fastest growth in emissions reductions in the country and the biggest growth in renewable electricity in the country. That will remain under our watch, and that is what is at risk from those opposite, who cuddle up with One Nation. I would say to the member for Brunswick that our commitment remains that we can continue to grow our economy as we transition our energy supply to renewable sources, because we know that when we do that and we do the heavy lifting in terms of decarbonising our economy our emissions go down. That is what our government will continue to deliver as we head towards net zero emissions by 2045. Only a Labor government will absolutely deliver that and the jobs growth that will come with that.

Ministers statements: working from home

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Sport and Major Events) (14:20): Work from home is working for Victorian workers and Victorian businesses. Our workforce participation leads the nation and is already 4.4 per cent higher than it was before the pandemic, showing that flexibility is helping more people stay engaged with work. In fact the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, together with the Committee for Melbourne, undertook a detailed survey on work from home and found 76 per cent of businesses reported staff regularly working from home already and 77 per cent of businesses reported requiring staff to attend the office a minimum number of days – you guessed it, three days per week. Work from home benefits businesses, whether through employee retention, lower absenteeism or lower overhead costs or by accessing a wider talent pool – as the Premier said, particularly women in the workforce.

This is all in the context of a growing economy, with more jobs being created. The national accounts came out last week. They demonstrated that state final demand in this state increased by 3.5 per cent to the year ending March 2026, the equal strongest growth of all the states, and over the last decade our economy has grown faster than any other state. It has grown 28 per cent since 2014–15. We know not all jobs can be done from home, but we believe every Victorian can benefit, whether it is a barista getting an extra shift at a suburban cafe or a tradie having less traffic to get to his or her job. But across the country every Australian and definitely every Victorian has to worry about a Liberal–One Nation coalition –

Jacinta Allan interjected.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: A One Nation–Liberal coalition that wants to rip working from home from Victorians.

James Newbury: I renew my earlier point of order, Speaker. Ministers statements are not an opportunity to simply sledge the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The minister to come back to his ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: The short of it is that a One Nation–Jess Wilson government would be a disaster for Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I caution ministers again that if you cannot make a ministers statement and refer to members by their correct titles without attacking the opposition then I will ask you to resume your seat.

Fire services

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Data provided to PAEC shows that 14 CFA tankers still in service were constructed before the fall of the Soviet Union. By what date will all of those tankers be replaced?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:23): I thank the member for his question and for the opportunity to yet again talk about the extraordinary investment that this government has made in CFA. Not only have we got increased funding year on year since reform, as we see with the budget that we recently announced; we also see $100 million that will be invested in new appliances over the next 10 years. We know that CFA in the last 12 months have received a new appliance on average every four days.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was very specific, and I ask you to bring the minister back to answering it.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the minister how to answer a question. She was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Vicki WARD: I would have thought that the opposition would be very happy with the fact that there has been a new appliance arriving at CFA every four days on average over the last 12 months. I would have thought that they would welcome the announcement of $100 million for new appliances for CFA. I would have thought that they would have appreciated the incredible investment this government has made in CFA.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I will be more specific and say, on the question of relevance, that the minister has not gone at all to the question of when these tankers will be replaced.

The SPEAKER: I cannot direct the minister how to answer a question. The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked. I have ruled on the point of order.

James Newbury: On a different point of order, on relevance, Speaker, I would have thought that the concept of relevance requires you to deal with the question in some way, shape or form, and the minister clearly is not doing that.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, what is your point of order?

James Newbury: Relevance.

The SPEAKER: The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked.

Vicki WARD: The question is about new appliances, and that is the information that I am giving the member, which is about the fact that we are investing with great fervour in new appliances for CFA. In fact I was out at Wendouree with the member in Ballarat on Saturday, where we took delivery of a new next-generation medium pumper that –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly debating the question and not coming near to answering it.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Vicki WARD: It is really clear that those opposite are not actually interested in information. They are not interested in the record funding of this government or the amount of appliances that we are actually producing for CFA and the massive pipeline of appliances that we have for CFA, the distribution of which is an operational decision of CFA as to where appliances go. But of course they are not interested in that, because there is only one thing they are interested in and that is getting into bed with One Nation.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:27): The data also shows that nearly a quarter of CFA appliances are more than 26 years old, while government policy states that all public service vehicles should be replaced after three years or 60,000 kilometres. Why are public servants given better vehicle conditions than our firefighters?

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:27): I would have thought that the member would understand the difference between a Subaru and a pumper tanker, but clearly the member does not. As I said in my response to the substantive question, we have $100 million in this budget invested in a pipeline for new appliances for CFA and $40 million in last year's budget for, again, a pipeline of appliances for CFA. What that means is a new appliance every four days is being delivered for CFA, because this is a government that invests in CFA. This is a government that is united behind our emergency services, who are united in ensuring that there is –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be factual.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Vicki WARD: This is a government that is united in its record funding for emergency services, and the one thing those opposite are united on is ripping $1.6 billion out of our emergency services.

Emma Kealy interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan is warned.

Ministers statements: working from home

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:29): I have some very good news. Victorians who work from home will soon have 3 hours of free power, saving them money on their electricity bills each and every day. We know that working from home works for families, which is why we are backing workers and protecting their right to work from home. Take one of my constituents. Felicity is a Mill Park mum with three young kids, and it was being able to work from home, as the Premier quite well knows, that got her back into the workforce. She got a job in admin for a small business and has worked her way to managing a team. Her husband Sam is a truck driver and is often away for long periods. It is families like these that our laws will protect. Felicity and Sam both support our laws because we are backing their right to work from home and balance life and work commitments and saving them money and time. Our new midday power saver will provide real cost relief for families just like Felicity's. From 11 am to 2 pm, if they have opted in, any electricity they use will be free. That is up to $1102 per year in savings by shifting their power use into the free period.

What does that mean if you are working from home? Free power to heat and cool your home while you work, free power to run those online meetings and do your computer work and free power to run a load of laundry or the dishwasher during your lunchbreak. This is what they hate over there. The opposition hate this because we are putting at the front and centre of everything we do the cost of living for Victorian families. Only the Allan Labor government will back the right to work from home, keep power bills low and make life easier and more affordable for hardworking Victorian families like Felicity and Sam's.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:31): (1678) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier commence one of her seven announced noise detection decibel camera trials on St Kilda Street in Brighton? In March the state government announced a trial of seven noise-detecting decibel cameras around Melbourne. In the two months since, no locations have been announced. Hoon driving and noise polluters are a serious problem. We know from the most recent statistics that the Environmental Protection Agency received 9100 noise reports in 2025, but only 1222 vehicle infringement notices were issued – that is only 13 per cent. In my community hundreds of locals have signed a petition calling for a trial on St Kilda Street. Since the petition began, over 300 people have signed. A copy of the petition will be delivered to the Premier this week. Locals understand that St Kilda Street is a busy thoroughfare, but the level of engine revving, racing and amplified exhaust noise has grown beyond what residents should reasonably have to tolerate. Announcing something and doing something are two very different things.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:33): (1679) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What support does our government have available to local councils such as the City of Greater Geelong to assist them in funding repairs and upgrades on local roads to ensure safety for our community? Residents in the Lara electorate raise important concerns about road safety and maintenance, only to be told by the council that they do not have the funding to address them. One example is the local roads around Lara Lake Primary School. Families have a number of concerns about road safety around the school, particularly during school drop-off and pick-up times. This includes one street where there is no kerb or bollard between the footpath and car parks. Concerns such as these highlight the urgent need for road safety improvements that directly respond to the priorities of the local community. I look forward to hearing from the minister about what support is available for councils.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:33): (1680) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Can the minister advise why V/Line has removed online booking for replacement coach services on the north-east line for Euroa and Benalla passengers? Dianne Simpson from Benalla contacted me recently. Dianne lives with a disability and needs priority seating. She spent nearly an entire hour stuck on the phone on hold just to book a seat on a replacement coach, something she used to do online in minutes. Regional passengers already cop enough disruption when trains get swapped for buses. They should not be forced into nearly an hour on the phone for a service that was simple before. It is the same story again and again for regional passengers. Labor now says you can tap on with a credit card, but that means nothing to my constituents, because most of my stations do not even have basic Myki. Regions were left behind in the original Myki rollout and we are being left behind again. The Allan Labor government must reinstate online coach bookings so regional Victorians are not stuck on the phone for an hour just to catch a replacement bus.

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:34): (1681) My question is to the Minister for Planning. What are the next steps for the now lodged interim environmental significance overlay amendment C181 to protect a significant section of the Western Port woodlands in Bass Coast? This vital wildlife corridor, our largest intact coastal woodland, supports rare orchids, critically endangered trees and threatened species. I welcome that council has finally got on with it, to use their words, as it was always their responsibility to undertake this important step, though it is curious that after taking so long themselves they now urge the minister to do the same. The real credit belongs to the sustained advocacy of the Save Western Port Woodlands group, alongside the Victorian National Parks Association, Western Port Biosphere and others – thank you. We have consistently called on council to undertake the strategic work outlined in the *Bass Coast Statement of Planning Policy* to progress environmental protections for these high-biodiversity woodlands. My support has never wavered, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (14:35): (1682) My question is to the Minister for Education. How will the government restore adequate equity in funding to Windsor Primary School, ensuring that funding formulas represent student vulnerability rather than enrolment numbers alone? Windsor Primary School serves a particularly vulnerable cohort: 26 per cent of students are disadvantaged; half receive Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund support; 30 per cent speak English as an additional language; and 36 per cent are living with a disability. Supporting schools like Windsor Primary School should be at the very centre of educational policy. The students should have the support that they need. However, despite these needs, the school's equity funding has fallen from $27,132 in 2025 to just $4994 in 2026, reducing its capacity to provide onsite wellbeing services by almost half.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:36): (1683) My question is to the Minister for Government Services in the other place. It has been wonderful to see around 2 million Victorians claim their 20 per cent rebate on their registration paid in the last financial year. With Victorians and families doing it tough, every dollar helps, so it is wonderful to see millions of applications being made on light vehicles for personal use. Up to two applications per person can be made, which is $186 or $372 going back into the pockets of everyday Victorians. My question to the minister is: how many applications have been made by locals in the Bayswater electorate?

Melbourne electorate

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:37): (1684) My question is to the Minister for Housing and Building. Minister, will the government pause demolition works in public housing towers while residents are still living in them? Right now families at 33 Alfred Street, North Melbourne, in my electorate are living with intense drilling for up to 4, 5 or even 6 hours a day. These families had to observe Eid, a sacred time for reflection, prayer and peace, in units that literally were shaking from drilling. The physical and physiological impact on residents is significant. As one constituent told me, parents report children crying hysterically out of fear and not able to sleep or rest at all. They say it is inhumane treatment. These are the same families that are already facing Labor's plan to demolish and privatise their public housing homes. The replacement homes that have been offered are in horrible condition and fail basic standards, yet the drilling is forcing them to accept them. They have raised complaints many times, and the state Labor government is simply not listening to these residents. That is simply not good enough.

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:38): (1685) My question is for the Minister for Water, and my question is: what is the Victorian government's policy position on putting bike paths and vegetation on land that has water pipes underneath it? I ask this question because we announced last year that we

were going to plant an additional thousand trees across Preston and Reservoir, including along parts of the Northern Pipe Trail, and we remain very committed to that project. But we have run into the challenge that there are some authorities and some decision-makers who seem to think you cannot plant trees or put bike paths anywhere near any underground asset. We appreciate that it is important to protect those assets, and there are real maintenance costs involved. But at the same time we note that there are bike paths and trees on top of underground assets right across this city, including elsewhere on the Northern Pipe Trail, and we believe that the Essential Services Commission and other authorities should treat this as a normal cost of doing business and not use it as an excuse or a reason to stop urban greening projects or stop active transport projects. Any advice or information that the minister can provide to us on this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:39): (1686) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Police. Minister, why didn't you properly fund Victoria Police in the 2026–27 state budget to provide the urgently needed additional resources to allow the Rowville police station to reopen to the public seven days a week? Rowville electorate residents continue to be deeply alarmed that, in the middle of an escalating crime wave across the state, the Rowville police station remains effectively shut five days a week, with public counter hours restricted to Tuesday and Thursday from 10 am to 6 pm. Our community has lost a vital safe haven and a visible crime deterrent. Our local police are exhausted, fighting crime with one hand tied behind their backs by a revolving door justice system. Rowville and Lysterfield residents deserve a full-time, seven-day-a-week local police presence to ensure a public counter service and restore safety to our streets.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:40): (1687) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The Victorian government has invested $673.6 million to deliver 25 locally built X'trapolis 2.0 trains, which have been manufactured in Ballarat, supporting hundreds of Victorian jobs. These new trains are currently rolling out on the Craigieburn line – I have seen them up and down in test phase – providing passengers getting on at Roxburgh Park and Coolaroo with more space, improved accessibility, greater comfort, increased reliability and capacity for more than 1200 passengers. Minister, when will these trains begin operating on the Craigieburn line to deliver these fantastic benefits to passengers?

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, I raise a point of order for a number of questions that remain unanswered, some being a year overdue. These questions are unanswered by the Treasurer: questions on notice 2421, 3237, 3238, 3239, 3240, 3241, 3242, 3256 and 3340. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Finance are questions on notice 3243 and 3245. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Skills and TAFE are questions on notice 3311, 3312, 3313, 3314 and 3315. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Education and Deputy Premier are questions on notice 3210 and 1632. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Government Services are questions on notice 3287, 3288, 3289, 3290, 3291, 3292 and 3293. A question that is overdue by the Minister for Health is question on notice 3317. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Planning are questions on notice 3282, 3283 and 3284. A question that is overdue by the Premier is question on notice 3316. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Transport Infrastructure are questions on notice 3294, 3295, 3296, 3297, 3298 and 3299. Some of these are a year overdue. I would appreciate responses for my constituents, and I will pass that list to the clerks.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, can I raise three outstanding matters that the Premier is up to six months overdue in responding to: constituency question 1450, constituency question 1562 and constituency question 1628. As I said, some of them are up to six months old.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:44): I rise to make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. This bill makes a number of amendments to Victoria's education framework, including measures relating to students' use of personal electronic devices in schools, teacher registration and regulation through the Victorian Institute of Teaching, improvements to student data systems through the Victorian student register and the unique student identifier and becoming more inclusive of First Nations people. In particular the bill requires all schools to implement policies restricting student use of personal electronic devices during school hours, reform teacher registration and regulatory process through the Victorian Institute of Teaching and expand the Victorian student register to support national data reforms, including the unique student identifier. The bill makes a minor statute law revision to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. The bill seeks to address a number of areas of the state's education system in one bill, which provides a consolidated approach to the reform.

Six years ago the government implemented restrictions on mobile phones and electronic devices in non-government schools during school hours, a policy which has had strong support across the wider education sector. I wish to focus more on this part of the bill. As I mentioned in this place recently, unfortunately my community just a few weeks ago experienced firsthand a very serious assault on a student that was filmed on a phone in the schoolyard and then shared on social media. It was horrific to see young girls inflicting such an awful assault on a young girl and then that content posted. There was another horrific incident the week before, when a group of girls attacked and bashed two 11-year-old girls, following them home from school when they got off the bus. Again, this was a vicious and sickening attack that was filmed and shared on social media, and the footage was hard to watch. What is so alarming about these incidents is the young age of these perpetrators – 13 and 14 years of age. It is alarming to think that children of that age want to inflict such harm on others. As you can imagine, these violent incidents have traumatised the victims, left families distressed and left many members of the community deeply concerned about the safety of their children. Victoria Police are currently investigating these incidents. These are not isolated incidents, and youth crime and youth violence have increased. What is incredibly alarming, as I have mentioned, is the young age of many of these offenders.

The bill does provide an opportunity for stronger protections and clearer expectations around the misuse of devices in our government schools, something that is needed to address this ongoing issue. Some of the footage that you see on social media these days, regardless of whatever platform you see it on, has an impact, and that impact can have a significant impact on a child now and well into their future. Schools must be a place of safety, learning and respect. What we have seen are ongoing incidents where fights, assaults, bullying and acts of humiliation are increasing and being deliberately filmed on mobile phones and personal devices and shared online for entertainment, attention or social media status. This behaviour simply magnifies harm far beyond the original incident itself. A student who is assaulted or bullied no longer only experiences the trauma once in a schoolyard or on the street. Instead, that footage can be replayed, reposted and circulated indefinitely. That humiliation becomes permanent and public. It follows young people into their homes and onto their devices and significantly impacts on their own mental health and wellbeing and puts them at significant risk.

Teachers, principals and families are also becoming more deeply concerned about the growing culture of bullying and intimidation and the increasing number of social media posts from students' devices. Staff are also reporting situations where behavioural incidents are escalated because students are attempting to record them for social media content rather than to de-escalate the whole situation or even to seek help. Parents are alarmed that images or videos of their children can end up online without

consent, and in some cases footage involving minors has circulated widely before schools or even families are aware of its existence and presence. We know that once material is online, removing it completely is very difficult and challenging.

This bill is a step in the right direction. Mobile phones, wearable devices and personal devices will be proscribed as a minimum standard for registration under the bill. It is hoped that this policy itself will improve student focus on learning and increase socialisation and physical activity during breaks so they are not just an opportunity to create social media content. We need to have students socialising with their peers and becoming more active. Too many hours are spent on devices and less time is spent interacting and socialising. However, if we are serious about supporting student safety and mental health and wellbeing and addressing the increasing incidence of antisocial behaviour and the level of assaults and escalating youth crime that we have been experiencing, so much more needs to be done. When young people find themselves heading down the wrong path, we need strong intervention, meaningful support and clear accountability to help turn lives around before more harm is done. Whilst there are some programs in schools, they are not working to address the level of aggressive and alarming physical assaults that they are experiencing. We need early intervention and pathways to address this alarming trend. The police, school organisations and the community must work together.

On Sunday in Shepparton there is a walk being organised by the families of the two 11-year-old girls that were brutally attacked. The families and the community are calling for change and highlighting the desperate need to address the rise in youth crime. The event is called Tipping Point, and the slogan is 'Enough is enough'. We cannot continue up this path of increasing youth crime and increasing physical attacks. Everyone deserves to feel safe at school and in the community. The event is also very focused on the escalating cycle of youth crime across the board – weak bail laws and a weak justice system that constantly sees reoffending. People are not feeling safe in their communities. Just this past week we had the Victoria Police chief commissioner Mike Bush double down on his criticism of the state's justice system, declaring that his members are quite used to teenagers they have arrested being allowed back out on the streets. That is why, on this side of the house, we have a plan to tackle the crime crisis with 3000 more police officers, tougher sentencing for serious and repeat offenders and early intervention and diversion programs to help young people get back on the right path. That is what is needed: investment into addressing the escalating crime of our state. People are angry, fed up and have had enough.

Coming back to the bill, the bill also strengthens teacher registration and regulatory settings by improving oversight and reinforcing child safety protections, which is important. It is critical that every child feels safe in their school. It is also critical that parents have reassurance that when their children do go to school, they are in a safe and cared-for space. There are some concerns around student privacy and data security in an increasingly digital education environment and the data governance risks that come with the amendments contained in the bill. The expansion of the student register will increase both the volume and sensitivity of student data collected, which raises legitimate concerns around data security, especially given the number of education-related data breaches that have occurred this year alone. Parents rightly expect that when their children attend school, their personal information will be protected.

Last month a number of universities here in Victoria and across the country, as well as TAFEs and public schools, were caught up in a global data breach. We are living in a time where cyberattacks and data breaches are becoming increasingly common across both the public and the private sectors. Schools hold an enormous amount of sensitive information about their students. When personal student data is compromised in such breaches, the consequences can be significant and long-lasting for students and families if hackers are able to get hold of such information. Parents are understandably concerned about who has access to this information, how it is stored and whether adequate safeguards are in place. As schools rely more heavily on online learning platforms today for learning purposes, apps and digital systems included, the responsibility falls back on government to ensure that there are

strong cybersecurity protections. It is not just an IT issue, it is a student safety issue, and we must do everything we can to protect personal data and information.

In my last few minutes I would like to acknowledge all of our hardworking teachers and staff, who do incredible work and who play a significant role in children's lives and their safety every single day. One of my daughters, as I have mentioned in the chamber before, is a teacher and she loves her job. I visited her school just last week, and the students were very excited about the clothes drive initiative that is currently being organised and hugely successful. The community donates clothes and then the school gives back to the community. Anyone can call in and get what they need. This is the third year that they have run the clothes drive, helping many families and providing a really great opportunity for children to understand that there are people out there in need and needing more support. The smiles on their faces when they were unpacking the clothes and seeing some of the donations was really fun to be part of. As I said, I think it is really important when we come into schools to also see children learning new things and understanding about community initiatives and how they can also make a difference within their communities.

But we must also make sure that our teachers have the resources and the support that they need. We know teachers are experiencing burnout. They often do way more than what they are expected to, working after hours supporting students and doing all the things that they need to do to be fantastic teachers. I am really proud of my daughter as a teacher, and I love hearing her feedback and also about the opportunities for how we can improve that space, something that we should be working hard on every single day to make it better. Teachers deserve so much recognition for what they do, because I can tell you it is more than just a job, absolutely, for many, many teachers, not just my daughter. I think in this place we need to make sure we have the right policies in place, that we can protect children and that we make sure that every single day we are working towards that goal.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:53): I rise to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026, and I have to agree wholeheartedly with the member for Shepparton and her comments about teachers and how hardworking they are. It is definitely more than just a job. It is a vocation, it is a calling, and our dedicated teachers deserve all of our respect and certainly recognition for the hard work that they put into teaching our young people – teaching our future.

This bill has some incredibly important components to it, and the one that the member for Shepparton spoke at length about is one that I wish to speak at some length about as well. It is the requirement of non-government schools to have a policy restricting student use of personal electronic devices. That includes not just mobile phones but also watches and audio devices. There is a whole range of different things. I know, having been a teacher myself, that some students can be very creative in trying to get away with having those devices in class. There are others nodding in the room who are aware of that creativity. Perhaps there are some people in their lives who try to get away with that.

It is something that teachers really do require, this kind of tool. It helps them to be able to control the classroom and to make sure it is a really safe learning environment. I was having a bit of a look around, because we know anecdotally but we also know now with academic research that smartphones and far too much screen time has a real impact on mental health. I was reading through a paper produced by the Columbia University's department of psychiatry. It is well worth reading, but it pretty much confirms what we kind of already know now. They acknowledge that smartphones have transformed the way we communicate. Long gone are the days where we had the telephone on the very, very long cord that we used to take under the door, shut the bedroom door and sit on the other end and hope that, if you had a second line in the house, a sibling or a parent did not pick it up to listen in. You could hear. It would change the sound in the background, and you would say, 'Get off the line!' But as parents you knew who was calling your child because you probably answered the phone. Now we do not know. These smartphones are everywhere. It is such a great move to make sure that the classroom can at least be a place free from them. I will tie this in too with the social media ban for under-16s.

