Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 4 March 2026

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

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Wednesday 4 March 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bills

Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (09:34): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to establish Safe Food Victoria and to provide for it to perform functions in regulating the Victorian food industry, to abolish Dairy Food Safety Victoria and PrimeSafe, to amend the Dairy Act 2000 to regulate foods that have not traditionally been produced or processed for human consumption in Victoria or that are produced or processed using new technologies, to make consequential and related amendments to the Dairy Act 2000, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and certain other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:34): I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (09:34): The Safe Food Victoria Bill 2026 will implement the first stage of a two-stage reform program to consolidate food safety regulators in Victoria, consistent with the government's public commitment in the *Economic Growth Statement*. The two-stage consolidation of food safety regulators will deliver a clear, simple and proportionate regulatory environment that is easier for business to navigate and results in improved user experience. It will also better protect public health and safety and provide market assurances.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Construction Enforcement Victoria Bill 2026

Introduction

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:35): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to ensure Victorian government construction and development activity complies with the construction industry code by providing for a Head, Construction Enforcement Victoria who will monitor and enforce compliance with that code and for other purposes.

I am seeking to introduce this bill today for the very simple reason that Victorian taxpayers money should be respected. Following almost 12 years of the Andrews and the Allan Labor governments in this state, it is quite clear that Labor do not respect Victorian taxpayers money. In fact it is worse than that. It is not that they just do not respect it, but they are allowing Victorian taxpayers, hardworking Victorian families, to be ripped off, because here is the economics of it: the more government money and the more taxpayer money that is wasted, the more the Labor government seeks to get through higher taxes, through greater regulation and by making Victorians lives more difficult, and it is Victorians who are paying the price for that every single day of the week.

The establishment of Construction Enforcement Victoria, an independent watchdog on the beat of Victorian government construction sites, is the right thing to do. Labor in New South Wales recognised that it is the right thing to do. Why not this government? In fact it was the former Liberal government in this state, the Baillieu–Napthine governments, that had Construction Enforcement Victoria, that had an independent body implementing a code on Victorian construction sites, and one of the first acts of

the Allan government was to remove that oversight. That coupled with the federal Labor government's shutting down of the Australian Building and Construction Commission has enabled crime to run rampant on Victorian building sites and for corruption to flourish. It is unacceptable.

This bill must be introduced. This bill must be first read. This bill must be second read. This bill must be debated in this place as a matter of urgency, and anything else is completely and utterly unacceptable in our view. We are prepared to take leadership where the government is not prepared to take leadership. We are prepared to do the right thing by Victorians when members of the government sit there idly by looking at their phones, probably checking their social media subscriptions, comments and trolls.

A member interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: And bots, no doubt. We are prepared to do what the government is not prepared to do, and that is to stand up for Victorians, to fight for them, to be on their side and in their corner and to back them in, because unlike the government we are not beholden to the union, we are not beholden to the labour movement and we are not beholden to the militant union and the union forces in this state. We need Construction Enforcement Victoria established in this state.

Construction Enforcement Victoria is part of our plan to clean up crime and corruption in Victoria, to enforce the law, to find the money and to stop the rorts. I do not think at this point in time anything could be more important than that. Construction Enforcement Victoria will have an ability to investigate. The head of Construction Enforcement Victoria, under the bill that I seek to introduce, will be compelled to report instances of allegations of criminal activity to the appropriate authority, whether that be Victoria Police for further investigation or whether that be WorkSafe or another body appropriate to investigate those allegations. When it comes to corruption, the head of Construction Enforcement Victoria will be compelled to refer that to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission for their investigation. Construction Enforcement Victoria and its head will have the opportunity, in fact the obligation, and the power, should they think that an individual or a group of individuals is not in compliance with the code first introduced in 1999 and then in 2014 – both by coalition governments, never by a Labor government – to issue a banning order against those individuals. A banning order is important. It sends a signal and it sets a standard on Victorian government building sites that corruption is unacceptable.

I do not mean to presuppose who the head of Construction Enforcement Victoria should have on that list, but starting with Mick Gatto is probably a bloody good idea, frankly, given his history, and there are so many others who could be on it as well.

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Sandringham about the use of unparliamentary language in the house. I ask you to apologise.

Brad ROWSWELL: I apologise.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (09:41): I am glad the member apologised; I think we were all offended by that. If the Liberals spent as much time talking about policy as they do the CFMEU, they might show an alternative to the Victorian people. When they find a problem, they turn it into a slogan. When we find a problem, we fix it. This oversight watchdog that we are talking about, we just heard that was in operation –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: Please, member for Polwarth, I show you respect when you are on your feet. We heard about an oversight watchdog in place during the Napthine–Baillieu governments to police, to regulate, the building sector at that time. The problem was that the Napthine–Baillieu governments did not build anything – not one inch of rail, not one level crossing removed. It is this government that has built over 120 schools –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston was being relevant. I do ask him to come back to why the bill should be or not be introduced.

Paul EDBROOKE: By virtue of the nature of the word 'construction', when you talk about a building, I think they are fairly well connected. I will leave it at that. I cannot back the introduction of this bill. It is just another way that the Liberals are finding a problem, wasting this government's time and wasting the people of Victoria's time.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (09:42): I rise in support of this bill. Has there ever been a time when Victorians have lost so much hope, confidence and pride in the leadership of their state? The fact is the Victorian people can no longer believe in this government. They cannot trust it, and they cannot rely on it. This mounting evidence of outrage after outrage across construction projects by the CFMEU and their fellow travellers has Victorians scratching their heads at the Premier's incomprehensible and implacable opposition to what is obvious – that is, the need for a royal commission and a body like Construction Enforcement Victoria to oversee our capital program.

It is not just about the billions of dollars that are flying out the door; it is about more than that. We have lost a life because of this. A young man's life was lost because of the intimidation that we saw in relation to Marda Dandhi. We see businesses and livelihoods being squandered because no action is being taken. We have a government that knows this is going on and will not do anything about it. We are all asking as Victorians: how can that be? How can the government have drifted so far from the principles of accountability, scrutiny and transparency that they would turn a blind eye to this and pretend that the mounting calls for a royal commission and for a body like Construction Enforcement Victoria should be ignored?

The scale of this is urgent. Think about this: this year, in the government's own budget papers, $213 billion is being spent on construction projects. To put that in context, our gross state product is about three times that, so for every dollar of value produced in our state economy, think of this: a third of it is going into major projects and infrastructure projects in this state. And while the government stands flat-footed and stubbornly defiant of the obvious need for greater scrutiny over the capital program, billions are being lost, billions that are not going to schools, not going to hospitals, not going to childcare and child protection services, not going to fixing potholes in our state.

We