I was speaking with my sister-in-law, who is very senior in her role over in the UK. She was a teacher for many, many years in secondary college and now works closely with students throughout all of Leeds who cannot attend school. She works in the local council there, because they do not have state governments – it is local councils that deliver education. We were having a chat this morning as I drove in about the impact of screens on young people and their mental health but also their capacity to learn. Screens and mobile phones, smartphones, that can follow you around, where you can be bullied no matter where you are, are really, really damaging. The UK has just moved forward with a social media ban. They are actually going a little bit further than we have. I think this is a great thing out there. It is a great tool for parents. I do digress from this bill somewhat, but it is related.

I think that this bill, in requiring non-government schools to have policies that restrict the use of these smart devices at school is very, very welcome. I know it is welcome amongst teachers, I know it is welcome amongst parents, and I know it is welcome amongst students as well, because there are issues with these devices, and if there can be a safe space where they cannot access them, that is good for everyone involved. I think it is a great, great move forward.

I did mention before the Columbia University studies. They said:

> … studies have shown a correlation between heavy social media use and depression, anxiety, loneliness, and suicidal ideation. The platforms are designed to be addictive, using algorithms that feed users content based on their preferences and interactions, keeping them engaged for longer periods.

They also said:

> Social media platforms, while enabling us to connect with others and share experiences, can also contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

Life is already tough when you are a kid. It is particularly challenging when you are an adolescent. You certainly do not need these on you at school, in the classroom. Be a kid, switch off from these devices, have conversations with people, learn how to read others and develop your social skills. It is so fundamentally important. I am so pleased that we are on a unity ticket in this chamber on this one. I think we all know that these phones, whilst they have brought some great things along with them – I mean, I used to have to go through the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to find facts, and now I can do a quick search and generally locate all those things I have always wanted to know – they have brought a lot of harm as well. This is a very welcome piece of legislation. I am so thrilled to be speaking on it.

Another really important part of the bill is the strengthening of Aboriginal recognition and self-determination in the education systems, including early childhood education and the training systems, to improve cultural safety and responsiveness and to support improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations learners. That is fundamental. When I do an Acknowledgement of Country, I do often speak after I have heard a beautiful Welcome to Country by a local Wurundjeri elder, and I reflect on the fact that when I went to school what we were taught about First Nations history in this country was pretty abysmal. Then when I became a teacher – and it is 20-odd years since I was in the classroom teaching – what we were teaching was not that much better. That was only two decades ago.

Where we are now and where the level of education and understanding is coming to now is a much better place than where we have been. We still have further to go, but it is so critical and so important that we understand the First Peoples of our nation, that we have an appreciation for the first educators and the first students in this land. I think it is very, very important that we do this, and this legislation takes us absolutely in the right direction when it comes to that. It actually aligns with key elements of recommendation 48 made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2025. It is going to introduce a new duty on the responsible departmental secretaries to ensure that Aboriginal cultural understanding professional development training is made available to anyone working to support learning or wellbeing in or across early childhood, schools, TAFEs and adult community and further education providers as well as state-funded registered training organisations. That is a great move.

It is so important, as I said before, that we develop an understanding of our First Nations. Across the hills, I have got to say, if you go to most of my primary schools, you will see embedded in their curriculum a deep, profound connection and learning about First Nations. It is one of the most heartening things to see. When I turn up to a school, if there is a wedge-tailed eagle flying overhead, I can guarantee there will be at least a bunch of children going, 'Bunjil. Bunjil's flying over us. Bunjil the protector's flying over us.' It is so wonderful to see that. That did not happen when we were children at school, and it certainly was not happening when I was teaching 20-odd years ago. It is happening now, and long may that continue, because we still have further to go.

This bill will introduce a statement of recognition that acknowledges the unique status of First Nations people in Victoria and outlines historical and ongoing factors that impact First Nations learning and wellbeing outcomes. It will also confirm Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives forming part of the learning areas that are subject to free instruction in schools. Well, 'Hear, hear' to that. The bill also will require some changes to the Victorian student register, and it will expand the information that needs to be collected and retained to include country of birth data and any other information prescribed by the regulations. Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034 heads of agreement, our state is required to implement and contribute to the national schools unique student identifier, and the aim of this is to create a lifelong education record for students across educational institutions across the country, so this bill is quite important.

I just want to say before I finish that investment in education is paramount to everything we do. As a former teacher, it is fundamentally important to me that we continue to invest in our education across this state, and I am so thrilled that we are going to be putting in more than $9 million to upgrade and modernise the wonderful P–12 Sherbrooke Community School in Sassafras. It is an absolutely fabulous school there in the hills. They have sheep on their property there in the front. It is just one of the most special schools to go along to. It is a fabulous school. I am thrilled that we are going to be upgrading and modernising it. It is in need of it. The staff are incredible. Now we are going to have buildings that will match the level of skill, care and professionalism of the staff at Sherbrooke P–12 community college. I am delighted and very, very happy to commend this bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:04): I am pleased to rise today on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I am very happy to follow the member for Monbulk, and I agree with a lot of what the member has just contributed. I did have a bit of a chuckle when she was talking about telephone devices and how it used to be in the old days, with the long cord and hiding in the cupboard so your parents would not hear you talking to whoever you were talking to, and then listening intently for that click – when they tried to pick up the phone and spring you on who you were talking to at the time. It was a good time back then. One thing about back then, in the 1980s, when I had a mullet, is that we were safe at home. Then we were able to go home after school, and we would not get hassled on any devices. It was actually a really good time. If you happened to get bullied at school that day, you would go home and you would be safe. You would talk to your mum and dad about it. That harassment would not follow you home, as it does today with these kids.

That is why – I will touch on this, and people might find this surprising – I am totally in support of the federal government's reforms on social media and banning kids under the age of 16 from social media. I actually think that is a good, positive thing – I really do. I have mentioned in this chamber before that I think this is probably the next step we should take: any social media account should be verified. I actually think that is really important. We have taken that first step, but I think the next step should be verification of social media accounts so you do not get the trolls and you do not get the undesirable people trying to infiltrate your children or have some result that they want. I just think verification of a social media account would be a very positive step in keeping our kids safe.

The member for Shepparton touched on it earlier – this is why we do not oppose this bill – when she was talking about her area, where kids are videoing kids getting beaten at school. I think it happened on two occasions, and it was young girls that were doing this. That is horrific for any parent. If you were sitting at home and that popped up on your feed, to see your child being beaten, bullied and

harassed at school, it would be heartbreaking, because as parents we all want to keep our kids safe. That is what we are there for. That is what we aspire to do. If you saw that come up on your feed, posted by someone else, you would be absolutely horrified.

We have brought in in this chamber – we did not oppose this either – the post-and-boast laws. If these kids did that – I do not know if they are being charged or not; I do not know the full history of the story. The post-and-boast laws are very important to stop that type of behaviour. This is why when we are talking about the devices and the restriction of devices in government and non-government schools it is actually really important, because it must be infuriating. Even in this chamber now, if you look around, you can see how many people are on their devices.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: That is all right. They are not listening. It is all good. But you can imagine the frustration of trying to be a teacher teaching a class with the constant distraction of devices all the time. It is hard. I give a shout-out to the teachers. I could not do their job at all. I would have no chance. They do an incredible job. They are there to educate our children, and they do a terrific job in what I would say, especially in some schools, is quite a challenging environment. To say we are going to restrict these personal devices is a positive step.

It is interesting. The member for Monbulk – I will reference her again – earlier touched on how our social interactions have changed over time. Now kids jump on the phone or text with WhatsApp or whatever. Even when you go out for dinner you see people picking up their phone, and you think, 'What? I thought we were going out for dinner.' Then you find – I hate this, to be honest – they are telling you about their lives through their phone: 'I did this and I did that.' I go, 'Put your phone away. Let's have a beer. Let's have a conversation and be normal people, not live our lives through electronic devices.' I actually think, especially for teachers in our school system, the restriction of devices is a positive thing – absolutely no doubt.

The other part I want to touch on here is the student data collection section of the bill. In a committee, I think it was last year, we talked about data collection and who owns the data and what the concerns are around that data. I can fully appreciate that data collection could need to happen in a school environment. I do not so much have a problem with that, but I think we have to be very cautious and very concerned about data collection and where that data goes and who that data goes to. To be honest, I am not 100 per cent over this detail, so I am just expressing my own personal concern, particularly after I sat on this committee when we talked about data collection, who owns the data and who can obtain the data. I hope in this situation that the data collected about students is kept very secure and very private. We know it happens quite often where we have big breaches of data security and big companies get – what do they call it? Pirated, or what is it?

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, data breach. They get hacked. That is the word. Thanks, guys, for helping me out. We have seen it time and time again where they get hacked and that information gets released. I do not know how this is going to be structured – I am not 100 per cent over that detail – but I really hope they have thought about the security of the data collection and how they are going to protect that security and make sure that that is rock-solid secure, because the last thing anyone wants is their private details getting out into the cloud or on the internet or whatever. I really hope they have got some strong support around this data collection. I understand it can be necessary – I get that – but I am concerned about security and data hacks that do happen. We have seen it happen with Optus. That was a big data hack in this country. I hope they have got all the security around that.

We are talking about education today. What I would like to see, particularly in my electorate, is a bit of investment in education, because I do see the government time and time again stand up and say, 'We've built all these schools, we've done this, we've done that. We've built new schools all over the state,' but I am yet to see one in my electorate. It is a bit of a failure of the government when you have

got a government that says, 'We govern for everybody; we govern for all', yet in my area, in my patch, there has not been one new school in over 50 years – not one. That is not governing for all as far as I am concerned; that is governing for your own. Especially when you hear the schools they list that are all in Labor seats. You never hear them list a school in a Liberal seat. I would like to hear the Minister for Education list a school in a Liberal seat.

The schools in my area need help. They need significant investment. I am in a growing region. I have Drouin Secondary College – which is undergoing expansion at the moment, I will admit that – which has got 1200 kids on a landlocked site. We have got another landlocked site in Drouin, Drouin Primary School, which just had an extension, but they cannot go any further. These are the two main schools in Drouin and they cannot grow any more than what they have grown. When the government stands up and says, 'We're investing in education, we're investing in schools,' well, my electorate needs new schools – new schools, not the expansion of existing ones that are on landlocked sites that cannot be developed anymore. A failure of this government in my electorate is on the delivery of new schools. It is okay to reno an old one, but when it is landlocked and it cannot expand anymore, that is an issue. The government needs to sort itself out and start investing in schools.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:14): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on a really substantive and important piece of legislation in this place, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I might refer to it henceforth as ETRA. It builds upon not only a really sustained record of investment by this government in our school system but also a record of deep policy thinking and reform that has been led by successive ministers for education on this side of the house, commencing with the former Deputy Premier James Merlino, ably supported by the member for Mordialloc, and then Minister Hutchins and now the current Deputy Premier, Minister Carroll. They have had a relentless focus on evidence-based practice that improves outcomes for Victorian students irrespective of their postcode. That has been complemented by an additional $38.6 billion of new investment into our schools while growing the teaching workforce, and not just growing it but investing in it – investing in the capacity of our teachers, who are the single biggest resource that we have in our education system, investing in their capacity to make a pronounced difference in the lives of young people irrespective of where they live in Victoria. That is the single biggest lever that we have as a government to improve social mobility, to improve economic opportunity and to improve productivity in our state – investing in those young people via the relationship that they have with their classroom teachers.

So too have we invested in the capacity of school leaders and the next generation of school leaders, because so much in our system is asked of our principals, our assistant principals and our leading teachers. They are really the fulcrum through which reform flows. I have seen that firsthand as a teacher in our state schools, where the principal was really the conduit through which so many reform endeavours flowed into the school. It is simultaneously a potential point of failure but also a tremendous opportunity to amplify really deep thinking and policymaking and evidence-based policy that are occurring within the Department of Education and to translate that into a classroom. That cannot happen unless you support principals, assistant principals and others who are leading schools to translate all of that work and render it relevant in a classroom. Things like the academy supporting the next generation of school leaders is incredibly important.

Do not take my word for it; just look at the NAPLAN results. Look at the trajectory of Victoria's NAPLAN results over recent years. These things take some time to change. A system takes time to change and for the effect of changes within it to become apparent in results, but they are becoming apparent in results. In 18 of the 20 domains within NAPLAN, Victoria is leading the nation. It does not happen by accident; it happens because of a sustained, incremental reform agenda that this government has engaged in since 2014. It has transformed the outcomes that Victorian students are exhibiting. In doing so, it is transforming their life opportunities, the opportunities that they will have available to them after school, because they are equipped with the skills that they need to pursue whatever is the thing that they wish to engage with and embark upon in their life.

I think there is a uniform passion for education on this side of the house, and it has been interesting hearing the contributions indeed of all members. But the reason I think this bill is so important is that talent is not restricted by postcode, as the member for Mordialloc very aptly said before. I want to talk firstly about the dimension of this bill which seeks to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across all aspects of our education system from early childhood right through to the vocational education sector, and let us not forget the important work that the adult, community and further education sector does in our state as well. Ensuring that the education system is accessible and responsive to Aboriginal Victorians is an incredibly important dimension of closing the gap. We can see the divergence in outcomes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians experience. It remains an acute challenge for our state and, frankly, more broadly for our country, and we need to undertake practical, substantive reforms to seek to close that. That is why I think this bill is so important, because it seeks to do that by better embedding Indigenous history and perspectives within ETRA and within our school system and other educational settings.

The member for Mordialloc also talked really powerfully about the statement of recognition and what it, practically speaking, actually means. It is not just an abstract thing. I am very mindful of the years in which I was a secondary school teacher in a rural part of our state that had a relatively high concentration of Indigenous pupils. It was devastating to see the consequences of intergenerational disadvantage and trauma playing out in the classroom and, crucially, not in the classroom. The level of disengagement that too many young people from Indigenous backgrounds had with school was devastating because it was pointing towards a system failure that was setting those students up for failure in the longer term as well. The anecdotal evidence that was obtained by speaking with those students and speaking with their families in a pastoral sense and trying to engage and then re-engage those students in full-time education to seek to give them those building blocks and to improve those life chances was that the school system did not feel like an accommodating place for enough students from those Indigenous backgrounds. It was not a system which reflected their history or indeed the breadth of the history of our state.

I will not revisit the Redfern address, but I am always mindful of Paul Keating's words when we talk about the breadth of our history and the impact that it has had upon Aboriginal Victorians. There is, I think, an incumbent obligation upon those of us who are making policy in this place now to ensure that the education system is a welcoming place for all Victorians, including and perhaps particularly Indigenous Victorians, who, because of that intergenerational cycle of disadvantage and dispossession and trauma, are empirically performing at a lower level than the median student in the system. We have to close that gap. This bill seeks to do that by doing something important, embedding that statement of recognition and making some really powerful statements of truth about the history of this state.

In the time that is remaining to me I want to talk briefly about the unique student identifier reforms that this bill includes. That is a really important aspect of the bill, both for students but also for the system. Having worked in a dual-sector institution at a tertiary level before the USI system was brought in, I have seen how piecemeal our capacity to track students was and how it was for students navigating the system. Individual TAFEs might have had a student number and the previous Commonwealth higher education student support number system for university students spoke only to the university sector within the tertiary system. It did not allow students to be able to navigate easily the breadth of offerings that exists in our system, to move between school and the tertiary setting that was most relevant for them at any particular time, to move from university into the TAFE sector if that had the program that was best for them. The USI is important for students, but it is also incredibly important for policymakers at both state and federal government levels to understand what the trends within our tertiary system in particular, but in all aspects of education, actually are so that funding models can be better tailored to those trends and so that industry can better understand where students are orientating themselves within that system. The member for Narracan I think made some important points about data integrity, which I certainly endorse.

Finally, in the time that is remaining to me I want to talk briefly about the importance of the reforms on digital devices and wearable devices in schools. A Programme for International Student Assessment study in 2018 made the point that Australia had an enduring problem with low-level poor behaviour in classes, which led to disengagement, which meant it was really difficult for teachers to manage that behaviour. We have sought to improve that. We have improved that in Victoria as measured by NAPLAN results, and part of that is ensuring that teachers have the clear air, the space, to teach without the disruption and the distraction that digital devices cause. There are important safeguards to ensure that students with disability, those who may have vision impairment, are able to continue to use wearable devices, for example, that allow them to fully engage in the classroom. But broadly speaking this is a really sensible reform that will improve outcomes for Victorian students.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:24): I rise to talk on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. It is great when a bill comes through which we are not opposing. We can see that the adjustments being made here are going towards helping the education of our children, making it (1) safer and (2) easier for them and also giving some guidelines to our educators.

I would love to give a shout-out to all the educators across the Latrobe Valley, who have a diverse range of students that attend their schools. We really would be at a loss if we did not have such passionate people in charge of our children, educating them through. We have a problem – not only in Latrobe Valley but right across the state – with disenfranchised youth and making sure that they are engaged in the education system. A lot of the youth that are in trouble with the law have gone down the path of not worrying about attending school. That can be because of various things, but we need to make sure there is that pathway through to re-engage with these students, because probably the only pathway to educate them and make sure that we have a chance to alter their thinking is the education system. We need to make sure we are doing things in that area.

On the data collection one – which I did hear the member for Narracan talking about, and I know he did sit on a committee talking about this – data collection is probably a crucial piece of the puzzle. We are making sure that data collected on our students is made safe in this world that we live in now. With data collection at the forefront of how we go about our day-to-day living, we need to make sure that we do have a secure way of collecting that data and then, more importantly, storing that data so it does not fall into the wrong hands. We need to make sure that we do that. I agree wholeheartedly – and I think I have heard nearly every member on their feet talking about this – with requiring all schools to implement policies restricting students' use of personal electronic devices. There are some exceptional cases where these devices do help, but on the broader scale they are probably a distraction inside our schools, not only for the teachers but also for the students themselves. I think nowadays it does not matter where you go, if you are at a sporting event or, as I heard the member for Narracan say, out for tea, you see people on their devices all the time.

Moving around and engaging with the schools and talking to the students, probably one of the first things that you do realise is the need for the art of actually being able to hold a conversation, whether they be younger students or even teenagers. Nowadays they rely heavily on their devices to communicate, and the art of actually being able to stand up and have a conversation with another person or other people in an environment is super important for a young person's growth as they move through from being a child into teenage years and then into adulthood. That is a lost art. I do worry a little bit about what it is going to be like in another decade in terms of that reliance on our devices. That has probably slipped through the cracks a little bit; it was just part of the norm to have a digital device on your person as you walked around.

We need to make sure that we are engaging with the students at school. I think it is only fair and reasonable that these devices are stored somewhere safely at school, so that when the children are there, they are actually there to learn; they are not distracted. There is so much outside noise these days that can actually distract people from learning. I have never been a teacher, but I can sense the frustration of those in the chamber that have been who have actually talked about that outside noise and looking out at their class and knowing that people were not taking your information in because

they were distracted. It used to be back in my day that we were distracted looking out the window, wanting to get out and play sport. But these days it is a little handheld device. So having rules and regulations that can be implemented and put in place I think is a great reform that we can actually do.

The Albert Street Primary School is an interesting one in Moe – a very proactive school. It is only a small school. They have a student with type 1 diabetes at the school. They have done a lot of work across the journey and I have asked questions of the minister, because with a student with type 1 diabetes in a school, the school actually gets no additional funding to be able to help that student out. We need to go beyond what we are talking about here. We want those students to come to school, we want them to engage and we want them to have the same prospects as any other child that goes through school. The Albert Street Primary School have, to their credit, off their own bat educated teachers about type 1 diabetes. This student actually wears a monitor, which alerts the staff and also his mother when he is having a high or a low. Without that, the student would not be able to go to school, run around and be part of that school environment. So we need to make sure of and look further into the prospect of actually getting some decent funding for students with type 1 diabetes that are in schools, because it is becoming more and more relevant for these students that have the condition of diabetes, and especially type 1 diabetes. We need to make sure that we are adequately giving the school the funding to be able to help out those students.

I also had a mother with a couple of stories about our bus services and how trying to get kids to school around regional Victoria is not as easy as jumping on a train or jumping on a bus here in metropolitan Melbourne. I had a mum from Glengarry and she was advocating on behalf of 24 children that are out and around that area of Glengarry in the Latrobe Valley. The children had no bus transport to get to school, so there was reliance on parents and neighbours to get these kids to school. I think talking with the relevant ministers about trying to change a bus route to pick up these students – and it was not one particular child, it was up to 24 children. I think we need to be looking in those areas to make sure that we are making policies to make our students safer and make it easier for them to learn in school. But we have actually got to get them to school, and these are bits and pieces that do matter to mums and dads that are in regional Victoria. If you have not got a bus and Mum and Dad are at work, it is very hard to get your child to school.

Then we had the insane case of a mum that came to our office. Her son who was seven and her daughter who was five were on a school bus going to school, and that was fine for term 1 and term 2, but the school bus was full, and unbelievably her son was removed – he lost his seat on the bus. His mother was obviously up in arms about her child losing his position on the bus. But the kicker is that his five-year-old sister was still able to get on the bus to go to school, and she had to go to school by herself. This is not just a one-off case, localised in my area; the member for Gippsland East was saying he has also had a couple of these cases. We are bringing in these bits and pieces to make our education system stronger and better, but we need to make sure that fundamentally getting our kids to school safely is also taken on board as well, because it is tough and it is hard for parents in regional Victoria.

As I said at the start, we support the bill. We do not oppose it, because we need to make sure that our kids in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria are getting the best education.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (15:34): It is a pleasure to rise on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I think that education is one of the greatest investments that we can make in this state and for our future. It is not only an important investment, obviously, into our young generation and our children, but it really is about building our future and building our communities and our future communities. As a former teacher, I do know that learning happens a lot more than just in the classroom – it happens outside in the big, wide world – but it is about creating environments where children feel safe, they feel belonging, they feel valued and they feel respected. Those are places where they can then thrive.

This bill does deliver a series of practical reforms. It certainly is about strengthening our education and training system from very early childhood through to secondary and beyond. Some of the measures I

will go to in a moment are in the bill, and they are really united in a common purpose, and that is around making sure our education system continues to be modern, continues to meet all of our needs and obviously reflects our values of inclusion, safety and excellence.

What does this bill do? Well, there are a few things that this bill strengthens. It strengthens Aboriginal recognition and self-determination within our education and training system. It introduces some consistent minimum standards, requiring all schools to have policies around the restrictions on and the use of personal devices, and I will go and talk more in depth to that in just a moment. It does, obviously, modernise the teaching registration framework administered by, as I know it and as I say, the VIT, as I was a teacher that was registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching. And finally, it enables improvements for the Victorian student register so students can be assigned a unique student identifier to create a smoother pathway as they go through their training and their courses and into employment. My son, who has just turned 16, just applied for the unique student identifier, and it was a really easy process. It is a great way for him to now be set up as he goes through the more senior years at school. These are some varied things within this bill. I just want to touch on a couple of those. As I have said, we really want to make sure that our education system is inclusive and safe, and for someone who has worked in the school system before, I know it has changed over the time since I was in the classroom. A lot of things have changed – the technology has changed, our curriculum has changed and our expectations in our community have changed.

It is interesting that just recently I had the Minister for Education visit my state high school, Bellarine Secondary College. What we did was a round table with young students and young leaders of the school across all various year levels. They really spoke with honesty and they were really forthcoming in all the things that they see as challenges but also as opportunities as they go through high school. I remember a student – and I have actually run into her several times after meeting her at the school. She is a First Nations student, and she spoke so honestly and really beautifully about her experiences through school, but she was honest and she said that she still experiences racism both at school and in the wider community. She really wanted to see a greater understanding of First Nations history. She wanted to have an improvement in our truth-telling through schools, really just so we can learn and grow from that shared history. What struck me most about her, though, was as she was speaking it was not just for her; she was speaking about her peers and her future as a First Nations young woman. She wanted to find employment or opportunity or further training, and she wanted to know those places would be culturally safe for her. She is a very proud First Nations woman, and she certainly struck me as someone who was really confident in speaking up. I was really pleased to hear the things that she was talking about. That conversation has certainly stayed with me. After the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, we have heard stories about that impact of racism and the impact of colonisation, and clearly education has a role to play here and certainly has a role to play in the truth-telling.

This bill, just to go into a little bit more depth, will introduce a statement of recognition that acknowledges the unique status of First Nations people in Victoria, outlines historic and ongoing facts that impact First Nations learning and wellbeing outcomes and also confirms Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives as forming part of the learning areas that are subject to that free instruction in schools. It certainly acknowledges that we need to improve the outcomes for First Nations learners. It does require Aboriginal and First Nations voices to help shape the education system itself, and we certainly want to have, as I have talked about, that culturally safe environment to support all our students to thrive. Something that we are very proud to have here in Victoria is our treaty. Certainly it is something that we should not only lean into but actually be very proud of. In our schools we should be teaching our First Nations history in an honest way so our students can all learn from the past but also come together and unite in a way to celebrate our First Nations culture.

When I was teaching in primary school I had grade 6. Australian studies was on the curriculum, and students would research where they had come from and their backgrounds. We also learned about our First Nations students and our First Nations culture, but I must say that that was very limited in what was discussed. It was probably not a fulsome conversation that we were having at the time, and that

was many years ago. I think that if I was teaching now in a grade 6 classroom, it would be a very different lesson. This is the start of making sure that our system is going to be addressing those honest conversations that need to be had.

In the few minutes left I just want to talk a little bit about the role of technology and how technology is changing in the classroom. Last time I was teaching, the iPads and the electronic whiteboards were just coming in, students were really excited to be learning on the iPads, and the screen time was not excessive. We were still doing lots of handwriting and writing in books. But over time there is no doubt that technology infiltrated our classrooms. It has opportunities but it has absolute challenges. We need to understand that the devices are competing for the students' attention. It is a challenge for students, but it is also a challenge for teachers, and I have heard lots of people reference that today in this debate. It is a challenge for teachers to monitor, and it is a challenge for teachers to ask students to put them away.

My daughter is not too happy about me having to put her phone in a box at the start of the day at the office for her collect at the end of the day. She does not like that. She is attached to that phone. It is like losing a kidney sometimes if I ask her to put it down. But it is really important that they understand – she knows, I tell her often – that it is hard for parents as well, dealing with it. I completely understand how a classroom can really be disrupted by the devices that we have now. We want to make sure that this bill has policies that will give, I suppose, power and some strength to the schools to have restrictions and to ensure that personal devices are not going to be disruptive in school hours.

We have already done this through our government schools. When I visit schools, even primary schools, teachers will say that just keeping devices out of the room makes a huge difference, that there is more engagement and there is more meaningful interaction. There are some students who really do well at monitoring their screen time. I have talked especially to VCE students who really need to put the distraction away. They put it under their bed or they take it to the kitchen and then they go study somewhere else so they are not distracted by the phone. Some can handle that really well and manage their time really well, some cannot. I think I might be a parent that will have to teach my daughter how to manage her time. This bill is really important. It is strengthening our education system. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (15:44): It is a pleasure to stand and make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. I want to make a few comments on a couple of elements of this bill. The first one is the push to get increased recognition of and learnings about our Indigenous community into the Victorian curriculum. This is something that I have mentioned on a few occasions in different forums, that we need to do more on our Australian history, both our Indigenous history but also our wartime history and those men and women who served our country and gave their lives. As I said, I have spoken about this in a number of forums. When I was at school, which was a fair while ago, I do concede, in much of our history classes we would learn about things like the Great Wall of China, like the pyramids, like Roman history, but we did so very, very little on both our Australian Indigenous history and our local Indigenous history. I represent an electorate that is very significant and is steeped in Indigenous history.

But also since colonisation unfortunately much of our Australian history has been enveloped by war. There was the First World War and the Second World War. We had the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The Boer War was the first one, and then there have been subsequent missions overseas of more recent times. The level of contribution from some of these smaller Victorian communities was just incredible. You only have to walk around some of our cenotaphs in our regional towns and look at the honour boards in some of our town halls and RSL sub-branches to see that very, very significant contribution that was made by those communities. Yet when I was going through school and going through the curriculum, we learned so very little about that. It was almost like something we did not want to talk about. We do have some elements of our community talk about the fact that we cannot glorify war, and I certainly accept and acknowledge that, but I think we all have an obligation, every single one of us, to remember and respect and honour.

Some schools do it very differently to others. Nagle College in my electorate and also the Bairnsdale Secondary College of recent times have had far more focus on that level of history, both our Indigenous history and recognising the sacrifices that were made during wartime. In about 11 days I will be taking 35 year 11 students across the Kokoda Trail. That is like herding cats, I can tell you. Getting 35 passports organised, getting visas done and getting all that sort of stuff organised is difficult, but it is a very, very worthwhile exercise. I will be accompanied by the member for Murray Plains, and I will also be accompanied by the member for Narracan, who will be assisting me. They will have students from their areas. While I am talking about the member for Narracan, there are a number of members on both sides of this chamber that have trekked Kokoda, and the only MP who has not made it and had an airlift out is the member for Narracan. He got a lovely chopper ride last time, but he is coming back this year and will hopefully make it the whole way. We will try and nurse him across the trail and see if we can get him to the other side. But well done to him for accompanying those students in his area to do that. I am certainly supportive of that element of the bill that looks at our Australian Indigenous history, but I also think we have got some room to move in recognising the people who made the ultimate sacrifice – let us be honest – so we can enjoy the freedoms and the life that we enjoy today. I think we could have a lot more of that in our Indigenous history. Incidentally, I have got the member for Narracan just calling me. He must be sitting in his office listening to this sledge. All the best, Mr Farnham, wherever you are watching from.

I also want to talk for a little while about the move to get phones out of classrooms. Other members on both sides of the chamber have spoken about this. I have not heard a dissenting voice from either side of the chamber, and I am certainly not going to be a dissenting voice. It is interesting because I had a little thing pop up on my phone a few nights ago to tell me that I had spent 6 hours that day on my phone. I was sort of semi-horrified by how much time that I had spent, not even really thinking about it. If someone had asked me, I would not have anticipated it was that long. So it does become addictive and it does become a habit, and there is no place for it in the education system.

Being the father of some kids who have been through the teenage years, I had one particular son – apart from being my son, my great mate – who was just addicted to his phone. When he was 16 I made the tough call and took it off him for six months, after a couple of warnings. Of course I was the worst person on earth. I had stopped him from having interactions with his friends and I had basically cruelled his social life if you listened to him. But he has come back to me in subsequent years and acknowledged that he needed that action because it was pretty much out of control. He would be on it, by his own admission, at 1 and 2 in the morning, messaging friends. It was just this addictiveness to the screen time and the interaction.

Having been through that personally and seeing the removal of that, even if it was only for that six-month period, and getting him to look at where he was heading through a different set of eyes and to reflect on his behaviour and then him subsequently acknowledging that later – although he reckoned it was the worst thing of all time to ever happen to him – by saying that the right thing was done, I would hope that today's generation can reflect on this decision that we are making as a Parliament and say, 'The right decision was made.' Not only do we have to control it at home, as the previous speaker referred to, but there is just no place for this to occur at school, so I am very, very supportive of that.

When I was going through my schooling years – and I dare say you, Speaker, with no disrespect – we did not have to worry about being addicted to mobile phones, because they did not exist. Having gone in as a local member of Parliament of relatively recent years, as I am sure we have all done in our schools, members on both sides of the chamber, we visit our schools on a very regular basis, and there is nothing more frustrating than when you are talking in a school environment and you can see kids on their mobile phones. They are just not listening, and they are away with the fairies. Whilst we are probably all a little bit boring at times as politicians addressing students, it is very difficult for teachers or anyone in that environment to get their message through when there is a level of distraction from the students, so I am fully supportive of that.

I also want to briefly just touch on the fact that, as other speakers have mentioned, this bill aligns with some national reforms that are coming into place across the various jurisdictions around the rollout of the unique student identifier. This will expand the type of data collected on our students, including the country of birth and various other pieces of information. You can only hope that that will be used for the benefit of improved educational outcomes across our education system here in Victoria. We need to make these changes. That is why we are not opposing this bill.

I will wind up by saying we certainly support the action on the mobile phones. We certainly support the action to introduce more understanding and more recognition of our Indigenous community within our school curriculum. I would also just finish off by reiterating that we can go a bit further. We have this huge focus on our returned service men and women as well as those who made the ultimate sacrifice on two different days of the year, predominantly Anzac Day and Remembrance Day, but there is much more room for that. I was recently in France, and when you walk into the school at Villers-Bretonneux – I know the member from Mildura has experienced this – the students at that school stand up and sing the Australian national anthem to you in English, such is their level of understanding and the huge part of the curriculum that wartime service is. Maybe we do not need to go that far, but we can certainly improve that element of our curriculum here in this state.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (15:54): I also rise with delight once again to talk about education. Before us is a bill that I am very happy to hear has got support from across all sides. I was listening intently to the member for Gippsland East, who was talking about his 16-year-old. I have a 16-year-old of my own – I will come back to that – but there are some similarities, member for Gippsland East. The strengthening of Aboriginal recognition and self-determination is a very crucial part of this bill, and it adds to the work that this government has done certainly during my time and before my time in this wonderful place. It is funny that at a time when we are battling ignorance in areas of our community, education is always the answer to the problem of ignorance. Other members have referred to the changes in education curriculums and such. I think we did a little bit of Australian history probably in year 8 at Fairhills High School back in the day – it would have been 1981 or something.

I do not remember doing much about Indigenous Australians. There were probably a few pictures of people with spears or something about kangaroos. That was about it. We probably spent a lot more time talking about Elizabeth I, and for me and my cohorts of that age that was to our detriment. The kids these days that we see at schools will never have that problem. That does not mean that we stop where we are. Obviously there is always more that we can do to enlighten with the wisdom of the oldest continuous living civilisation on this planet. Again, it stops me every time I say that, because there is only one of those on our planet. We have the luxury of living in the same country as that civilisation, and it is up to all of us, whether Indigenous or not, to enable the continuation of that, every day. Obviously we stand proudly with Indigenous Victorians now that we have a treaty and Gellung Warl. A shout-out to – I would not say one of my favourite constituents, as all my constituents are my favourite constituents – Rueben Berg, a former co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. He is a constituent of mine, and very proudly do I represent all of my constituents, including him.

The work that this government is doing to enhance the knowledge and wisdom of the next generation in regard to understanding the history of our great country can be imagined now, can be seen now, in the years that we have changed. A shout-out to the great Pinewood Primary School, who in the last couple of years have renamed their houses to Indigenous names. It is all part of them teaching the next generation about Indigenous knowledge. I think the longer that I am lucky enough to live in this wonderful world, the more we will see the benefit of the steps we take now. It is the kids that are going through our education system now that will never know any different. I personally think if they know a little bit less about Elizabeth I they can always grab a podcast. But we should know where we all come from. An important percentage of our community has been here for a very, very long time, and the rest of us are migrants. It is really important work that the minister is doing, and I congratulate him and his team on that work.

The other thing – and I did say I would come back to this – is regarding the use of devices. Similar to the member for Gippsland East – I presume his son is not 16 anymore, from his oratory, but one of mine is 16 – our eldest boy loves a device. He is going to hate me for this, by the way. He will not read it, but you never know in 20 years – sorry, Lindsay. We are going through a thing at the moment, similar to the story that I heard from the member for Gippsland East, where we are trying to balance the usage of the device that is a crutch with his peace of mind. The struggle we are facing right now is that when he leaves his room – as anyone who has had a 16-year-old in their house knows, they do not leave their room that much; they come out for food or money or school or something – his job is to unplug the AirPods. Anyway, this apparently is very difficult for Lindsay.

I will set the scene here. He is going to hate this, but anyway. Lindsay loves watching his computer. He has got his phone going as well, so he has got probably a game on the computer, he has got some anime thing or something and whatever music he is listening to going on his phone. He has got the earbuds in, and he has got the big set of headphones on him with the game. He is fully switched in. He enjoys that; that is lovely. But the job now for him is that when he leaves his room he has got to unplug. You would think this is a relatively easy sort of thing: you leave the door, you unplug. But no, it is very difficult.

As parents, we struggle with these challenges with our wonderful kids. But to know that when they go to school and they need to switch on to the education that will prepare them for the rest of their life, to know that when they get there it has got to go in the box or the locker or wherever it goes and it is away for the whole day is very reassuring for me at least as a parent. I remember when it came in a few years ago that Linds had a bit of a struggle trying to understand it. He got into trouble once because he had the device – he was outside the gate, waiting for the bell, on his device. He got corrected on that, and they took it off him. This caused a bit of a problem, I have got to tell you. He did not like having the phone taken off him. But we managed to convince him that he had to play by the rules because the next time they take it off him they have got to call Bec or me in to actually have a meeting before we get it, and that, as we are all very busy, could take a number of days. Similar to I think when the member for Gippsland East's son did not have his for six months – we have not done that to him – the threat of not having it has had some effect. That has worked well from a schooling point of view. I can see that with all of our kids.

I have mentioned before that Bec is a teacher at an independent school, and they historically have not had this rule. I can tell you that when this was put forward by the minister and his office this was very, very popular in my house with a certain teacher because –

A member interjected.

Matt FREGON: Well, you know, the kids will adjust; they are young. One of the problems – and I accept this with an independent school, especially where parents are paying fees and they have expectations and all these sorts of things – is that suddenly there will be some parents, not all, who think, 'Well, hang on, I want to be able to contact my kid.' That is one of the ones that comes up. You do not really need to if they are at school, because you will get a note if they are not. I think bringing this in gives those schools just the power behind them to say, 'No, no, this is everyone now, we are all the same, and if we are going to teach our children in the state of Victoria, they are going to be unplugged while we do it.'

In the last 40 seconds, I think we still have a question mark before us about the use of laptops in classrooms. I am not saying we should not use laptops in classrooms – they are very useful. But I did overhear a certain person, who I will not name – not my family – saying that he was playing a game in class. He had finished his work, so good on him, but I do wonder about the use of laptops too much. I am probably sounding like the senior I will be in three years, but are we losing some of the old skills like handwriting and things because we are relying on that digital technology in class too? I commend the bill to the house.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (16:04): It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026. Can I, from the very outset, thank the minister and his team for the work that they have put into this bill. As always, they are a great team. We have a very capable minister who should be very proud of this piece of legislation and of course all the reform that he has led in this period of government. Of course this is another piece of legislation that is helping to build the Education State, because Victoria is well and truly the Education State. I know it is very, very proudly emblazoned on millions of cars across this state, but it is not just a numberplate, and it is not just a saying – it lives and breathes in the actions and deeds of this government and in the deeds of successive Labor governments in building what we have today.

I am very proud to be part of this government, and I am very proud of its record when it comes to education. It has been a great pleasure, Acting Speaker De Martino – good to see you in the chair. Obviously, as a former teacher yourself, it is good to see you there. It was great to hear your contribution. I know that you are extremely passionate about education, from your own personal experience and professional experience, not just for your kids but for every single kid across your electorate and across Victoria. That absolutely showed in your contribution in this house today. On a personal note as well I would just like to congratulate you on becoming the new secretary to the parliamentary Labor Party. It is fantastic. With the indulgence of the house, congratulations.

Mathew Hilakari: What an indulgence.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you very much. I appreciate it, member for Point Cook. But congratulations – very well deserved. It is no secret that I do have a great deal of affection for the member for Monbulk. She is, as we often say, my Labor neighbour.

Mathew Hilakari: An extension of time.

Jackson TAYLOR: How long do you have, member for Point Cook? She is about to call a point of order herself. But it is always wonderful to hear your musings and your contribution on education. It has been a great pleasure working with you these past nearly four years now, Acting Speaker.

The member for Bellarine gave a wonderful contribution and spoke about the importance of education in her electorate and the impact this piece of legislation will have. The member for Mordialloc has many gears. It is odd to not see the member for Mordialloc riffing during an MPI or a grievance debate, but it is always nice to hear him talking policy, because he does it with such eloquence. He is an absolute professional, and he is certainly someone in this government who is very proud of the Education State they have built in their own patch out in Mordialloc. I know he has done a great deal of work. The member for Ashwood I think went with no notes. That was quite impressive, I must say – no notes, member for Footscray. He gave a fantastic contribution, and it was nice to listen to someone with a few more years on this planet who has seen a few things that I have not in their time. The member for Ashwood always gives a sterling contribution.

Of course, as I said, this is something that we are very proud of here in Victoria, the Education State. This bill is another piece of reform which seeks to cement that and make sure we are continuously improving on what we have here in Victoria. This bill seeks to strengthen Aboriginal recognition and self-determination across the early childhood education, schooling, vocational education and training and adult community and further education systems. It also requires that schools have a policy that restricts student use of personal electronic devices within school hours, which has been quite a feature of debate and I imagine will continue to be a feature given the impact it has had not just in Victoria but now Australia-wide, that policy being implemented. Across the globe I have seen a whole range of governors in the United States now talking about how this policy has been rolled out in places like Pennsylvania, and it is having an extremely beneficial impact. Of course we were one of the first places, certainly in Western democracies, to roll it out so successfully. I am not surprised that it is a big part of this debate. It is this government that has led the way and this government that has paved the way for the rest of the Australian jurisdictions. I am pleased to see further legislating and working

with our school sector when it comes to this important reform. This bill is also about improving the teacher registration framework administered by the Victorian Institute of Teaching. It will expand the information collected and retained by the Victorian student register to include country of birth and other information prescribed by the regulations and make other minor technical amendments.

Ultimately this bill does quite a lot in terms of amendments, building on the work of the Andrews and Allan Labor governments. We know that education is absolutely the most important public investment we can make in our future, and the Allan Labor government has absolutely set a strong foundation for education here in Victoria. One thing I have always said in my role is that education is my absolute number one priority. Of course governments have lots of important things we do, and in state government we have some serious responsibilities around education, health, transport and the even greater need to respond to the cost-of-living pressures that we have seen the Labor government respond to, whether it be the 20 per cent off rego rebate or half-price public transport. But education has got to be front and centre. It is about building the future. I know it is one of those phrases that get used all the time, like when everyone started saying '21st-century facilities'. Luckily that one has been phased out.

We now use words like 'modern' and 'bright', which will have their day as well soon. But genuinely, it is the most important thing; it is the greatest leveller in society. And you can tell a lot about a government and you can tell a lot about a society, about what their values are, by how they value education and the money that they spend. And what this Labor government has done is completely revolutionise the way that education is funded in this state and of course the way that we reform through pieces of legislation in this place today, which I wish a very speedy passage to.

When you look at the reforms we have made in kindergarten, there is that universal access to three- and four-year-old kindergarten and free kinder, making sure the cost – your credit card – is no barrier. But simply having a child being able to participate in that system, not being locked out because of cost prohibition, has been huge. In lifting the amount of hours we have seen the results in how they have stacked up across the globe and the amount of work that a child's brain does in the first four years of life to grow and to mature. So the research is there, the work is there, and Victoria led the way, and again, the rest of Australia adopted it.

We led the way when it came to free TAFE courses. We have now got well and truly over 80 free TAFE courses. People are getting out there, getting the necessary qualifications for the jobs of tomorrow and making a living in many different priority industries. And that has again been taken up by other states, which is now a wonderful partnership with the Albanese federal government. But that is purely as a result of the determination and grit of this Labor government to back in education reforms and to not take the easy way out but to take the hard decisions and to provide the investment.

Again, make no mistake, my number one priority in my electorate is around education, and I have been really proud, member for Narre Warren North – excellent, I nailed it – to lead only the eighth education plan in my electorate. The Bayswater education plan was only the eighth. We worked with the four Bayswater primary schools and Bayswater Secondary College, and it was about school improvement. It was about bringing together the wonderful educators in our local system throughout the Bayswater suburb. It was about making sure that we were talking not just about capital improvements – I know as local members it is really important that our communities turn to us about making sure we secure the facilities that our students and staff and communities deserve – but about school improvement. It was about improving curriculum. It was about getting the schools working together for student and staff excellence. And it was about building on the foundation that they already had at those schools, and it has had a fantastic outcome.

Primarily the focus of it, to be fair, was Bayswater Secondary College, and it has gone from strength to strength. A few years ago they had 170 or 180 students. It was a very different vibe. And now when you look at the school that is there today, Liz Swan, the principal, is doing incredible work. When we opened those new buildings – I said it is not about capital, but yes, we also did deliver some capital

upgrades, some $13 million in new senior and middle school learning buildings, which is critically important to make sure that kids are learning in those contemporary environments – when we walked into the place it was different. I could not even remember it. It was a great school made even better through leadership, through planning, through collaborative investment and through place-based work, and the education plan made a huge difference.

I am very proud that in my electorate of Bayswater we have delivered close to $100 million in capital upgrades. I know that lots of members – not just members of the government but everyone – have a story to tell here. We have delivered half of the new schools across Australia right here in Victoria, and we have all got a story to tell. Education, by and large, is a very bipartisan issue, and I am very pleased by that. And I hope that we continue to see successive Labor governments continuing to build the Education State, and in my last 3 seconds I will commend the bill to the house.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:14): It is not really possible to be able to top the fantastic member for Bayswater and the way that he just made an outstanding contribution to a very important and significant piece of legislation that goes to exactly what the member for Bayswater and others on this side of the house know and understand, and that is that consistent, reliable, solid investment in education, making opportunities for our youngest Victorians to have a chance to get their very best start, is indeed something that this government is focused on today and will be focused on tomorrow. Proudly, over the journey of the past 12 years that we have had the opportunity to be on this side of the house, member for Bayswater, this government has made nearly $40 billion of investment into education in this state.

Acting Speaker De Martino, it is quite fortunate that you are in the chair at this point in time, because I think – knowing and understanding your background – just the opportunity to work with our young people and understand how important teaching is is indeed something that this government knows and understands. In just the last budget, having the opportunity to give Sam Carlton, who is the principal at Kismet Park Primary School in my electorate, a phone call and announce more than $11 million to modernise and upgrade Kismet Park Primary, a terrific local primary school, was indeed great. What that does is enable the terrific teaching workforce and the support staff to be able to deliver high-quality education, and that builds upon more than $100 million invested in local schools within my electorate. It builds upon investments at Diggers Rest Primary School, Sunbury College, Sunbury Downs College, Salesian College, Gladstone Park Secondary, Gladstone Park Primary, Gladstone Views Primary, Sunbury Primary, Sunbury West Primary and many more. The member for Bayswater is right when he says that capital investment is certainly not the only thing that matters for schools, but having the ability to make those new, better facilities and new classrooms and a new opportunity for an environment that is fit for purpose and caters for growth is something that is really, really important.

What we have remained focused on, and what this bill will continue to do through the significant and important reforms that it contains, is build upon that notion around the Education State. We speak a lot in this chamber – all of the research suggests the importance of the first 1000 days in a child's life – about the investment in early ed. We then go to investment and support around primary school. I think in listening to the contributions that have been made so far, there is the recognition and the understanding of programs like the breakfast club; the free glasses program; the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund; and the Smile Squad. All of those wraparound support services that we are able to provide in a school setting make for opportunity. When those opportunities are missed, when those opportunities are not funded and when we see, like we did in the period from 2010 to 2014, the education maintenance allowance cut and significant cuts from the other side of the house when it comes to education in this state, it does significant damage to our youngest Victorians, and that is simply not fair.

What we set out to do is to level the playing field for those who may not have that support and those opportunities at home. We remain committed to focusing on student wellbeing and on supporting young people to get the opportunities to be their best. In so many ways that is a really simple premise, but there are the complexity and the dynamic nature that exist in a school setting, and of course we

grapple with so many challenges that young people do experience and certainly those challenges that arise through the use of technology. I think what I have said in the house before and what many other members have pointed out as well is indeed that technology can play a significant, important role in so many ways, but having proper safeguards and important regulation and control around the use of tech is really important. This bill goes to some of those measures. But what is important is to provide for the best workforce, the best support and that additional and sustained capital growth that we know is really important in our schools within this state. We have got an opportunity, through this piece of legislation, to make for an even better system, and the government is always looking for those opportunities. We will consistently work with those that provide important research to the department. We will consistently work with our teachers and of course the union representatives and those that work within schools. Of course all of the conversations that you have as a parent, as a guardian or as a friend of a school are really important to have, because what it means is that we are listening and responding to the needs of students.

The other area that I did want to go to in the 3½ minutes that I have got remaining is of course the investment in special ed, and we know just how important that is. I want to give a shout-out to the amazing team at Sunbury and Macedon Ranges Specialist School, both the Sunbury campus and the Bullengarook campus in the member for Macedon's electorate. The investment that has been made to upgrade every single special school in the state is indeed another significant and important value proposition from this government, because that, I think, is exactly what it is. It speaks to where we value investment, it speaks to where we want to support, and it goes to those matters that I mentioned earlier in the contribution, which of course are about making sure that everyone in this state has an opportunity. Everyone in this state has a right to learn and have the opportunity to be their best. What these investments and the work of the minister, the department and the entire team remain focused on is making sure that that investment continues through the budgetary process and all of those programs and initiatives that I mentioned earlier. They are extremely important, they are really valued by the workforce and they are really valued by, I think, Victorians.

There is of course an alternative approach. There is the approach we saw from 2010 to 2014: those savage and damaging cuts that those opposite inflicted on Victorian schools. We then had to play catch-up from that period of November 2014 onwards. I sat in meetings in 2015 and pulled out the books with the terrific education minister at the time, who you know very well, Acting Speaker, and there were no plans for new schools – there was just a blank book with nothing in it – and there was significant and sustained population growth in this state. You simply wonder what was going on in those four years. Where were the priorities? Where was the work? Where was the planning? Well, no, there was just nothing there. I distinctly remember sitting in those meetings and listening to the minister at the time talk about catch-up and the investment that we had to make. Fast-forward and go back to those numbers that I rattled off before. This government will always prioritise education in this state. We have got a strong and proud record of delivering in schools and of course in the entire education system, because we realise the importance of the society that you can create when you invest in education and the economic benefits that flow from that.

The provisions that are contained within this bill go to providing for a better and stronger and fairer system. For those reasons I certainly support the bill, and I want to acknowledge the work that has been done in getting us to this point and making sure that the opportunity to continue to invest is always there, because we maintain our focus on that. With those remarks, I commend the bill to the house.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (16:24): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motions of Ben Carroll:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (16:24): I fear that I am going to need an extension of time to speak on these bills, because there is a lot to cover and I have got quite into the weeds, actually. I am really pleased to speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. As we know, these are being debated together as cognate bills. I want to start with: why do we have occupational health and safety legislation? We need to have occupational health and safety legislation for a reason. It is about protecting the people and it is about protecting workers. It is about protecting the physical and psychological health, safety and welfare of workers. The core purpose of the legislation is to prevent workplace deaths, injuries and diseases. It is governed by the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, which is being amended here.

I mentioned that one of the key core purposes is to prevent workplace deaths, and I want to reflect on that for a moment, because the number of deaths in the workplace is too high. If I look at the data from the last decade, in 2014–15 there were 20 workplace deaths. Last year there were 53. It seems that prior to 2018–19 the numbers were in the 20s. Lately they have been in the 50s or 60s. At the moment, as of 9 June, we have had 19 confirmed workplace fatalities. These deaths are too high in Victoria. At the minute it is a bit of a decrease on last year, but we know if you look at a decade ago, there is a long way to go to really make some changes here.

The legislation that we have around already, the occupational health and safety legislation, has clear duties and things that it is trying to do to make sure that workplaces are as safe as possible. Some of these objectives include eliminating hazards at the source. This requires businesses to identify and remove or minimise workplace risks before harm occurs – I think all of us here would know and understand that and have probably been subject to a bit of a check here and there to make sure that safety is paramount where we work and those hazards are reduced – and also to protect the public, to ensure that work activities do not endanger the health and safety not just of employees but of the general public. Another core purpose is to promote collaboration, and that is fostering cooperation between employers, employees and worker representatives to establish and apply safe standards. Of course there is a legal framework around this, which outlines specific rights for workers and enforcement powers for WorkSafe. It is WorkSafe that is the overarching body.

We have dangerous goods legislation in existence at the moment, and it is important to have this legislation because there are catastrophic risks attached to a number of hazardous chemicals. These are things that we deal with in everyday life, and it is easy to take it for granted that the risks associated with dangerous goods are managed, but there is legislation that sits around that. There is compliance as well as enforcement that are needed to make sure that our streets are safe, our workers are safe and people in communities are safe as well. That legislation is to prevent catastrophic incidents and mandate safe practices for manufacturing, storing and transporting substances that, for example, are explosive, flammable, combustible or corrosive. I will talk about those a little bit later.

To enforce the accountability here is about deterring reckless behaviour by imposing strict penalties, because dangerous goods can have quite catastrophic and wideranging impacts. These penalties, particularly around industrial fires and illegal chemical stockpiling, which has occurred, again are about protecting public health – about keeping the workers and the general public safe from chemical exposure, poisoning and large-scale environmental damage. These laws are governed and enforced by WorkSafe, so if you are involved in the extraction, production, manufacture, transport, sale or use of dangerous goods you need to be protected, but you need to make sure that those in that work environment are also protected. That is so broad that if you have the tankers driving down a highway,

you want to know that if they are carrying something that is explosive it is marked properly and they are perhaps taking the safest route through the cities. I am a bit alarmed that I am not sure that that actually happens now. You get some trucks carrying really highly explosive materials heading down King Street, which is an area in the middle of the city with a lot of traffic, a lot of people and a lot of offices. I think that that is something that we need to have a look at perhaps in the future.

The dangerous goods legislation and the occupational health and safety legislation work hand in hand. They are particularly intertwined. The changes that are being made through these bills are complex, but they are being debated concurrently because they are very intertwined. It makes sense to do so, and I had no issue whatsoever in agreeing to that.

The purpose here today is to create a new principal act to regulate the transport of dangerous goods, including high-consequence dangerous goods and explosives by vessel on inland waters, by road or by rail to promote public safety and protect property and the environment from harm. That is creating a new principal act. I have mentioned already that there is an existing Dangerous Goods Act 1985, but this bill creates a new act because it is about the transport of dangerous goods. Also the Occupational Health and Safety Act will be amended to incorporate the regulation of the handling of dangerous goods, excluding their transport, because that is going to be in the other bill. It will repeal the existing Dangerous Goods Act 1985 on commencement, which is going to occur sometime in the future, hopefully well before 2028, which is an exceptionally long lead time. I understand that it is complex, but I certainly think that by 2028 – on my birthday in fact. Because the Dangerous Goods Act is going to be repealed, the Occupational Health and Safety Act will provide the regulatory framework for handling dangerous goods in Victoria once that is repealed. It is important to understand that there are two bills before the house. One is an amendment, and the other is the creation of a new bill. Our position here is not to oppose these. I would have been very keen to have supported these bills. I do have a couple of concerns. Some of them I will outline towards the end. But the timeframes to get these important changes made are particularly long.

How did this come about? What caused these bills to be on the agenda in the first place? Why was the legislation being reviewed? We had a couple of catastrophic fires as a result of illegal chemical stockpiling. They released toxic smoke and hazardous substances into surrounding communities. Most notably, there was the West Footscray blaze that burnt for two weeks in August 2018 and a major fire at the Campbellfield chemical waste facility in April 2019 that took several days to bring under control.

I just want to mention quickly the 2018 fire in Somerville Road, Tottenham. 140 firefighters and 30 appliances battled this inferno. It was contained after 14 hours, but the firefighters remained onsite for quite some time to manage hotspots and hazardous run-off. They were there for another couple of weeks. One thing that was particularly concerning for the firefighters was that they were so hampered by the narrow passageways created by the illegally stacked shipping containers and thousands of 44-gallon drums. The illegal chemical stockpiling was an issue. The warehouse was not registered under the Dangerous Goods Act to store hazardous chemicals. There was a regulatory failure. The post investigations revealed thousands of litres of volatile solvents – acetones, for example – detergents and welding chemicals. Not only was this a disaster in the spot where it happened, but it caused other environmental disasters and community health concerns. There were plumes of smoke. Suburbs were affected. In Yarraville, Brooklyn and Kingsville people were urged to stay indoors. Symptoms of exposure were raised, and there was an asbestos risk. There was a wildlife impact. Water containing PFAS et cetera entered Stony Creek, killing approximately 2500 fish, eels and birds. The clean-up took ages. The one in Campbellfield took probably six months, maybe a little bit more later, and it was also a disaster, you would say. It took four days to fully extinguish. Two workers were hospitalised. When we have our firefighters and emergency workers going into these situations, it is very, very risky. This is where they really are tested – their skills and how they manage things.

Again, there were failures here. There was excessive storage. At the time of the fire they had approximately 330,000 litres of chemicals, more than double the 154,000-litre limit. The EPA had suspended the licence just weeks earlier, discovering the company had three times its permitted waste.

There were unsafe conditions, things were stacked too high. Again, there were environmental disasters. Ten nearby schools were closed, and that is a huge impact for communities and families. The local creek required a major clean-up by Melbourne Water and the EPA to try and contain toxic sludge. The air quality was low. There was a 'watch and act' in place for some time. These were pretty catastrophic fires that occurred.

It is quite ironic that whilst we have these bills before us now, only last week there was a fire at a Campbellfield chemical plant which was licensed to receive and dispose of chemicals. Twenty-three firefighting appliances and 70 firefighters worked quickly to contain that. As a result of these pretty awful fires that we had, the government realised that they needed to do something about it. There was a review that took place. It was conducted by Andrew Palmer, who is now KC but was not at the time. The brief was to address contemporary challenges in managing dangerous goods, which he did, and it was released in October 2022. That was 3½ years ago. Now we have an implementation date of April 2028. This is such a long period of time. That is 10 years after the first incident, and I just do not think that is good enough.

The review specifically recommended, through recommendations 3.1, 11.4 and 13.2, that Victoria's dangerous goods legislation be incorporated within the OH&S act and regulations. This is where we see the OH&S act being amended, and other areas are going to be put into the regulations. It was recommended that dangerous goods transport be regulated by its own act and that explosives and high-consequence dangerous goods be regulated under separate legislation. The reforms that we have here are about embedding dangerous goods regulation into the existing OH&S act, including a new duty to handle dangerous goods safely. It creates the new Dangerous Goods Transport Act, covering rail, road, boat and inland waterways. If you think about how dangerous goods are transported, we import a lot of things. Some of them might come in by ship through Melbourne's ports, or they might come in by plane out at the airport.

This makes it an offence to risk serious injury or death involving dangerous goods, and it strengthens WorkSafe's powers – the ability to enforce compliance – and gives the courts broader sentencing options. It aligns dangerous goods laws with other regulatory frameworks and facilitates better coordination and information sharing between jurisdictions. That addresses some of the weaknesses in interstate transport that have been identified. These regulations will be developed after the bills pass, and I hope they are developed quickly. They will align Victoria with other jurisdictions by adopting the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road & Rail – as I said, with commencement sometime down the track – which will allow more than sufficient time for the industry and duty holders to prepare for and comply with the changes.

Some commentary about the legislation – it is a significant reform, and it does move the Dangerous Goods Act to a more modern, transport-focused framework that I believe is timely and necessary and is clearly there to protect the safety of all Victorians. The structure and intent of the bill reflect a shift towards a more contemporary risk-based approach, and I think that is a good thing. It is closely aligned with the principles that already exist in the OH&S act. It completely bans the transport of extremely dangerous goods; there are other mechanisms in place for that. What is important to consider here is how this will work in practice, because it must work for the regulator and the industry. We are looking for good behaviours here so that the risk can be reduced as much as possible and everybody is kept safe.

I am going to talk about duty, because one of the important changes here is the introduction of a clear, overarching duty on everybody involved in the transporting of dangerous goods to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that activities are carried out safely and without risk to people, property or the environment. It has been said to me that 'reasonably practicable' might not be the right term because a defence goes straight out the door when someone is seriously injured or killed, and we do not want companies putting prices on death in the first instance. The element of duty applies really, really broadly. It is not just drivers or operators, it extends across the supply chain. That supply chain is very broad – consignors and contractors, company directors and senior executives. These changes will sting

cowboy operators badly, and hopefully it will drive these guys out of business, which is positive. I am sure that is one of the aims.

This is a positive step because it reinforces that safety is a shared responsibility, and it does lift expectations considerably. Organisations need to demonstrate that they are actively managing risk through effective systems and governance, so that cannot be somebody else's job. As senior leaders, you need to be across this and actively engaging to make sure that your company does the right thing; you cannot just rely on procedures or paperwork. It moves away from a prescriptive compliance-based model towards one that focuses on whether the risks are being properly controlled. In practical terms, that means organisations will need to show that they have well-maintained equipment, competent or trained people, clear processes and the ability to respond effectively if something goes wrong.

Moving now to enforcement, this area has also been beefed up and will send a message around accountability. If you are a good operator, this will be easier for you. If you are not such a good operator, then it is going to be a little bit tricky for you. As I said earlier, to get those that behave a little bit irresponsibly out of the system will be a good thing. The bill introduces aggravated offences and provisions around reckless conduct, particularly where there is potential for serious injury or death, and it sends that very strong signal around accountability. The level of penalties, including the possibility of custodial sentences, places dangerous goods transport alongside the more serious end of occupational health and safety regulation. As I have mentioned, a key point is the explicit duty on officers to exercise due diligence, so the directors and senior leaders really need to understand the risks of operations and ensure systems and resources are in place and appropriate and satisfy themselves that they are actually working. They must be actively engaged – real engagement at that senior level.

Another area that is being strengthened here is incident reporting and the requirements there. Immediate notification, preservation of incident sites and ongoing record keeping will improve visibility and support learning from incidents, which is a positive development. From a regulatory perspective, inspectors are given strong powers to enter, inspect and intervene where needed. This has been raised as a concern, what this will look like and how this will work, particularly by the Victorian Transport Association (VTA). I urge the government, as they take the next steps in the development of the regulations, to engage properly with the industry to make sure that they are on board and understand. There is the addition of cost recovery provisions, which is notable and will change your focus to compliance.

The powers of entry have also been raised with me as an issue. They are broader than what has traditionally been applied in the dangerous goods space, so people are a little bit edgy about that – they are a little bit antsy about what that means – but the powers are largely consistent with what already exists under the OH&S legislation. The VTA raised concerns with me about inspection enforcement and powers in relation to entry. Within the OH&S context, inspectors are generally empowered to examine anything reasonably connected to risk, not just the immediate hazard. In part they have greater powers than police on the right of entry. The police might require a warrant, but inspectors do not always, and they can enter on a suspicion. We raised some of these questions, and I really thank from the minister's office Gil and Emily and the people from WorkSafe and the Department of Treasury and Finance who participated in the bill briefing and the subsequent responses to questions on notice, because it was greatly appreciated and I got proper detailed responses, for which I was really pleased.

It is about prompt and effective responses and community safety. I do understand the issues, because they are worried about inspectors looking beyond just the dangerous goods and into other areas of the vehicles, for example. So dangerous goods might be contained in one area, but the vehicle may be inspected more broadly. That may be the case, but from a practical standpoint sometimes this can be problematic because many of the real risks sit in the surrounding systems, maybe in the vehicle condition, in the load restraint, maintenance, documentation, competence of operators and so on. So it can be argued that allowing inspectors to look more broadly can lead to better safety outcomes, provided these powers are exercised appropriately. Like all roles, there are professionals who are well briefed, well intentioned and focused on achieving safer outcomes rather than simply enforcing

compliance for compliance's sake. Sometimes inspectors can be a little bit more rigid, more regimented, and there could be inconsistency in how powers are interpreted or applied, and sometimes this can be changed with a government direction and whether your government uses a big stick or a carrot. I think that we really need to be working closely with stakeholders to bring them along the journey, to make sure things are implemented as smoothly as possible.

It is so important that inspectors demonstrate a sound understanding of risk, particularly in higher hazard environments. In relation to inspector training, WorkSafe inspectors typically undergo structured internal training and mentoring and have established capability frameworks, and inspectors often come from industry backgrounds such as engineering, operations or safety. Formal training is supplemented by on-the-job experience and, in some cases, external technical courses. WorkSafe also engages external expertise with specific knowledge, if required, in particularly complex or emerging risk issues. And this area and the changes are complex. I spoke to many in the sector who were intent on doing the right thing, and I was impressed by the level of engagement and how well they took their responsibilities. It was put to me that less mature operators who perhaps prioritise cost or productivity over risk management might be the ones that we need to work with to either help them change their practices and come along on the ride here or look at helping them realise that this is not perhaps the right industry for them.

I sought a lot of feedback and I got great feedback, and I do want to mention the comprehensive feedback I received particularly from the Australian Institute of Health and Safety. I am not sure whether the government have been given the extensive feedback that I was provided, and if they have not been, I urge them to contact them to go through some of the issues. The institute certainly understood the broad application and were supportive of the reforms generally and understood that level of complexity. I quote:

> … the reforms introduce a level of complexity and ambiguity, particularly in relation to expanded duty holder obligations, the interaction between workplace and transport legislation, and the increased reliance on principles-based interpretation. Without clear articulation of roles, responsibilities, and practical application, there is a risk of diffused accountability, inconsistent implementation, and increased legal uncertainty for businesses who conduct undertakings in Victoria.

They had a lot more to say about that, but I think that that is particularly important, because there are risks. When I worked as a management consultant, one of the things that we did consistently with leadership was talk about accountability, roles and responsibilities, and clarity around the roles and responsibilities. I cannot urge the government enough to make sure here that this is done.

The exploitation of weaknesses in interstate movement of hazardous waste has been addressed here through better coordination of information sharing between jurisdictions, and that feedback has been noted positively. The Victorian Farmers Federation also had concerns, and I would urge the government to work with the VFF to make sure that farmers are not unfairly targeted, because farmers do use a lot of dangerous goods on their properties and we do not want farmers getting caught in a whole lot of paper-based compliance activity which is drowning them. We need to make sure that they understand the changes as simply as possible, that they meet the requirements and that they know that very quickly and simply so that they are not unfairly targeted.

The effectiveness of these reforms, though, will ultimately depend on how well they are implemented by industry and the regulator. The main challenge will be implementation, and I have covered off on a couple of those areas already. Many organisations, particularly smaller operators, will need support to move from a compliance mindset to a systems-based approach, and this is where clear guidance, practical compliance codes and education will be important to ensure the intent of the legislation is achieved on the ground.

There is a little bit more that needs to be done here, I would suggest, and I would like to see a structured independent review after implementation to provide valuable insight into whether the intended safety and governance outcomes are being achieved. This industry is high risk, and it is important that

workers in the supply chain and the community at large are kept safe. Community members do not always know what is happening in the area where they work or how close they may be. They do not know that there is a truck driving down the road in front of them that is in itself a risk. I would like to suggest an audit of the scheme to ensure that safety outcomes are achieved, focusing on regulatory compliance, regulatory governance and oversight, licensing and the authorisation framework, compliance and enforcement effectiveness, transport operator compliance, incident management, goods that are too dangerous to transport, emergency preparedness and response and scheme outcomes. There are a lot of stakeholders involved here, because they each have different roles. I mentioned earlier the EPA, for example, and the firefighters, whether that is the CFA or Fire Rescue Victoria. We have those that work on the ports and those that work in the airports. There are a lot of stakeholders here that need to be worked with and brought on board.

We might think dangerous goods sometimes are just a toxic substance – cyanide you might know of, things in hospitals, the X-ray equipment. It is important when they are disposed of and they have got to be transported that the legislation around transporting them is done correctly. We see in hospitals puncture-proof containers because we know their contents are dangerous. There are fireworks and ammunition, TNT and things that we know of, gases that are used every day: LPG, propane, butane, aerosols, some flammable, some nonflammable. We work with dangerous goods all the time and take for granted how important this is. We are seeing a lot more now with lithium batteries and the risk associated with those, including in a vehicle. We saw a golf club burn down because the lithium batteries in a golf cart caught fire and set all of the Eastern Golf Club in Yering on fire, and there was millions and millions of dollars worth of damage because of that. That changed storage processes in so many different organisations because they knew it was a risk. It has taken too long for this bill to reach this point. It is a long lead-in time as well to 2028, when these incidents happened in 2018–19. Overall though, the bill is well considered and a necessary step forward, and I hope the government listens to my contribution.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (16:55): Thank you to the member for Eildon for taking us away. The member for Eildon could have continued for a very long time, I am sure, but I am here now, so you will have to put up with me – I am very sorry. It is my great honour to rise and speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 in conjunction with the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026, and I have been looking forward to this one. I will come back to this gentleman further, but I have been looking forward to this one because I have a constituent in my area, Mr Jeff Simpson. Jeff is from Haztech Environmental and is a hazardous chemicals and regulatory affairs consultant. Jeff lives and breathes trying to make our state a safer place in regard to dangerous chemicals, and for that I thank Jeff for his wisdom, although I do not 100 per cent agree with everything he has said, and he knows that. But I will come back to that.

I think we have come a long way in 40 years since the original dangerous goods bill was introduced. I thank the Deputy Premier for his work. But as a government, I can recall many instances when we have made small changes to make our state a safer place. It is not always in dangerous goods. I note the Minister for Consumer Affairs is at the table. In our rental area I remember making the change to allow renters to put hooks in the wall or to have shelves nailed into the wall so they would not fall down. That seemed at the time like a fairly obvious thing.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Matt FREGON: 'Common sense', the minister says, and he is absolutely right, because up until that point, a landlord could have said, 'You know what, I don't want you putting holes in my wall,' and you can understand that. But I have got to tell you, there is no way Bec would have let me put some IKEA shelves up anywhere near the house without making sure they were screwed into the wall for the safety of our children. This, if I can use the minister's words, is another commonsense thing. We did not just make it up on the spot. This is obviously following tragedies and very problematic fires from 2018 and 2019. The member for Footscray was just enlightening me about her personal circumstances when that was happening, but I will not steal her thunder; I will let her talk about that.

Katie Hall interjected.

Matt FREGON: You are not speaking? Well, okay. Apparently you do not want to have a very large factory fire when you are in labour; it does create extra complications in what I am sure is a complicated time – at a guess, obviously no personal experience there. We had the Palmer report commissioned, and a number of recommendations followed, and this has led us to this bill.

I will just come back to Jeff, because Jeff has looked at this bill. Jeff is a very knowledgeable man in regard to this area. Jeff proposed a couple of amendments, which I do not actually agree with, and I am going to explain to him on the record – I have already explained to him in person, but I am going to repeat it on the record – why I think his proposed amendments are not necessary. Jeff proposed that in part 3, clause 16, of the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill and then also in clause 20, part 3, we add a similar line that says that the person who has to be aware of the dangerous goods should know and understand the hazards and risks so far as reasonably practicable. He wanted to put in those words. We did forward that correspondence on for consideration, but I do not think it is necessary. I will go into this further, but I think the reason, in summary, why it is not necessary is because, if we take the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill section, 'Duties relating to dangerous goods transport', 'Division 1 – Duty to ensure dangerous goods transported in a safe manner and related offences', there is already a duty to ensure the dangerous goods are transported safely. You can only do that if you know and understand the hazards and risks. The knowledge that I think Jeff wants everyone to have in regard to managing these is already implied in the section that this is at. Therefore, it is not necessary to specifically arrange it. More than that, not that I am a lawyer, but my understanding in general is that ignorance is not a defence in these things.

I would say to Jeff that the bill does introduce a new due diligence duty for officers of body corporates to ensure that the body corporate complies with the relevant duty or obligation. Therefore it is not necessary to specifically say that you must have the knowledge, because it is implied that you have to have that knowledge in order to do it safely and to be safe, and that would fit into the due diligence. More than that, it goes on to say that exercising due diligence is defined in the bill and includes taking reasonable steps to stay informed about health and safety, understanding business operations and associated risks and ensuring that adequate resources, processes and systems are in place to manage those risks. Once again, that implies, fairly obviously in my mind, that knowledge is required and therefore we would not need to exactly specify it in the light. I thank Jeff for his contribution. He is right that managers should have to know this thing, because otherwise they are not going to be able to comply with the laws that will be enacted. But more than that, it is also worth pointing out to Jeff and any other interested bodies –

A member interjected.

Matt FREGON: I am going to react to the interjection: Jeff Simpson. Again I will mention him. It is worth pointing out that stakeholders will have the ability to be involved in the regulations as they are generated with a code of conduct or whatever the process is. Therefore I encourage all the Jeffs out there, whoever they are, to get involved in that process, because it is the very people who work in this industry, who have this knowledge in chemicals, that we need to have helping with that process for WorkSafe. I am sure that we will have further conversations. This is just another step in all the laws that are a work in progress as we chip away to make our state a better place.

It reminds me, as I started with, of the changes over 40-odd years. I can vaguely remember one of my first jobs over summer when I was doing work in a cable factory. They said, 'You can help us out on the forklift, right?' And I went, 'Well, I don't know. I've never ridden a forklift.' We were a little more lax on the old licences for forklifts back then, so I drove it for a little while and luckily did not hurt myself. But obviously we have come a long way since then, and it is fair to say that anyone who is going to drive a vehicle that is going to lift heavy loads should have a licence, and I think we all are safer because of that work that WorkSafe do in our community. On that, I will commend the bills to the house.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (17:03): I rise to make a contribution on these bills that we are debating concurrently: the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. The changes in these bills are being delivered, as our previous speaker mentioned, after a report was done – a review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, it was, by Andrew Palmer – and it was released in October 2022. This has been a little time coming around, but we are here – it has been a while in the making. They aim to modernise the regulation of the transport of dangerous goods and to strengthen WorkSafe's ability to enforce compliance with dangerous goods transport law.

In reading a bit of the background on these bills, a lot of these changes have come out of two very, very significant events: the suburban chemical fires that we had in 2018 and 2019, approaching a decade ago. It is about time we got around to making some changes that needed to be made after that. Refreshing my memory on what occurred in those incidents, illegal stockpiling of chemicals was a major contributor to those fires, I guess, creating that catastrophe that they did.

We had one in West Footscray that burnt for around two weeks, and it seemed to be on the news, just thinking back, for the full two weeks; every night there was an update on it. The second one was in Campbellfield, which I think also took at least a week to bring under control. I can remember – and it is well documented on the public record – the issues that caused with the health of people living in the area. A lot of people had to move out of home and move to another area because of the smoke. It really impacted on communities; it impacted on some of the waterways and just the general environment. Changes needed to be made around making people more responsible, making people more accountable and ensuring that certain standards are met so that we do not have a repeat of those situations.

As I said earlier, one of the biggest contributors to that was the illegal stockpiling of chemicals. I think part of the reason that that occurred was because the repercussions for doing that were not great. Those who undertook that illegal stockpiling were not concerned about what faced them legally, so they were sort of happy to put up with it. This bill goes a fair way to addressing that by making the penalties tougher and making people more responsible and more accountable. Similarly, there are changes to occupational health and safety that also needed to be made similar to the changes that were made to dangerous goods. As the member for Eildon said in her initial speech, there have been simply far too many deaths for us as a society to continue to not take action, so it is good to finally have this bill before us.

The bill creates a new act that covers road, rail, boat and inland waterways. I read 'inland waterways' with a little bit of interest, because in my electorate of Gippsland East we have one of the biggest waterways in the Southern Hemisphere – or it actually is the biggest waterway in the Southern Hemisphere. We have had a few spills in recent times where we have had to call in the expert authorities to clean them up, and it got me thinking, going back over the years, that my family has had a pretty long association with transporting goods around the Gippsland Lakes. My great-grandfather Captain James was born in Shalford but came out here in the 1870s and took up a job for six weeks captaining the *Tanjil* paddle-steamer on the lakes. He was only here for six weeks, and he wrote in his diary that he thought the Gippsland Lakes was a mosquito-infested swampland and he never wanted to come back, but he actually met a lady there and married my great-grandmother. He went on and worked on a number of paddle-steamers on the lakes – the *Sarah*, the *Ariel*, the *Tarra* and the *Tanjil II* after the first *Tanjil* got burnt – carting a lot of freight and goods around the Gippsland Lakes. I am not sure there would have been too many dangerous goods, but there was a lot of fuel and oil. He also went on one little expedition there of interest, while I digress slightly; he actually bought a paddle-steamer – the member for Narracan will like this story – called the *Burrabogie*, and he set up the only on-water pub on the Gippsland Lakes on the paddle-steamer *Burrabogie*. Imagine that these days: getting on a paddle-steamer pub and going for a cruise around the lakes. It would be pretty hard to get off and get home. We did not have phones in those days, but you would be ringing your wife, saying, 'I can't get off the boat.' That went well for a couple of years, so I do not know what dangerous goods

they had on there apart from maybe a few alcoholic drinks, but it was a very interesting period in the history of the Gippsland Lakes but also in the history of my family.

Getting back onto the bill, it makes it an offence to risk serious injury or death involving dangerous goods. Laws along these lines are already in place, but this makes things a bit tougher in that regard, and it strengthens WorkSafe's powers to give court orders and broader sentencing options. On that, a person involved in the transport of dangerous goods must ensure they are transported in a safe manner. There is more onus in this bill to do that and make people more responsible without posing risks to public safety, to property and to the environment, which is what we saw with those couple of incidents that I mentioned a little bit earlier in my speech.

Before I finish, I want to just touch on one element of the bill, and it was feedback we got from the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF). Our farmers and our rural sector have been caught up in this transporting of dangerous goods. Although they are not officially or formally in the freight industry, this bill now covers them. We need to make sure that this legislation does not impose a disproportionate regulatory burden on our primary producers. Our farmers are doing it tough enough at the moment without having to find themselves in bother doing this. Of course they do need to be responsible, but they are not transport operators of dangerous goods by trade, yet they are captured under this legislation, and we just need to have some oversight on that. We have got some members in the chamber at the moment that have big farming districts within their electorates. I have got the Macalister irrigation district and also the Lindenow Valley, which is a massive horticulture area. Those farmers do, particularly in the vegetable industry and the horticulture industry, transport a lot of goods around. We need to make sure that we support our farming sector and our rural sector and make sure that there is not overreach on this that impacts on them unnecessarily.

I will mention that interestingly, one of the people who has flagged this concern, Brett Hosking, is going to be a candidate for Murray Plains with the retirement of Peter Walsh. He was a previous president of the VFF, and he flagged some of these concerns with this bill in his role as VFF president, which he stepped down from to contest the next election. I am sure if and when – I will say when – Brett gets in here that he will be keeping some pretty strong oversight on any unnecessary repercussions that this bill applies to our rural and farming sectors.

This is not a bill that we are opposing. We do wish it the best through the parliamentary processes of going through the two chambers, but with the acknowledgement that we need to monitor, like we do with all legislation that passes through this place, how indeed it plays out on the ground. We have a society that is heavily regulated, in many cases for good reason, but we often, history will tell us, have passed laws and legislation in this place only to see when it gets royal assent and gets implemented that there are repercussions on the ground that we have not foreseen. We just need to make sure that this is not another one of them. That aside, we wish this legislation a clear passage through the Parliament.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (17:13): I am delighted to make a contribution on this bill because it is a really important piece of legislation. At the outset I do want to acknowledge the contribution made by the member for Eildon. The member for Eildon was my shadow minister for an extended period of time when I held this portfolio, and I do want to acknowledge the fact that the member for Eildon is a detail person and she spends a lot of time getting across the detail of really complex legislation. I think that was clear and evident in relation to the contribution she made earlier today.

The genesis of this legislation goes back a number of years, and I had stewardship of it when I held the portfolio. It has taken a while to get here because it is deeply complex. Both pieces of legislation are incredibly complicated pieces of legislation. Why is it complicated? You have got to cover a number of different industries and a number of different sectors, and you have got to try and find the balance between making sure that you are protecting the environment, protecting workers and protecting the community and doing so in a way that is not too onerous or too much of a burden for employers and employees. By its very nature it is difficult and complex work. For me this is really

important because of the consequences when you get it wrong. The member for Gippsland East talked about the events of 2018. I think that is a clear example of market failure, where you let the private sector just go off and manage these things. Without a proper and appropriate regulatory regime, you see really bad consequences.

I am really pleased that the member for Narre Warren South is in the chamber, because it gives me an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution that the member for Narre Warren South made in relation to the Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee. When I took on the portfolio, I did not really know much about the WICC. The member for Thomastown sat down with me and she spoke with me about her role on that committee. For the benefit of the house, the Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee is a lived-experience committee comprising members who have lost a loved one through a tragic workplace incident. I had never heard of this committee prior to taking on the role, but I went before them and I could not get over the bravery that these people displayed on a regular basis. You can imagine for a moment you get that dreadful call advising you that your partner has been killed in a workplace incident. You go through that whole trauma of the event, you go through the trauma of the impact that it has on your life and your response is to retraumatise yourself regularly so that no-one goes through that trauma. The member for Narre Warren South was the co-chair, and for the benefit of the house I do want to read in the names of the members of this committee because I worked with them and the member for Narre Warren South was my proxy. The way in which the member for Narre Warren South dealt with people who had been traumatised and brutalised and did so in such a deft and empathetic way was remarkable. To Dr Lana Cormie, who was the co-chair with the member for Narre Warren South, an outstanding person who led that committee; Samantha Burns; Joe Alderuccio; Dave Brownlee; Sophie Leonard; Francis Malek; Elvis Martin; Nick McHugh; Bette Phillips-Campbell; Jacquie Robertson; Ralph Snider; Abha Somesh; Llewellyn Stevens; Michael Stone; Brett Struhs; and James Wood, all of you made such a huge contribution in trying to make our community safer. Again I want to extend my deep thanks to the member for Narre Warren South, particularly given the fact that he has indicated that like me he will be retiring at the election. Gary, you should be so proud of the contribution you made in making workplaces safer.

I always felt very strongly about these matters. I was working here in the 1990s, and I remember during the federal election campaign – it was Friday about lunchtime – I was working in the old chook house and word came through that there was an explosion at the Longford gas plant. Pretty quickly we ran out of gas. We had run out of gas by the following Saturday, which was grand final day – Adelaide I think were the victors that day. The state went through an extended period of time, probably 10 days, before the gas was reconnected with New South Wales while we dealt with the trauma of the Longford gas explosion. Interestingly, those of us who were working in the building at the time realised pretty quickly that there was actually an electric hot water service on the Council side of the building on the second level, and we availed ourselves of being able to have a hot shower when we found this out. But while it is a glib remark at one level, the reality is that when the Longford gas plant exploded, Peter Wilson and John Lowery were both killed. I at that stage was working for John Brumby. We sought leave to appear at the Longford royal commission. A very, very good, generous barrister gave his time pro bono, who sadly no longer with us, Greg Meese. We sought to ensure that there was a recognition that the Victorian Workcover Authority, as it was back in those days, had not done a great job in terms of regulating the industry, and we saw the consequences. It was not just the fact of the economic dislocation, it was not the fact that we all could not have a hot shower for two weeks or most of us could not; it was the loss of life – the fact that these two workers had seen that there was a leak in relation to condensate, went over to investigate and were killed. They were killed and a number of workers were badly burnt and injured. It was because the regulatory regime had failed. It had absolutely, comprehensively failed, and these workers paid with their lives.

I can appreciate that, yes, it has taken a while to get here, but when you are dealing with a multiplicity of industries all along a risk curve, with different levels of training and education and with different levels of engagement, it is really difficult to get it right. As you look at the size of the proposed legislation, the proposed acts – the bills that are on the table – it gives you some sense of their

complexity. Obviously, yes, of course there will be a need to make sure that the regulations, which are the teeth of the legislation, are appropriately drafted and presented and to make sure that we get the balance right. But we have had to do this because if we do not do this, we know what the consequences are. Similarly, in relation to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, that was a piece of legislation that was proudly passed by the Parliament when John Cain held the Legislative Council for those three weeks before the Nunawading supplementary by-election, which then provided the opportunity to have that level of safety in relation to these major industries and major worksites.

Again, I do want to acknowledge the contribution that the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC has made in bringing this legislation before the house. This legislation will make sure that our regulatory regime is modern and fit for purpose. It will ensure that we can avoid the tragedy of workplace injuries and workplace deaths. You have got to get the balance right, because if you vacate the field – if you do not have a proper regulatory regime in place – then you will see that people who are motivated by the wrong things in life will take hold and you will have a repeat performance of what we have seen previously.

The bills that are before the house are important because they will mean that there will be fewer members of our society who will be the victim of a workplace injury or a workplace incident, or who will lose their life. But again, for me, I wanted to speak on this bill because I feel a great level of gratitude because of the way in which the WICC conducted themselves over that period of time. I recognise their bravery and their courage – their absolute courage in wanting to make sure that no-one experiences what they experienced.

I think that again, with work that the member for Narre Warren South did, we wanted to do better. We wanted to be better. We wanted to improve the experience of those victims and their families. I hope that through those concerted efforts when we worked together, member for Narre Warren South – Gary – we made things a little bit better and we made things a little bit easier. I commend the bills to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:23): I am pleased to rise to talk on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. From the outset, we do not oppose this bill, and for good reason, because anything we do through this chamber that makes workplaces safer should be supported. I take on board the honourable member for Essendon's comments in his contribution on the bill, and I know he actually is passionate in this space. I will give him credit where credit is due – when it comes to health and safety and WorkSafe issues, he actually is quite passionate. But it is an interesting bill, this one.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: I have got two people down the front there who are annoying me, but I would like to get on with it. These changes have come about, as was referred to by the member for Gippsland East – and there will be other members who refer to this as well – because of the two major chemical fires we had in 2018 and 2019. I actually can accept that this bill is probably highly complex in the sense that we have to cover a range of products, chemicals and everything through the industry.

I can appreciate that it would have been complex to get this legislation up and going. Although these fires happened seven or eight years ago, I can appreciate why this would take some time to come forward. The two fires back in 2018 and 2019 were really around the stockpiling of illegal chemicals and substances within these areas. They were terrible blazes. As I pointed out, one of them burnt for two weeks and another one burnt for a week. You can only imagine the residents in those areas having to live next door to those toxic plumes of smoke. If the wind is blowing a certain way on a certain day, then it covers a fair area. It is good that we are bringing in these bills, because in Victoria and in fact Australia we do transport a lot of materials, a lot of chemicals, a lot of whatever around the state – we pretty well transport it everywhere. This legislation is going to make people more responsible for what they transport or what they carry and how it is stored, and they should be.

When I think about this bill my assumption is – there are some points here – that we are coming into line with other jurisdictions, and I hope that is the case. You can imagine if you are a truckie in WA, South Australia or the Northern Territory – wherever – that our legislation and our regulation, when that comes through, will go into line with those other jurisdictions, because I would hate for a truck driver in one jurisdiction to drive into Victoria when that is illegal in this state. Part of me wonders: was this better off being an approach on a national level so we have all the same regulation throughout the country when it comes to the transporting of goods, particularly dangerous goods and dangerous chemicals? We need that to align. Australia is a transport country; we know that. We have trucks running north to south, east to west. My assumption is that the government has done its homework on this and that we are coming into line with those jurisdictions, because it is important that we have consistency within our laws and within our regulation. Maybe there will be a point in time in the future when we may look at this legislation again and need to adjust it a little bit to bring it in line, or maybe other jurisdictions will look at us and say they need to adjust to come in line with Victoria. I hope that governments in other states actually take that on board, because it is very, very important.

Everyone that goes to work deserves to come home. By strengthening our transport laws, that can happen. That should happen. Nobody wants to make that phone call. As an employer for many, many years, the last thing you ever want to do is make a phone call to someone saying that, 'I'm sorry, your partner has been injured at work,' or that they are not coming home today. That is a terrible phone call to make. Even if they get injured, it is a terrible phone call to make. I had to make a couple of those phone calls in my working career, and it is not nice. But when there is a fatality, I cannot even imagine what that phone call would be like. Anything that brings health and safety to the forefront so people that go to work come home I think is a good thing, and I would always support it.

The key reforms really are around the embedded dangerous goods regulation to the existing Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, including a new duty to handle dangerous goods safely. That is pretty well what I have just touched on, and it is very, very important that we do that. The legislation creates a new Dangerous Goods Transport Act covering road, rail, boat and inland waterways. This one is interesting for me. I do not know how this will work in a practical sense, being that we have a lot of imports into the country. Whatever countries they come from, when they land – it could be at the port or via air freight, for example – if those goods get plucked off the ship and put onto a truck, is there a stopgap here that we check those goods and we check how they are handled? I am not quite sure. Again, I am going to put faith in the government that they have addressed that issue, because not every place around the world is going to handle things like we do here. Obviously with these bills we are trying our best to keep people safe; not everywhere around the world is like that. I am not up to date with port and air freight regulation and how things are delivered in that manner, but my assumption is the government has handled that.

The legislation makes it an offence to risk serious injury or death involving dangerous goods, and so it should be an offence. Sometimes truckies will jump in a truck and drive off and someone else could have loaded the truck not in a safe manner but in a manner that puts people at risk. Bringing this reform in really does put the onus on them by saying that if you are transporting this, it has to be done in this manner so it is safe. It is protecting not only the driver of the vehicle but also those around them. If something spills off a truck and explodes, there are other people at risk as well, so it is very, very important that this is an offence. The bills strengthen WorkSafe's powers and ability to enforce compliance, give courts broader sentencing options, align dangerous goods laws with other regulatory frameworks and facilitate better coordination and information sharing between jurisdictions. That is very, very important. As I touched on earlier, the information sharing should be with other jurisdictions because we are a country of transport, particularly truck and rail. We do a lot of it, so to share that is incredibly important.

To get back to the member for Gippsland East, he was telling us his story about his grandfather on the Gippsland Lakes and pulling up to the pub boat, as he put it. Pub boats still exist, believe it or not. I have got an uncle on the Gold Coast who is a bit of a boatie. He pretty well lives on the water, and I

was up there with him one day and we are out fishing. It was a bit hot, and he had run out of the vessel of happiness, so he rang up the pub boat, which pulled alongside and he loaded up his boat again and kept fishing for the rest of the day. He had quite a happy day by the end of it. Just for the member for Gippsland East, they still exist. His family may have invented them or been part of it, but they still exist in Queensland; I know they are up there. As I said at the start, we do not oppose these bills, nor should we when we are making people's workplaces safer. That is something we should always support.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:33): I rise to support the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. I would like to acknowledge the in-depth and bipartisan contributions from all sides of the chamber today. We had the member for Eildon, followed by the member for Ashwood, who gave us the story and the experience and the feedback from Jeff from his electorate, who had a lot to say about this bill that I am sure we all enjoyed and got a lot of value from hearing about. Then we had the member for Essendon with his personal experience directly in this policy space and firsthand knowledge of the impact that dangerous workplaces have on those directly impacted and their families and communities. And we had the member for Narracan talking about the booze cruise that still is in place essentially, if I am not mistaken, up on the Gold Coast.

These bills represent the most significant change to Victoria's dangerous goods framework in more than 40 years, improving the safety of the Victorian community, strengthening enforcement and supporting businesses to make their workplaces safer. Dangerous goods are an integral part of our economy and are used across industries, including agriculture, construction, manufacturing and health care, to provide services and to produce essential goods such as cleaning products, food, fertiliser, fuel, plastics and paint. Dangerous goods include chemicals that carry inherent risks to persons or property, such as goods that are corrosive, flammable, combustible, explosive, oxidising or have other hazardous properties.

Dangerous goods also include explosives and security sensitive ammonium nitrate, which present security risks to the Victorian community. When they are not dealt with safely, dangerous goods can result in incidents exposing Victorian workers, emergency service personnel and the wider community to risks of harm to their health, safety and property. Those risks to health and safety include risks to Victorians whose jobs require them to work with such chemicals, including transport workers, which I will touch on soon, emergency service personnel of course, as I said, who respond to these incidents involving the chemicals and members of the public who live, study or work near these places where those chemicals are stored or located. That is why safe storage, handling, disposal and transport of dangerous goods is absolutely critical and why this Victorian Labor government is improving safety by modernising the regulation of dangerous goods and strengthening WorkSafe's ability to enforce compliance with dangerous goods laws as well.

High-profile incidents across Melbourne involving illegal stockpiling of chemical waste occurred in 2018 and 2019. In August 2018 a major fire broke out at a warehouse in West Footscray, which contained millions of litres of toxic chemical waste, and the fire took more than a week to subdue. More than 200 firefighters and 40 firefighting appliances were involved in the response. MFB personnel reported more than 100 injuries, including health issues from exposure to smoke and other substances, musculoskeletal pain and fatigue. A number of firefighters continue to, sadly, experience health problems as a result of fighting that toxic fire. The fire had a terrible impact on the local environment, with fire water run-off contaminating the neighbouring Stony Creek, killing wildlife and vegetation. More than 2300 dead fish were collected from the estuary, and many dead eels were collected further upstream. Community health warnings were issued to avoid human and pet contact with the creek for several months after the incident. Rehabilitation works conducted by the Environment Protection Authority, the EPA, Melbourne Water and other agencies have included the removal of more than 70 million litres of polluted water and approximately 2800 cubic metres of contaminated sediment from Stony Creek.

Not long afterwards, in April 2019, another large fire broke out at a chemical waste processing facility in Campbellfield in Melbourne's northern suburbs. The fire also took several days to subdue, and I remember even my father-in-law, who lived in very close proximity along Barry Road, was heavily impacted by that at the time. The MFB deployed more than 175 firefighters and 40 appliances to contain the blaze. Two factory workers were hospitalised as a result of the fire. One of these received serious burns and another an eye injury. The fire also emitted toxic smoke across all of Melbourne's northern suburbs, including across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and even Brunswick West. Nearby residents and workplaces were warned to close doors and windows, and five local schools in the immediate area there in Hume were shut down. After working on the fire for four days the MFB handed the site to WorkSafe. The EPA stepped in under its powers to oversee the remaining clean-up of the site, which was completed in December 2021 at a cost of $6.5 million. In addition to the EPA laying several charges against the owner of the facility for breaching the Environment Protection Act 2017, WorkSafe also filed three charges relating to the fire.

After these fires, joint inspections by regulators, including WorkSafe and the EPA, uncovered 14 sites illegally storing dangerous chemicals in Melbourne's northern suburbs and further waste dumped at a property in rural Victoria. WorkSafe led the huge clean-up operation of these 13 to 14 sites at a significant cost. These events are a clear example of dangerous goods risks not being safely controlled. They led to a key question being asked: is the legislative framework regulating dangerous goods safety still fit for purpose in today's context? In response to this issue, the Labor government commissioned Andrew Palmer KC to conduct an independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and associated regulations.

The final report, the Palmer report, was provided to government in January 2022 and found that the Dangerous Goods Act and associated regulations were no longer fit for purpose, nor were they consistent with other regulatory frameworks that applied to dangerous goods duty holders, most notably through the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. In the final report it was noted that Victorian regulators, including fire services, WorkSafe and the EPA, had already done a substantial amount of work to address the risks posed by fires, including introducing stronger environment protection legislation through the Environment Protection Act 2017. The EP act 2017 increased the maximum penalties for serious offences. The courts were able to fine severe polluters between $1.6 million to $3.2 million. Individuals who commit aggravated offences can receive a jail term of up to five years under those changes. However, the Palmer report noted that the key legislation that regulates dangerous goods in Victoria, the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, had remained largely unchanged since it was introduced – now 41 years ago, the year of my birthday.

WorkSafe is the safety regulator for both dangerous goods and occupational health and safety. However, major incidents involving dangerous goods are very different from occupational health and safety incidents.

Andrew Palmer KC said, in his report on page 3:

> While conducting this Review, I noticed that major incidents involving dangerous goods seem to occur every 10 to 20 years in Victoria. This observation led me to speculate that in the immediate aftermath of a major incident there would be increased regulatory focus on dangerous chemicals and calls for legislative change. But as the incident receded from memory, the regulatory focus might wane, and the calls for change subside. And after enough time had passed, there might be another major incident and the cycle would begin again.
>
> My hope is that this Review will be a step towards breaking that cycle …

through these recommendations. He put forward what I believe are nearly 50 recommendations, supported in full by government across a range of areas. He particularly noted on page 23 that:

> Transporting dangerous goods is an inherently risky activity. Mishandled, accidentally released or spilled dangerous goods can cause injury and death, and seriously damage property and the environment.

This bill, across the changes in both the Dangerous Goods Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, will implement most of those recommendations that he has put forward. The dangerous goods

bill modernises the regulation of the transport of dangerous goods in Victoria by introducing a new broad general duty for a person engaging in the transport of dangerous goods by vessel on inland water, by road or by rail to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that dangerous goods are transported in a manner that is safe and without risk to public safety, property and the environment. The bill creates a standalone act to regulate the transport of dangerous goods, including dangerous goods waste. This will support businesses to understand and comply with their duties and will align Victoria's regulation of the transport of dangerous goods with most other Australian jurisdictions as well.

The occupational health and safety bill of 2026 incorporates the regulation of dangerous goods into the OH&S act, making the OH&S act the primary regulatory framework applying to the handling, manufacture, processing, use, treatment, dispensing, supply, packaging, import, export, storage, sale or transfer of dangerous goods. The bill modernises the regulation of dangerous goods in Victoria by introducing a new broad general duty requiring a person to comply with these new, better and safer standards as well. In this respect I particularly want to acknowledge that it is all about making workplaces safer, particularly for those in the freight and transport sectors, and particularly those from the Transport Workers' Union, who I would like to acknowledge as well, who literally work every single day to carry this country and to make it what it is. Without our transport workers the country would come to a stop – that is a fact. They also handle very dangerous goods as well: chemical toxins, petroleum and gas – and many of them are TWU members, who I acknowledge and for whom this bill will help make the workplace safer as well.

It is also about making communities and suburbs safer. Like I pointed out earlier, we heard about that experience in Campbellfield, the toxic fire. My community in Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West is one of the Victorian government's new activity centres, so we are forecasting more growth over coming years with new housing. That will mean increased densification. In that respect as well we are traditionally part of the manufacturing heartland of Melbourne's north, and we still have a very strong and vibrant manufacturing corridor through the Newlands corridor in North Coburg. I do also have in my community many major arterial roads that carry a lot of these vehicles that carry a lot of these goods and services as well. Whether it is through CityLink, Tullamarine Freeway, Pascoe Vale Road, Sydney Road, Nicholson Street, Melville Road, Boundary Road, Gaffney Street, Murray Road, Bell Street, Bakers Road, Newlands Road and Moreland Road, of course we need to make all of these corridors safer for the communities that live in and around them every day, and that is why I commend this bill.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (17:43): I rise to speak on the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 and the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026, two bills that we will be debating in cognate tonight. These bills represent the culmination of a significant body of work arising from an independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985. This review was conducted by Andrew Palmer, now Judge Palmer, following a series of chemical fires that exposed weaknesses in the Victorian regulatory system. I think most people will recall those catastrophic chemical fires of 2018 and 2019. As a result of those fires it was pointed out that there were some issues that needed to be addressed because major industrial disasters burning for days and in some cases weeks, releasing toxic smoke and hazardous substances into the surrounding community, clearly are not something that we ever want to see. The Palmer review examined these events in detail and produced 49 recommendations. The Dangerous Goods Act is now more than four decades old – it was a 1985 act – and the nature of the freight industry, the movement and logistics industries and regulatory oversight have actually changed drastically during that time, so it is appropriate that these reforms seek to modernise the law by embedding dangerous goods regulation within Victoria's existing occupational health and safety framework while a dedicated transport-specific legislative regime is also part of that change.

The Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Bill introduces a new duty requiring dangerous goods to be handled safely and without risks to people, property and the environment. Everyone wants

to see safety. This bill introduces a new offence relating to conduct that risks serious injury or death involving dangerous goods, increases WorkSafe Victoria enforcement powers and provides courts with more sentencing options. Overall stakeholders such as the Victorian Transport Association and the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) recognise that there is a need for reform and acknowledge that modernising Victoria's dangerous goods framework is both necessary and overdue. However, we need to acknowledge that the Victorian transport industry is an incredibly important industry, and we need to make sure we enable them and do not hamstring them with more regulation and more red tape that actually does not provide an outcome.

We are not opposing this legislation, but I am always hesitant about whether these reforms are focused on better outcomes rather than more on administrative burden that does not actually get the result that we are all sitting here saying we want to see. That is why I also say that the Victorian Farmers Federation have made some contributions to this debate through input back through the consultation process, saying that farmers recognise the importance of safety but they are not usually transporters of goods. They are not the transport industry, but on farms they do have dangerous goods. Let us make sure that we respect the work of our transport operators and our farmers, who do so much to feed our community and provide goods at a high standard, which they take pride in, and have those goods transported for the people of Victoria, of Australia and internationally to be able to enjoy the benefits of. They have raised some important issues that do warrant consideration as the regulations are developed, and the Victorian Transport Association's concerns were regarding the new powers-of-entry provision. Brett Hosking, the current VFF president, has put forward some suggestions. My request of the government is to make sure they are listening to the farmers and listening to the transport industry, because let us remember that when trucks do not move, we do not get goods and the nation stops. When farmers cannot produce food, we all go hungry. All these regulations need to make sure they are practical and are in consultation so that that does not actually hamper the good work of our truck drivers and our farmers. These concerns should be carefully considered.

I always find when we have got a transport bill or a roads bill, as this is, that we sometimes are missing the opportunity to really improve the situation that is experienced on the ground by truck drivers, people trying to get goods to market or families just trying to get around. Right now in South-West Coast the rain is pouring down again, just like it did last week, because in June that is what generally happens. Our roads have just deteriorated to a point where last sitting week in the Parliament, nearly a fortnight ago now, I was here on the late session that went all night on Thursday talking about how people were calling me, how the roads have become massive craters that look like a moonscape and how many, many cars were pulled up on the side of the road. I was literally getting calls because they could not get home.

Now I have got a tow truck operator who is telling me he has gone and bought a tow truck. He has been trying to get a tow truck licence for some time, but trying to work through the government bureaucracy is proving to be absolutely impossible. The introduction of a transport bill is the opportunity to fix some of these bureaucratic bogging situations that people are finding themselves in. This is certainly where someone has found themselves bogged. We had 12 cars lined up on the side of the road in Panmure the week before last. There is a Cudgee Cars operator who has got a tow truck sitting in the shed and cannot get a licence, because they say there are enough tow trucks in the region. If that was the case, why did we have 12 cars sitting by the side of the road? He actually had to turn down 11 jobs when his tow truck was sitting in the shed. We have had licences retired in Terang. We have had licences retired in Camperdown that have not been renewed. Right now there is a 77-year-old man from Cooriemungle, which is about 50 k's from Cudgee, and the logic says that that licence could be transferred to this operator, who wants to be out on the roads, as we need people to be at the moment, picking up people who have hit these potholes, blown tyres, smashed rims and who should not be sitting in the dark on cold rainy nights because of the environment that has been created by a lack of transport, a lack of maintenance of the roads and massive potholes, where it has just become impossible to navigate them. So I implore the minister to look at how these licences are issued and

review the licence issue for the Cudgee Cars operator. Matthew Bouchier is just wanting an outcome so that he can look after his community.

Under the current system, administered by VicRoads operators, you have to hold a licence to operate a tow truck, and there is no issue with that, but if they think there are enough tow trucks around, well, they probably have not looked at how many potholes are emerging in our roads, and it is not because potholes are normal, it is because the government have not done their job of maintaining the roads. The potholes are a consequence of that, not a consequence of rain. Just filling them over and over again is where we are at, and not because that is the smartest thing to do. It is like pouring money into the ground and just stomping all over it. It just makes no sense when we should have had the works done last spring that the government has been boasting about but that did not take place. Clearly that has left us in this crisis situation that we find ourselves in. We clearly are finding these sorts of things out of step with a community that desperately needs a government that understands their needs and addresses their needs. And regarding tow truck capacity in the region, last week's weather just exposed that failure starkly, and it will soon be exposed again with this rainfall this week. It started last night with 15 mils overnight, and it has been raining again all day today.

Back to the bill, the VFF supports safety outcomes and stronger accountability across supply chains. However, they rightly argue that these reforms must not impose disproportionate regulatory burden on farmers who are simply undertaking everyday agricultural operations, and that is really a fair point. They are primary producers in need of certainty, practical guidance and genuine consultation and are not to be unfairly caught up in compliance obligations that were never really intended for farmers. Even though they do have the transportation of goods coming to and from their farms, they are not actually transport operators in most cases. In many respects the success or failure of these reforms will depend on the quality of the regulations, the clarity of guidance materials and the ability of duty holders to understand and comply with their obligations. Without that clarity there is a risk that complexity could undermine the very safety outcomes these reforms seek to achieve.

We will not oppose this bill. However, we do strongly encourage the government to continue meaningful engagement with industry, transport operators, farmers, safety professionals and other stakeholders as the regulations are developed. If the government gets these regulations right, these reforms have the potential to deliver a safer and more modern and effective dangerous goods framework for Victoria, rather than just making it more difficult for the good operators. I certainly saw a lot of those during my time as the shadow minister for transport among the people I visited who handle dangerous goods, and rather than making it harder for those guys who are doing a really good job and meanwhile the cowboys are really getting away with it, that is where the focus can often make a real difference.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:53): It is funny when we are thinking about what we label as dangerous goods, they are things that so many of us rely on each and every day: cleaning products, food of course, fertiliser, fuel, plastics and paint. We do not always reflect on how that paint got to Bunnings or the store otherwise that we all want to use day in, day out across the community. Certainly, I must say from the outset, I want to express some gratitude for those who are involved in producing the goods and those that are handling the goods, and that is certainly what this legislation is pertaining to. Thankfully it does not happen often, but when it has happened – and there have been some very dangerous incidents, and certainly they are the impetus behind these reforms – the ramifications can be so devastating that there is no question about why we are making one of the largest reforms in this space in over 40 years. Certainly they are very important for the people who actually produce and handle and transport the goods – the workers in that sense; the emergency services who, unfortunately, when there is an incident have to clean up after the fact; and then of course members of the public who live in proximity to or study or work near places that store these goods.

It is absolutely imperative. It seems we have a pretty good agreement across the chamber in terms of getting these reforms through. I think it is well understood that for these reforms to have true meaning, they do have to have a practical, user-friendly element in terms of their application so that workers in

the various industries that will be impacted, and I say impacted from a positive connotation, will have a better and safer existence because of the reforms that we are bringing through. Thinking back, this was discussed in the chamber in 2018 when a major fire broke out at a warehouse in West Footscray. More than 200 firefighters and 40 firefighting appliances responded. MFB personnel reported more than 100 injuries, including health issues from exposure to smoke and other substances and musculoskeletal pain and fatigue, and a number of the firefighters continued to experience health problems as a result of fighting the fire. That is absolutely devastating, I am sure, for them. In the local environment, fire water runoff contaminated the nearby Stony Creek, killing wildlife and vegetation. More than 2300 dead fish were collected from the estuary, and many dead eels were collected further upstream.

We can see that, apart from the fact that I think we feel a sense in our conscience that we do not want to be impacting other human beings, flora or fauna, the cost of the clean-up is a huge impost and certainly something to be mitigated, if not avoided, in terms of having to be in those circumstances in the future. Of course you always have to clean up where there is waste – I am not saying that we do not do that – but mitigating the risk of that happening is absolutely vital.

Another incident has been referred to here, involving 175 firefighters, 40 appliances and so forth – serious burns and another eye injury. That was an incident that occurred in Campbellfield, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, in 2019. Furthermore, after those incidents, joint inspections by regulators including WorkSafe Victoria and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria uncovered 14 sites illegally storing dangerous chemicals. It is very unsettling to think that that did happen, the risk to community and risk to the workers. That was in the northern suburbs, and further waste was dumped at a property in rural Victoria.

WorkSafe led the huge clean-up operation at 13 of these sites at a significant cost. They did the right thing and made sure that the situation was remedied. Nevertheless, we can see why it is so important that we have tighter regulation in this domain. I pick up on the points that have been made about making sure that the regulations are workable. I absolutely respect that. It is a delicate line. I think always you have err on the side of safety because the alternatives are just unthinkable. We have already been there, and we would not want to see that repeated or anything worse still.

I will make a caveat that the Environment Protection Act 2017 increased the maximum penalties for serious offences. The courts can fine severe polluters between $1.6 million and $3.2 million. That gave the EPA much greater teeth. Individuals who commit aggravated offences can receive a jail term of up to five years. I think that is absolutely appropriate. But the Palmer report noted that the key legislation that regulates dangerous goods in Victoria, the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, remained largely unchanged since it was introduced more than 40 years ago. When we think about how society has changed, even the kinds of vehicles that are transporting goods and the goods that are being transported and also our awareness of workplaces and ramifications for workers, et cetera, again it is a logical step to be moving forward with these changes.

I should say that WorkSafe is the safety regulator for both dangerous goods and occupational health and safety. We know, however, that major incidents involving dangerous goods are very different from occupational health and safety incidents. As I said at the outset, serious incidents involving dangerous goods, although potentially catastrophic, are relatively infrequent. The risk with that is we can forget about it. You know, when you are not the one handling those goods day in, day out, unfortunately there is theoretically a risk of overlooking these matters. Of course we are not doing that. There has been a deep dive and proper consultation and evaluation and of course the Palmer report. I am just saying that thankfully, if we reverse it, because so many workplaces and people are seeking to do the right thing, we do not have these incidents every day of the week. Nevertheless when they do happen, the consequences can be truly, truly terrible. So it is very good that we are moving on these reforms today.

The bill introduces several new offences that will apply to breaches of dangerous goods obligations to reflect differences in the severity of offending and differing degrees of culpability of offenders, including offences for a failure to comply with the new dangerous goods general duty, an aggravated breach of the new dangerous goods general duty and recklessly undertaking an activity involving dangerous goods that places or may place another person in danger of serious injury or death. You can see the very nuanced elements, as they should be in this legislation. We have got the cognate debate because there is the difference between storage of goods – I do not mean to oversimplify this – and the actual transportation of goods, which of itself will have its own risks.

The only other point I was going to make is I used to represent, as an organiser, Border Force, and they did a lot of checking of cargo and other elements. That is going into the federal domain, but it was raised in the chamber. When they are even at a mail centre they have the risk of drugs and other things – and we are not talking about narcotics here, we are actually talking about everyday chemicals and things. Even when just opening to check for what products are inside, to do their cross-checks to look for drugs, they could be exposed to things like fentanyl and other things. When we are thinking about the various dangers that workers can be exposed to, there is obviously the regulated industry and then there are the truly illegal elements. I am saying this from the point of view of compassion for workers who do this important checking of products coming in and out of the country, let alone those moving within the state. We are relying on various checks and balances to mitigate risk. You cannot completely do away with all risk, but certainly we need to mitigate risk, because we do not want anyone not being able to go home safely at the end of the day.

I am certainly really pleased to see these legislative reforms that are seeking to improve the outcome and the likelihood of workers being safe in their role but also the community at large, because when we have much tighter systems and better enforcement, then ultimately the risk of the community being harmed as well is reduced significantly. There are benefits all round.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:03): I rise to talk on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. We have two bills here. We have all seen it: when we are driving around and we have been behind a truck with a sign on the back that says 'Dangerous goods on board'. It is part of our day-to-day life really, as we drive around on the streets here in Melbourne or in regional Victoria. It does not matter what it is that the trucks are hauling, we need to make sure that we do have rules and regulations that people have to be accountable for, and that is why these bills have come in, one for transport obviously and one for the storage of goods around the place. At the outset, the number one priority that we do need to have is the safety of the workers, but also the safety of the general public, especially those that are on transport routes around regional Victoria and inner-city Melbourne as well. We need to make sure that we are protecting them. These changes in the bills deliver on the reforms recommended in the final report of the independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 from Andrew Palmer KC.

They were released in October 2022, so they have been a while in the making. As the member for Essendon said, if you see the actual bills together and the amendments, it is a lot of legislation that has had to been worked through, tricky legislation, to make sure that we do get it right, because it is covering, as I said, not only stockpiling of dangerous goods but then transport of them around not only Victoria but interstate as well. There are states that have different rules and regulations, so we need to make sure that we are ticking the boxes for everybody.

The member for Essendon, when he gave his contribution – Acting Speaker, I am not sure if you were in the chamber – actually spoke about the Longford gas explosion back, I think, in 1998. That is down in my area in the valley just pushing into East Gippsland. At the time I think there were two losses of life in that situation, and we need to make sure that we learn from all these experiences. I am sure there are other examples around the place of chemicals having been stored and loss of life. Being involved predominantly throughout my lifetime in the construction industry, there were times when people at work were injured, which was very unfortunate. On the odd occasion, it actually cost people their life.

So we do need to make sure that we are doing what we can, when we can, to make sure that people can go to work safely.

Two major suburban fires were the catalyst for these two bills coming together, in 2018 and 2019, and they triggered an independent review on dangerous goods. It was probably at a time when there had been incidents previously. But as we move on quickly in life, once we cleaned those incidents up we probably did not have the regulations in place to make sure that it did not happen again, and eventually there would be another incident. It has taken a while to get this here to the chamber, but to go through it so as to make sure that when we are debating these new laws that are going to come in, we do it once and we do it for a final time, so there is a step and a pathway for business owners and also for our workers to do that. The catalysts for this review back in 2018 and 19 caused mayhem across metropolitan Melbourne and in the suburbs. There have been other members on their feet who have spoken about the fire, the toxic smoke and how many firefighters there were. I think it was a couple of hundred firefighters and 40 trucks that actually put the fire out, but then there was the next step of all the toxins leaking into the creeks and into our river structures, which caused great concern and actually killed wildlife along the way. So we can see that there is a huge need to make sure that we do get this right.

We need to ensure the safety of the truck drivers that are actually transporting these chemicals around because most of the spillages have been on sites. It would be frightening. I do not know what the number is of how many dangerous goods we move around the state on a daily basis. I think that would be – not an alarming amount, because that is our day-to-day work, but I think it would leave a lot of people in here surprised as to how much is taken around the state by truck on daily and weekly bases. We have got truck owners in the Latrobe Valley that, as I have said to you before, Acting Speaker Kathage, not only do runs around regional Victoria and into the city but are interstate drivers, so they are travelling between Victoria and Perth and Victoria and Sydney and Brisbane. They are travelling a lot of kilometres, so we need to, one, make sure that we do not have an incident, but if there is one, we need things in place to be able to clean it up the best that we can.

If there is an incident, it puts our first responders under the spotlight as well. We are probably better now with our registers of knowing what dangerous goods are on board, but I am sure many, many years ago there would have been a stockpile of dangerous chemicals that would have been just pushed around the corner – not through anyone's fault, I would not think, but that is just what the rules were that they could work with back in the day. We need to make sure that we are stamping these out and that there are reasonable ramifications for people that are doing the wrong thing.

One of the concerns – and I think the member for Gippsland East spoke about this – with the Victorian Farmers Federation and our farmers is that one rule sometimes does not fit all. Whilst I understand the intent to strengthen accountability, and we should be strengthening the accountability to improve the safety outcomes across the supply chain, many farmers and many farms are using dangerous products all the time. It is stated in this critical response that these reforms do not impose disproportionate regulatory burdens on our primary producers. Farmers are not transport operators. They may be moving chemicals around, and they need to do that safely, on their farms, but they are not transport operators by trade. We just need to make sure that they can still safely go about their daily activities on their farms. I think there were a few concerns raised by the VFF, so the need for more meaningful consultation and input into the development of regulations is essential so that unintended consequences are not impacting our farmers, because they do a mighty job and are on the roads constantly as well, bringing the produce down to Melbourne to be consumed by the people of Melbourne. We need to make sure that we do look after them.

But in saying that, the reforms that are coming through here are well and truly needed. They are probably overdue. They have taken a while to work through and be talked about by everybody. But the number one thing that we do need to do is to make sure that there are ramifications for people that are doing the wrong thing. Most – nearly all – will be doing the right thing, but we need to make sure that we are looking after our workers that are working at these storage facilities and, more importantly,

that are the ones that are on the roads transporting dangerous goods around. As my time winds down, it is pleasing to see reforms come through like this. We are not opposing the bill. I think that we are doing a good thing here in the chamber today.

John LISTER (Werribee) (18:13): I rise to speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. I want to reflect, as many have, on some of the impetus for having these changes, particularly some of those industrial waste fires that we saw back in 2018 and 2019. As someone who has been to their fair share of fires in different contexts, there is nothing scarier than when you rock up to a job and you get the taste of metal in your mouth or the feeling of vapours coming through your nose, and you are like, 'This is going to be a really risky job. We need to take care and follow all our precautions and dynamic risk assessment to be able to manage what could be a serious risk to life and property.' In thinking about that and the training that we have as firefighters too, we are always told to be able to understand dangerous goods, and the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 is something that forms part of our training. But what we are doing with this bill is not just about what happens when things go wrong. It is also about making sure that we empower WorkSafe, as well as other agencies, to be out there actively investigating and looking for these risks and also being able to manage these risks when they are identified, either through reporting or through their investigations.

It is particularly important to have these two bills here in the house today. I know it is a fairly bipartisan thing, but particularly for the Labor government, our focus is always on protecting the public as well as workers. These two bills go a long way in that commitment to protecting the public and workers when it comes to dangerous goods.

In reflecting on the 2018–19 fires, at the time I lived very briefly in Footscray, not far from where the fires took place. I remember seeing the large, angry black plume of smoke flowing across back towards the bay and thinking, 'Oh my God, we have a huge problem here.' But it is not just obvious things like West Footscray that drive the impetus for these bills. Some people may say, 'Member for Werribee, you have a lot of houses, and you have a lot of new estates; surely that's all you've got to worry about in Werribee.' We have a lot of legacy industrial estates in the middle of old residential areas in the electorate of Werribee, including in places like Lock Avenue and Riverside Avenue, where we have quite serious industrial operations only 200 or 300 metres away from general residential zones. It is legacy planning but also things that still exist and things that are still quite a risk to the community. I know at the fire brigade we are always very conscious of these little pockets of industrial activity around my electorate.

Something that people might also not realise is that any explosives that are being used by the defence force get transported through Werribee from Point Wilson, which forms just on the edge of my electorate, through the explosives pier there for the defence force. Not only that, we have got two or three quarries that also use explosives and test explosives for quarrying not far from the boundary of my electorate, out in places like Mambourin. Dangerous goods are everywhere, even in places that you would not expect them to be. We are not just thinking about places like Coode Island; we are also thinking about communities like Werribee when it comes to these reforms. These reforms are quite sensible. They come out of that report that others have mentioned, the Palmer report, which came out of those 2018–19 incidents, and the suggestion and recommendation that we look to have the Dangerous Goods Act components incorporated in OH&S legislation as well as ensuring that there is a separate and specific dangerous goods transport bill to bring us more in line with other states.

In reflecting on why this was important I also turned back to some of my other firefighting experience up in Dimboola. Not only did we have places where there was illegally dumped industrial waste and materials on the outskirts of the desert in Dimboola – there were lots of sites that were not clearly identified, and a lot of investigation happened around that over the last few years – but also we had the transport of dangerous goods across the border into South Australia. Every night you would have hundreds of trucks rolling through Dimboola carrying all sorts of things. To have that harmonisation across the entire country I think is particularly important. Yes, we have our intergovernmental

agreement around the transport of dangerous goods not only with road, but also when I was living up there we had the major rail line to Perth running straight through the middle of the town. Having these codes is important at the local level because it means that those operators are held to account and there is a similar standard across all states no matter where that train travels or that semi goes across the border. It is towns like that that are at the heart of our transport community, and it is areas like Werribee, where we have that light industrial mixed in with residential estates, where it is particularly important to have these really clear laws incorporated into our Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

Why is it important to have these laws in the OH&S act? I guess it is because our OH&S act is that primary source for how we work on a worksite and how we make people safe on a worksite. It is not only people who are working in that context but anyone who may be affected or impacted by the work that is happening there. What is interesting about the bill, particularly the OH&S bill, is that it has a broad general duty requiring a person who undertakes activities involving dangerous goods to ensure so far as reasonably practicable that these activities are undertaken in a manner that is safe, without risks to health, safety and property. Having a general duty like that means that it does not matter if you are the manager, you are the person who is working on the line or you are the person who may be using the forklift with a licence – unlike the Leader of the Opposition – to transport goods across that yard safely; that general duty applies to everyone in that context, which is very, very important.

Something else that I welcome in this bill, and we saw this as a particular issue with some of that illegal dumping in western Victoria, is the provisions for civil penalties to make sure that they can be ordered, particularly around improvement projects – so fixing the thing up – injunctions to make sure they stop doing it, looking at the monetary benefit that they are making out of it and how we restrict that but also adverse publicity. There is nothing like a little bit of name and shame when it comes to people who are doing the wrong thing by workers and the nearby community.

I spoke a little bit about those light industrial areas that are very close to residential areas in Werribee, and some of the work in this bill goes to the powers of WorkSafe inspectors to be able to go onto different properties. We have a new entry power allowing an inspector to enter a place if such entry is necessary to allow an inspector to exercise their power to intervene to address a serious or immediate risk at a nearby property. It is not just about the property that they believe the risk is emanating from; it is also those properties nearby. This is particularly important – you may think of a storage facility that backs onto a residential area. We need to have the ability to have our WorkSafe inspectors go through those houses, to be able to see how that other site may potentially impact on those residential houses and vice versa. It is important to have that flexibility and that clear power for our WorkSafe inspectors, because in the end it is those powers that give them the opportunity to keep Victorians safe.

This is part of a range of reforms that we have had in this space around WorkSafe and keeping the community safe when it comes to dangerous activities or dangerous goods. In this budget we have invested $22.4 million to help keep workers safe, particularly around return to work and supporting families who may have had a loved one killed at work, which I know is something particularly sensitive in my community because we have had a few over the last year. We have invested in 20 extra WorkSafe inspectors to target five of the most dangerous industries for workers – construction, health care, social assistance, public sector, agriculture and manufacturing – which is on top of the 60 additional workplace inspectors that we already have. Returning to that, I would like to thank all those people who do work for WorkSafe. They often do not get recognised enough. They get called out at all sorts of hours to all sorts of places and all sorts of situations. As someone who has been there when they have had to show up to an industrial accident or a rescue job that we have had, I know that they are extremely diligent and professional. Making sure that they have those powers to continue to do their job and the clarity in the two bills is particularly important. I commend these bills to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:23): I rise to speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. As we have heard throughout this evening and this afternoon, we on this side, the Liberals and Nationals, do

not oppose these bills, because anything that improves workplace safety should be supported, anything that reduces risk or serious dangerous incidents should be supported and anything that helps a worker walk back through their front door after a day's work is something that we support on this side.

To break it down into the two separate bills, we have got the transport bill, and that is looking at how those dangerous goods are moving across Victoria by road and rail, and the OH&S bill, and this is really about how those goods are handled, which is critical to my electorate of Euroa when we look at the agricultural industry, the freight corridor that runs through the centre of it and all the industries that benefit from those businesses and the transportation of goods but, importantly, need to do it safely. On fuel, ag chemicals, fertiliser, industrial gases and explosives, we need to eliminate those risks wherever possible and reduce them as far as is practical, and it makes a lot of sense.

I think my comments today are around the fact that we take enormous responsibility for dangerous goods and their safe transportation, and it is really a daily reality for a lot of the industries in the Euroa electorate – fuel that fuels our cars, diesel that powers the tractors and harvesters, fertilisers, industrial chemicals. Never have we had such a hot topic around diesel and fertiliser in my electorate as the current cost and the impact that is having on agriculture throughout the cropping industry. I think that, whereas a lot of contribution has been around the emotion today, we need to look at it from the practicality as well, because in the end, when we look at our agriculture and our primary producers, they are working at home and they often work in isolation, and making sure it is a safe contribution to the industry is really, really critical.

We also have a significant freight industry throughout regional Victoria, but certainly through Benalla, Euroa, Violet Town and really all of that Hume corridor and all of the periphery roads as well. You really see our region ignite during harvest, the peak of the agricultural industry. You can see it also in the fact that we transport some significant concrete, as well as having all of our quarry operations. Getting the products into the centre, getting them between Melbourne and Sydney, you come through the wonderful Euroa electorate, and we need to make sure it is done safely. We actually have had a few transportation accidents, where you have seen the EPA on the ground because of the consequences of those. My heart always goes out to making sure that the drivers and those that have been playing a role in the transportation are safe and that their families have someone coming home to them at night-time.

Euroa I am very proud of – the fact that our region and my community and electorate help feed and power Victoria and keep Victoria moving. This is why we are supportive of these reforms. But I think that it is appropriate to also highlight that you cannot legislate safety into a freight task while the roads beneath the wheels are falling apart. They actually have to go hand in hand. While we are debating dangerous goods and safety here, what my office and my community are feeling is a very different situation. They are inundated – and I am sure that most members here are in the same position – with complaints about the condition of the roads and the impact that is having on the safety of them getting home.

One decent rain event after months of dry – actually, we have had several decent rain events recently – will see new potholes and new erosion on the sides of our roads. The deterioration is so significant. Whether it is your industry that is moving, your agricultural industry or your emergency services, having safe roads is the foundation of all of this. To move industry, move business, move your communities and move your families safely is critical. The Midland Highway between Benalla and Mansfield is crumbling, and you can actually see the toll and the consequence on those roads in the level of wire barriers that have also been impacted. You know because they sit like that for several months, if not years – the amount of wire barriers that have been destroyed and then not fixed. Actually, on my way to Parliament I did see a small section of the Hume Freeway that had been destroyed and sat like that for several months, finally getting fixed.

I have mentioned at length Archie Baines, who is 82. I went for a drive with him, and he actually analysed the condition of the roads and the impact it is having on his business. He has got a rather

large transportation business that is known across Australia. He had a critical incident that nearly took his life. The wire barriers are still destroyed. I anticipate they will probably remain destroyed for a few more years under a Labor government, but they do have a role to play. They actually prevented him from exiting the Goulburn Valley Highway and having a potentially fatal accident. He was quite traumatised when he was reliving that story with me. He was dragged across several lanes. The consequence of that pothole and that deteriorated road was actually a lot of damage. We estimated it was worth a couple hundred thousand dollars – this one single pothole and the destruction it caused to people's cars and vehicles.

I know that because I went to Wahring Motors, which is the nearby mechanic, and I asked him, 'What are the most lethal potholes in the Euroa electorate?' and he mentioned the ones, and he can almost put a value on the damage because he is repairing the vehicles. During cost-of-living pressures, having vehicle damage is really extraordinary for people's livelihoods at the moment. It is tough going when you are paying $400. As we know, the government have increased the cost of reimbursement up to $1500 strategically so that they are not paying any out.

But imagine Archie's truck was carrying fuel. Imagine the consequences not just to him but the environment and other drivers as well. The consequences are serious. This is a quite a segue to make, but it just reminded me of the situation during the Longwood bushfire, when the Longwood fire jumped the freeway. Because of some of the dysfunction of the incident control centre and the communications, when the fire jumped it actually went down the freeway on either side of the Hume Freeway and it trapped about 30 vehicles, including a fuel tanker, on the road. The consequence of that is extreme. I honestly think that legislation around safety and making sure people come home is critical, but there are so many other areas that the Labor government could be looking at that it is just completely avoiding.

Many of us have complained about the deterioration of rope barriers and how long they take to fix. Hundreds of metres of barriers where Archie tore through are still broken, which is so concerning. I think that the responsibility of these two bills has to cut both ways, doesn't it? A government is not exempt from those safety requirements. What we are asking in this legislation is that employers, transport operators, workers, directors and company officers all carry that responsibility – entirely appropriate. But if the Allan Labor government does not take on that same responsibility and ensure the same safety to make sure that workers get home, that goods are transported safely on safe roads, that workers are walking through the door after a day supporting our state's economy, then it is a double standard that I think is unacceptable. Barrier maintenance has to be a greater focus of the government. A freight operator can meet every requirement of these bills – immaculate vehicle, fully trained driver, comprehensive systems – and still be driving on roads that deteriorate year after year.

I want to mention briefly rail, which is also mentioned in this legislation, but I am running out of time. I just want to very quickly talk about the fact that, when you talk about safety and talk about the condition of the roads, that also has an impact on the safety of our drivers. They feel it every time they hit a pothole, every time a repair fails after the next rain, every time a train is cancelled and they are forced back behind the wheel. Safety is the road beneath the wheels of a freight vehicle and a barrier maintained after it has done its job.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (18:33): I rise to speak in support of the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026. At the start I would just like to make the point that it is the Labor Party and Labor governments, together with unions, that have a very strong and proud history of supporting and enacting legislation to support workers rights at work, in particular their right to a healthy and safe workplace, and also of course their right to come home. This legislation continues to build on the work that really started with the Labor government in the 1980s, when the strongest health and safety legislation for workplaces was introduced – and opposed vehemently, might I add, by the opposition, the Liberal–National parties. That was well before my time, but even during my time in this place most of the legislation that we have introduced around workplace health and safety has been, while not always opposed, sometimes opposed. Certainly there has been a lot of talk about how this is not

going to be good for employers, and the focus was on the employers and their income rather than the safety of working people and their right to return home in a safe way without injury or illness.

Dangerous goods are a huge risk to the health and safety of working people as well as the community generally. This legislation comes from the learnings from those terrible chemical fires in 2018 and 2019, starting with the fire in West Footscray. Workplaces and residents were told to close their windows, schools were closed, traffic was diverted – not to mention the absolute worry and concern of residents: would the fire expand, would it become out of control, would it come near and burn places they were living in? That is not to mention the toxic fumes that people were worried about: had they breathed that in, what would that do to their bodies?

When we are talking about health and safety and compensation, do not forget that it was the Labor government that introduced the presumptive legislation that applies to firefighters, both CFA and the full-time firefighters, and the workers that maintain the trucks in the firegrounds and in structural fires. The presumptive legislation is protection for those that are protecting us when it comes to fires. It also demonstrates the very well proven fact that chemicals are a huge risk to the safety of people, that they cause all sorts of illnesses and cancers, as well as some of the shorter term effects such as all sorts of skin problems that can continue on. This is the sort of thing that individuals in 2018 and 2019 in particular were exposed to, from people doing the things that risk communities and the health of those communities in the most irresponsible way.

The CFA, the EPA and WorkSafe were all involved in the clean-up and control of these fires and chemical dumping. One of the comments from one representative of one of the authorities was:

> This is at the extreme end of offending in terms of what we allege and there's a complete disregard for community safety, complete shirking of responsibility.

And:

> We believe this has been a highly co-ordinated … highly organised illegal activity.

In order to address these issues, the Victorian Labor government conducted a review, because you do not know – you really need to get all the evidence together to see what is the best way to protect people, what is the best possible legislation to ensure that there are no loopholes, to ensure there are no unintended consequences and to find what will be best to protect residents and Victorians from these sorts of actions. The review was conducted by a now judge, who looked into what had happened in particular around the West Footscray fire, and not only that but there was also a fire in Campbellfield. In the electorate of Thomastown, the electorate I represent, in Epping there were a number of warehouses that were stocked so high with illegal chemicals and waste and dangerous products that the CFA, the EPA and even WorkSafe found it really difficult to get into those workplaces – they were so full of this contaminated stuff. It seems that what was happening was that individuals, to make a quick buck, were collecting these dangerous materials and these chemicals and so on, and instead of disposing of them in a responsible way with the proper authorities and the proper licences, they just hid them away in warehouses, left them there just to continue on and become a massive risk to the community. People do not learn. I know, Acting Speaker Kathage, that you would recall that at the height of the fire season that we have just had a completely irresponsible criminal person was dumping chemicals on properties in the top end of Wollert and then started to burn them off on a total fire ban day. Luckily he was caught, along with others that were involved, and we expect that the full force of the law will deal with that offending.

This legislation, though, as I said, is in response to the Palmer review, and I suppose the mechanics of it are to have a piece of legislation that just deals singularly with the transport of dangerous goods. There is the Dangerous Goods Act 1985, but this bill will bring all the legislation and regulation around the transportation of dangerous goods into one piece of legislation. That will cover transportation – whether it is by land, by sea, by road or by rail – all in one piece of legislation to make it easier for

those involved in this industry to understand and comply with, as well as strengthening the penalties and the regulatory framework in which it will operate, and the business.

When we look at some of this sort of legislation, sometimes it is really just a matter of experiences that show where legislation is lacking or requires further amendment, whether it is because of the changing nature of industry or whether it is because of a change in ways of doing things. This legislation looks at bringing everything together but also strengthening the penalties to make sure that people that break the law and put the community at risk are subject to the strongest of penalties and sanctions.

First of all, just going through some of the amendments – and I know I do not have a very long to do that – this is going to make it easier for duty holders to understand the responsibilities clearly outlined in the legislation, what the transport of dangerous goods is and how to ensure they are transported in a safe manner. There is also going to be greater strength in enforcement and prosecution and penalties so that there is an effective enforcement system so we can actually catch those that are committing these crimes and effectively charge them. Those sorts of enforcement tools will be things such as allowing authorised officers better entry powers into facilities that are suspected of storing dangerous goods and also allowing pre-emptive action, so it is about not just when a crime is committed in this area but when an authorised officer may suspect that something is going to occur or has occurred so that we can nip it in the bud before it becomes the worst-case scenario. There is also ability in this legislation for compensation, so road and rail authorities will be able to seek compensation for damages. Because again, we know that some of the damage, particularly in the fires, was to public facilities, and of course there ought to be compensation for that.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (18:43): I rise to speak on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026. These bills seek to modernise Victoria's dangerous goods regulatory framework, strengthen safety protections and provide greater clarity for businesses, workers, emergency services and the broader community. The legislation follows recommendations arising from the independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and represents a significant overhaul of laws that are now more than four decades old. Dangerous goods are a necessary part of modern life. They include substances that are flammable, explosive, corrosive, oxidising or otherwise hazardous. They are used every day across agriculture, manufacturing, construction, transport, health care and many other sectors. While essential, they also carry significant risks if not handled, stored or transported appropriately.

The Dangerous Goods Transport Bill establishes a dedicated legislative framework governing the transport of dangerous goods by road, rail and inland waterways. It replaces outdated provisions and aligns Victoria more closely with national approaches, providing greater consistency for industry while enhancing public safety. Both of these bills seek to enact the recommendations that were put forward in the final report of the independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 by Andrew Palmer KC, now a judge, back in October 2022. Importantly, the bill introduces a general duty requiring those involved in transporting dangerous goods to ensure those goods are transported safely and without risk to public safety, property and the environment. This places the focus where it belongs, on identifying and managing risks before accidents and incidents occur.

The bills that we are debating concurrently today aim to modernise the overall regulation of the transport of dangerous goods across Victoria as well as strengthen WorkSafe's overall ability to enforce compliance with current dangerous goods transport laws. Dangerous goods are an important part of the state's economy, and in particular dangerous goods are used across a variety of different industries, especially agriculture, construction, manufacturing and health care, in order to provide services and produce essential goods. We know that dangerous goods present significant risks to the community that need to be controlled. Ultimately every Victorian expects dangerous goods to be handled and transported safely. They expect workers to return home safely, communities to be protected from avoidable risks and regulators to have the tools necessary to enforce the law when serious breaches occur.

These bills recognise that prevention is always better than response. By strengthening duties, improving accountability and ensuring clear safety obligations the legislation seeks to reduce the likelihood of serious incidents occurring in the first place. It is also important to acknowledge the vital role played by emergency services personnel who respond to dangerous goods incidents. Strong regulatory frameworks assist not only workers and businesses but also those who place themselves in harm's way to protect the community. Importantly, stronger penalties for reckless or negligent conduct send a clear message that safety cannot be treated as an afterthought. Where individuals or organisations fail to meet their obligations and place others at risk there must be appropriate consequences. The community expects that those responsible for managing dangerous goods do so with the highest regard for safety and responsibility.

My electorate is one of the largest and most successful agriculture, manufacturing and industry suppliers, with both national and global success, and we have an enormous amount of transport movement. My region is home to close to 25 per cent of the state's trucks, and that number continues to grow. It is incredibly busy when it comes to the transport of dangerous goods, whether that is down the Goulburn Valley Highway, onto the Hume Freeway, down to Melbourne, interstate or, as I said, globally. We need to ensure that the truck drivers and everyone involved in handling dangerous goods are protected with safe legislation so that their lives are not put at risk, and everyone deserves to get home safely.

There have been incidents over time that have raised the need for these reforms. We saw the two chemical fires back in 2018 and 2019. At the time they were both linked to illegal stockpiling, which as a result released toxic smoke and hazardous substances into surrounding communities. There was the West Footscray fire that burnt for almost two weeks back in August 2018, and then following that the major fire at a Campbellfield chemical waste facility in April 2019, which took several days before being brought under control by our first responders. Both these incidents impacted the health of not only individuals and our first responders but also neighbouring communities surrounding the fires. We also saw waterways contaminated and substances being released from these blazes, as well as the overall environment being severely damaged as a result.

These illicit activities had been occurring in the lead-up to the independent review being commissioned, which later highlighted the weakness in the system that needed to be acted upon, including the interstate movement and transport of hazardous waste. In the final report handed down by Andrew Palmer KC back in 2022 it included a total of 49 recommendations made to the government, with 37 of them since having been fully supported by the government today. Change is needed to make people more responsible and more accountable. The report specifically recommended that the state's dangerous goods legislation be incorporated within the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and such regulations, as well as that dangerous goods transport be regulated by its own act and regulations, with explosives and high-consequence dangerous goods regulated under separate legislation.

There are a number of key amendments the bill contains, such as the creation of a new Dangerous Goods Transport Act that seeks to cover road, rail, boat and inland waterways, makes it an offence to risk serious injury or death involving dangerous goods and strengthens WorkSafe's powers and overall ability to enforce compliance. It gives the courts broader sentencing options and also aligns dangerous goods laws with other regulatory frameworks and facilitates better coordination and information sharing between jurisdictions in addressing the weaknesses in interstate transport of dangerous goods. The adoption of a duties-based approach means that a person involved in the transport of dangerous goods must ensure that they are transported in a manner that is firstly safe and secondly without risks to public safety, property and the environment. That is incredibly important when we consider the nature of such goods being transported across the state but also interstate, whether that be on our roads or via rail.

Pending the bill's passage the regulations to come are expected to align Victoria with other jurisdictions across the country by adopting the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods

by Road & Rail, with the commencement of these changes not anticipated until April 2028 in order to allow for sufficient time for the industry and duty holders to prepare for and comply with the changes as the bill sets out.

As the member for Eildon touched on as well in her lead contribution, the Victorian Transport Association, the VTA, have raised concerns regarding the bill's new powers relating to entry. In particular the VTA has expressed that these new powers are too broad and that they do not direct the inspector to focus solely on dangerous goods, instead allowing all parts of the vehicle and vessel to be searched and seized as a result. When you consider the practicality of all of this, many of the real risks sit in the surrounding conditions such as, for example, the vehicle's condition, load restraint, maintenance, documentation and competence of operators. Most of the changes that are contained in the bill are with already existing OH&S legislation. The member for Eildon also raised that the VTA holds concerns around the seizure of vehicles without some degree of formal notice that can be communicated to the owner of the vehicle or freight.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) also raised concerns about the reforms in the bill – that they do not impose disproportionate regulatory burdens. Farmers are not transport operators by trade, yet under these bills they will be directly captured by these provisions through normal farming activities. As a result of this, there is a need for meaningful consultation and input into the development of the regulations. It is essential that farmers are not unfairly exposed by the amendments contained in these bills.

Whilst we do not oppose these bills, it should be noted that these bills are significant. We need to monitor how well they play out on the ground. Moving away from the Dangerous Goods Act to a more modern, transport-focused framework is timely and necessary, as it is clear that there need to be more protections and safety in place. That is critically important, especially when you take into account such goods that are being transported across Victoria and interstate. The overall structure and intent of these bills also reflects a shift to a more contemporary and risk-based approach that is closely aligned with the principles that we see also in the current Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, which completely bans the transport of extremely dangerous goods. It not only improves compliance, it also reduces compliance costs for industry by supporting national productivity.

The Australian Institute of Health & Safety recognises that these changes are positive and timely, yet the concerns they have outlined, particularly around the ambiguity and potential risks, are real. Similar to the VFF, their concerns about their members being caught up in the new reforms are also fair and need to be considered by the government when developing future regulations pending the passage of these bills. That is why we, the Nationals and Liberals, are calling on the government for consultation around the development of the regulations and, where feedback has been provided by key industry stakeholders, that it be taken into account.

Whilst we do not oppose this bill, we do note that these bills are significant and also complex in nature. Moving to a more modern and transport-focused framework is welcomed and necessary. It is important that it is there to protect the safety of all Victorians, something which is incredibly important. As I have mentioned, the government must take into account the feedback that has been provided by industry stakeholders when developing future regulations pending this bill so that most people are not severely impacted.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:53): I am pleased to have quite a few minutes left on the clock to make a contribution on the Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026 and the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026 and follow on from what was a very sound and measured contribution from the member for Shepparton, who I think went to the key components within the bill that go to providing for better safety for our state and go towards providing for a better system of management in terms of regulation and control.

I think broadly the debate on this piece of legislation throughout the journey of the evening has been a good one. Indeed, it is on the back of some really significant work that other members have mentioned around the report and the significant amount of work that has been done to improve the control and management of dangerous goods. Certainly a number of members have made really significant and important contributions to what we have seen in terms of a number of safety incidents across the state. I think that the learnings that are contained within the bill before the house and the work that has been done in terms of the report make this a really important step, because it goes to safety. It goes to the safety of not just those who are working within particular industries who might be further exposed or have a higher risk in terms of the management and the control of such substances, but also the wider community. What has been really well canvassed through the journey of the debate this evening has indeed been that contribution around those incidents that have occurred and the way in which the learnings can evolve and the way in which the government and agencies can respond.

I do want to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge those in our emergency services family, who do amazing work in responding to any incident, particularly those that involve dangerous goods. Picking up on the thread that a number of other members have raised around that additional training and the safeguards that are put in place for the management and the control of such goods, it is something that is really important to put on the record, our thanks and acknowledgement of that, as well. I think when you are speaking to the wider community on these matters, people know and understand that the existence of all of these chemicals is indeed within the community. But knowing and understanding that the safeguards are in place and that that is backed up by solid research is something that is really important.

From the position of transport, understanding the work that needs to be done around having our agencies equipped with the resources and the tools that they need to be able to respond is something that is really, really important. Making these provisions on the back of these reports is a really important part of government, and I want to thank those that have done the work to make the report possible and take the opportunity to acknowledge that that is a really significant and valued contribution. This piece of legislation goes to community safety and the management and responsibility of our agencies. When we are guided by the principles, those that are contained in the report around better safety, better management and better control, we of course get better outcomes.

I did not get to hear all of the terrific contributions that were made on this piece of legislation this evening, but listening to quite a few, I think there has been a really measured, responsible debate this evening around this piece of legislation, in those that I have heard, and making those provisions that go to that better control, that better certainty and that better understanding is really important. The member for Thomastown I think articulated a number of these matters really well in going to the safety of workers and the safety of community when it comes to the management and the control of dangerous goods within our community. I think certainly picking up on the member for Shepparton, some of her points around that transport and those matters are really important, and they go to those better safeguards. As industry changes and as different products come to market and are used in different ways, we need to make sure that we are responding accordingly. I do not think by any stretch of the imagination anyone is saying that this is the final piece of legislation that will be drafted on these matters. We need to make sure that we are responsive, and we need to make sure that we are continuing to operate in a way that makes our state a fairer and better place as we move forward.

I think the final observation for me that I would make would be that we need to make sure we are supporting our agencies to be able to do this work. The government's announcements that we have made within the budget certainly go to those matters. That is something that I think is really, really important. There has been a lot of work that has gone into this, and I think we should be really pleased that this piece of legislation is before the house, and it is for those reasons and a few more that I happily commend this bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Australian Property Owners Alliance

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (1699) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and it concerns the issue of rental owners and some of their rights that they are wanting to place on record and talk to the minister about. I recently met, on the weekend, a group called the APOA, the Australian Property Owners Alliance. They are a group of mum-and-dad small investors from Box Hill, Bulleen, Balwyn, mainly from our Chinese community. As I said, they are small investors; they are mum-and-dad investors who usually have one or at best two properties to their names. They have rented those properties out, and they are seeking to have some issues clarified in relation to Victoria's rental property laws, particularly in relation to gas and electricity being checked every two years when the property might be newly built, for instance. They want to understand why this cost is there for them when the property might be new.

In relation to the rental eviction laws, tenants cannot be evicted if they do not have money, for instance, to pay rent, and that then falls back on the small investor. Most landlords are, as I said, mum-and-dad investors. The costs are increasing on them, including land tax, the COVID debt levy. On VCAT, they raised a number of issues in relation to the speed of VCAT. Landlords feel powerless in dealing with tenants who in some instances may be bad. Participants feel that VCAT stands for the tenants, not the landlords. They want those issues around VCAT to be reviewed.

These are small, mum-and-dad investors. They are regular Australians who just want to have parity. They are not asking for anyone to lose any rights. They are not being unfair. They were not being offensive. They were not being in any way unreasonable. What they want is for their issues to be heard, and they want a forum in which to put those issues to the minister. My request tonight is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to meet with the APOA so they can discuss their issues with him directly and put the issues of those small, mum-and-dad investors to him to get a fairer deal.

Brisbane Ranges National Park

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:02): (1700) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. The action that I seek from the minister is to exempt all land within the Brisbane Ranges National Park from future mining exploration. This park is incredibly valuable for its natural environment. The Brisbane Ranges are home to Victoria's richest wildflower habitat. There are plants there that have long disappeared from other parts of the state. Nearby the Steiglitz Historic Park is a unique reminder of Victoria's gold rush history, with sites and landscapes that have been preserved for generations.

I recently met with a number of community members from the Lara electorate who are concerned about the impact of potential mining activities, which could threaten the integrity of the environmentally significant Brisbane Ranges National Park and the historically significant Steiglitz Historic Park, causing irreversible damage and undermining their value for future generations. Once lost, these sites and the stories that they hold cannot be replaced. It is important that the state government act now to ensure the ongoing protection of the Brisbane Ranges National Park from activities that may compromise its historical, cultural and environmental significance.

Mildura pest animal and weed control

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:03): (1701) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Local Government, who is at the table, and the action I seek is an urgent increase in funding to Mildura Rural City Council's roadside pests and weeds program. Mildura Rural City Council has partnered with dryland farming Landcare groups, who I know are in Queen's Hall this week, so this is a very timely adjournment matter. They have been the public land managers for more than 12 years

to deliver coordinated weed and rabbit control across the extensive road network that Mildura Rural City Council manages, which is about 5000 kilometres of roadside. Much of it is unsealed, and it adjoins dryland agriculture land.

The funding that the state contributes from the state's roadside weeds and pests program is only $85,000. That is the contribution that the Mildura Rural City Council is getting from the state to help manage roadside pests and weeds. Why this is important is it leaves Mildura Rural City Council hugely under-resourced. To be able to manage that huge road network and the invasive weeds and the rabbits on the scale that is required, it urgently needs further funding.

Our roadsides contain some of the last remaining vegetation in dryland farming areas and form critical habitat for corridors for native animals to safely migrate, forage – all of the kinds of things that little creatures do. We are talking about threatened species as well, like the regent parrot, the malleefowl and the mallee emu-wren. They rely on these corridors as an important habitat. But the rabbits – the infestations are severely degrading these corridors through overgrazing. They are eating the seed when they are out seeding, which most have completed by now. There is soil disturbance, and the competition for resources and the prevention of native plant regeneration contributes to erosion and predator pressure as well. The impact on adjoining agricultural land is substantial. We urgently need more funding not just for the Landcare groups, which do a huge amount to control roadside weeds and pests, but also to Mildura Rural City Council and other rural councils to help manage their very, very vast road networks and the pests and weeds that call them home, unfortunately.

Dandenong Hospital

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:06): (1702) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. The action I seek is an update on the timeframe of construction of the redevelopment of Dandenong Hospital. This is a significant investment that is being made in health, one of 11 hospital upgrades that has been made by this Labor government, because it is Labor governments that invest in health care. It is the nurses, doctors and allied health workers that Labor governments always protect and support.

We see each and every day the risk of a Liberal–One Nation coalition, and we see this now more real than ever before. We see One Nation running absolutely over the top of the Nationals, and we see the significant risk to the Nationals seeking to exist in the state of Victoria. It will be a tragedy to see the 100-plus-year-old National Party recede out, but then we see as well the huge desperation to survive as a Liberal movement – now down federally at 17 points on recent polling. That is right, 17 points is where Angus Taylor and the federal Liberals are. We see that populism has taken over policy. Who will be on the side of health workers in Victoria? It will be a Labor government who will be on the side of hospital investments, with 11 hospital upgrades. We have seen Peninsula University Hospital, we have seen Dandenong Hospital receiving an upgrade, and literally Monash Medical Centre is out of the ground. When those opposite, the Liberals, had their chance federally they absolutely tore a hole through federal health funding. When they had an opportunity to front up to nurses, what did the former Premier's family do? They gave them the middle finger. Literally, that was how our health workers were treated.

At a time when services matter, when governments need to intervene to support the health outcomes for Victorians – because we know people are doing it tough and we know that these hospital upgrades and investments are so important – an upgrade at Dandenong Hospital will mean so much to so many in our community. It will deliver nine new operating theatres, a new intensive care unit and 16 beds as part of an upgrade to day surgery admissions. It is part of a $305 million investment in the Dandenong Hospital. Those in my community know just how significant it is – their maternal child services and the maternity ward as well – with so many of the bubbies of my community going through Dandenong Hospital or up to Sandringham, Frankston or Monash. It is a significant part of our health infrastructure and our communities. I am so proud that this Labor government backs health how it has

for 10 to 12 years, because Victorians know it is in our DNA to support health, not the populist cuts and destruction that would be a Liberal–One Nation and National coalition.

Cost of living

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:09): (1703) My question is to the Premier. The action I seek is for her to match the Liberals' plan to cut taxes for Victorians to help ease the cost of living. Recently the Premier stood in Parliament and declared that she is determined to do everything that she can to ease cost-of-living pressures, not that one can really believe what she has to say when she reckons she does not know anything about the $15 billion that has gone missing to corruption in Victoria. But anyway, there is a newsflash for you and for every Victorian, because from 1 July the government is set to hit Victorians with a wave of increases across government charges, all of them landing all at once. Car registration is going up. Drivers licence fees are going up. The emergency services levy is brand new, and it is already going up. Working with children checks; birth, death and marriage certificates; business registration fees; liquor licences; national park camping fees; and builder registrations – every single one of them is going up and up and up, and that is the hallmark of the Allan Labor government, tax after tax after tax, increased fees, increased charges and increased and new taxes. Sixty-seven I think we are up to now – 67 increased and new taxes – when they promised there would not be one increased or new tax in their government. Well, here we are. Is that what the Premier calls helping with cost of living?

I think of young families already choosing between filling the petrol tank and filling the fridge, and now their rego is going up too. I think of small business owners across our state who fought through the pandemic, who fought through rising interest rates and who are only just finding their feet again, and now their registration costs are climbing once more. I think of the local tradie who is about to renew their builders rego, only to find out that the government has decided now is the time to take a little bit more out of his pocket. These are the basic, unavoidable costs of living and working in this state, and the Allan Labor government is raising every single one of them simultaneously, while the Premier pats herself on the back for helping ease the cost of living, she reckons, in Victoria.

I mean, there are even weekend camping trips that are going to cost more soon. There is only one party who is serious about cutting costs, Victorians, and that is the Liberal Party. We will cut land tax and payroll tax. We will cut the emergency services levy on farmers, families and businesses. We will cut the schools tax and GP tax. We will cut stamp duty for first home buyers up to $1 million. We will cut Labor's waste and we will cut Labor's corruption, and we certainly will not be spending $15 billion on corruption here in Victoria. We will fix the budget, prioritise essential services and make life easier for Victorians, and we will let Victorians keep more of their money – because you earned it, so you deserve to keep it. It is time for a fresh start.

Crime prevention

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (19:12): (1704) I rise to raise a matter for the Minister for Violence Reduction, and the action I seek is that the minister provides an update on how our government will support the rollout of early prevention models that were discussed at last week's western metro violence reduction unit forum that occurred in Sunshine. On 11 June I had the absolute pleasure and privilege of joining the minister, local leaders and expert frontline agencies at this absolutely vital event across the western suburbs. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the minister herself and the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Safety for attending the forum. The dedicated VRU team, who were there in force, and our many community partners brought together an amazing day with such positive energy and, most importantly, evidence-led solutions that were on display and discussed at length.

This momentum is backed by our government's recent budget announcement of $33 million to the VRU. This funding will go directly towards new programs that focus on early intervention and identify and disrupt youth crime patterns early. As discussed at this forum, the programs must involve the whole community but in particular young people. It was incredibly valuable to review the localised

data packs that were provided for the Brimbank, Wyndham and Melton areas, highlighting exactly where early intervention is needed most. We know that violence can be prevented when we actively tackle the conditions that allow it to develop in the first place, and there was a real focus on the health and wellbeing of our young people.

The strong focus on secondary prevention is specifically stopping those emerging risks before they escalate. A shining example of the day was the work presented by the Target Zero initiative, which is being driven by Westjustice and the Centre for Multicultural Youth. This is a powerful project, perfectly embodying the local-led model that we need to prevent harm, distribute cycle pathways and support early intervention. To make this vision a reality, we need to continue to support the full landscape and those organisations that are working day in and day out to prevent violence and support our young people, organisations like 1000 Generations, the Les Twentyman Foundation, Youth Junction, Youth Support and Advocacy Service – YSAS – and legal aid.

WRAD Health

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:15): (1705) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to urgently commit funding to the proposed WRAD Health Lookout residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Warrnambool. Alarming new figures released by the Penington Institute highlight why this project cannot be delayed any longer. The report reveals that Victoria recorded its deadliest year on record for unintentional drug deaths, with 572 Victorians losing their lives in 2024. Across Australia seven people die from overdose every day. These are not statistics; these are parents, workers, friends and families whose lives have been cut short. Particularly alarming is that Australians in their 40s and 50s are now the age group most likely to die from an accidental drug overdose. Opioids remain the most common drug involved in fatal overdoses, while deaths involving stimulants and cocaine continue to rise. Penington Institute chief executive John Ryan described the situation as one of Australia's most urgent public health emergencies. His warning should be a wake-up call for this Allan Labor government. What is missing here is not evidence; what is missing is political urgency, and that is exactly what communities in south-west Victoria have been saying for years.

Despite the clear and growing need, south-west Victoria remains the only region in Victoria without a committed, proposed or under-construction residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. This glaring gap in service provision has existed for far too long. Families in the south-west are still forced to send loved ones hundreds of kilometres away for treatment, if they can access treatment at all. The local community, health providers and advocates have worked tirelessly to develop the WRAD Health proposal. They have demonstrated the need, identified the solution and built the strong community support. What is missing is a commitment from the Allan Labor government.

The proposed Lookout rehab centre would change that. It would provide a local pathway of recovery, giving people the opportunity to receive treatment close to their families, support networks and communities. We know these connections are critical to long-term recovery, yet despite the overwhelming need and the strong community support, this project continues to sit on the government's never-ending list of promises and delays. Every year of inaction means that more people miss out on treatment, more families are left struggling and more pressure is placed on hospitals, emergency services and community organisations. The evidence is clear, the need is undeniable and the community support is there. What is required now is leadership and a government that does what it says. A Wilson-led coalition government will make the Lookout rehabilitation centre a priority and ensure the people of Warrnambool and south-west Victoria have access to the same life-changing rehabilitation services available in other regions. It is time for a fresh start, Victoria.

Public transport fares

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:18): (1706) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and concerns half-price transport fares. The action that I seek is that the minister provides an update on how this initiative is benefiting constituents in my

electorate of Narre Warren South. The Allan Labor government took real and immediate steps to take pressure off the petrol pump in response to issues overseas which are raising costs in Australia. Free public transport for everyone across April and May was a tangible saving that helped encourage public transport use while reducing the demand on fuel. This was evident in the 100 million trips that took place on our great public transport system over that period, with passenger numbers returning to pre-COVID levels. Now with half-price travel available for the rest of the year, our community can continue saving with fewer Myki top-ups. This adds to other fantastic measures like free public transport for under-18s and for Victorian Seniors Card holders on weekends. I was really pleased to recently see that tap-and-go has now been rolled out across our train network too. It is now possible to touch on with an EFTPOS card, smartphone or smartwatch at Myki-operated stations across the state, including along the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, which my community uses. We are cutting the cost of commuting to make life a bit easier and more affordable, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Narracan electorate infrastructure

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:20): (1707) My adjournment this evening is to the Premier, and the action I seek is that the Premier visit the electorate of Narracan to view firsthand the concern my community has for missing infrastructure investment, which has been neglected by the Victorian Labor government for more than a decade. I make this request because for the last three and a bit years that I have been in this place, I have continually brought up issues with ministers. Sometimes you just need to go to the boss. Because I do not know if the ministers do or do not convey the message accurately or give an accurate assessment of what is going on in my electorate, I would like the Premier herself to visit my electorate, and I am more than happy to escort her around the electorate.

The first people I would like her to speak to are the doctors, nurses and all the staff at the West Gippsland Hospital. Rather than hearing it from me in this chamber, hear it from the people that directly work there and hear how their work lives are affected working in a hospital that is not fit for purpose anymore. Listen to the stories about the patients getting treated in corridors. That is what I want the Premier to listen to. The Premier – I am sick of trying to deal with ministers that do not listen. It is not only that. It is the road network; it is the CFA stations; it is my electorate across the board and investment in schools. These are all issues I have brought up in this chamber, and not one of these issues has been addressed in the 3½ years I have been in this chamber.

I just heard the member for Mordialloc get up before and spruik about hospital investment. We are investing in health and all this other regurgitation, which is literally a press release that he regurgitates in this chamber. Not once did he mention West Gippsland Hospital and the failure on that investment. You would not even want to go there. You have probably never been there, and that is why I want the Premier to go there to see for herself, to see about every issue I have brought up in this chamber where a minister will not address it properly. Bring the Premier down – I want the Premier to come down to see for herself. If what this government says is true – that they govern for all Victorians – I think when the Premier looks at the state of my electorate, she will be ashamed that her ministers have failed in their duty of care to the people of Narracan.

Camp Road, Broadmeadows, pedestrian safety

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:22): (1708) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is a review of the safety of pedestrians on Camp Road between Gibson Street and Railway Crescent and a feasibility study on the installation of a signalised pedestrian crossing. Our government has prioritised safety on roads as a key issue with the *Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030*. The strategy aims to halve deaths on the road and greatly reduce road injuries incurred by drivers, passengers and pedestrians and put us on the path to zero road deaths by 2050 through the use of education, policy, technology and infrastructure.

Every day I witness people trying to cross Camp Road, especially because it is so close to the station, and I am very concerned about their safety, particularly students and young people who often cross

there. Constituents from my electorate, including Rushil Raina, a work experience student who drafted this adjournment for me, have also pointed out how dangerous and busy the area can be, especially during school drop-off and pick-up times when the traffic is worse than normal, with St Dominic's primary and Penola college close by. I appreciate the minister's review of this intersection and welcome measures to improve safety there, and I thank Rushil, who is also one of the young leaders in Hume, for his diligent work over the week.

Responses

Paul HAMER (Box Hill – Minister for Local Government, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Corrections) (19:24): I will deal with the member for Mildura's matter first. The government's roadside weeds and pests program is a very important program. Since the 2021–22 financial year, the Victorian government has provided $11.5 million over four years for this program, and that includes about $2.86 million in each financial year. There is another allocation of that amount in the 2026–27 budget to support councils – it is the 45 rural, regional and outer metropolitan councils. Obviously, as the member would well know, hers would be one of the biggest electorates, if not the biggest electorate in the state, and therefore would have a commensurate amount of local roads. I appreciate the member's request. I would note that the funding allocations for 2026–27 will be announced for eligible councils in July 2026, and that will be –

Jade Benham interjected.

Paul HAMER: I will take the member's comments and questions on board when that determination comes through.

In relation to the other members who have raised matters for other ministers, the member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, requesting a meeting with a group of landlords to clarify rental laws. The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources, requesting that the Brisbane Ranges National Park be protected from resource extraction. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure regarding the timeframe for construction of the Dandenong Hospital. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Premier regarding our cost-of-living measures. The member for Sydenham raised a matter for the Minister for Violence Reduction, seeking an update on the rollout of the early intervention program. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Health, requesting funding for a residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility in Warrnambool. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, seeking an update on how the initiative of half-price fares, this wonderful government initiative, is helping residents in his electorate. The member for Narracan, who has left the building, raised a matter for the Premier, seeking the Premier to visit his electorate and explore some of the infrastructure. And the member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, requesting an investigation of a potential pedestrian crossing to improve the safety of pedestrians on Camp Road.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:27 pm.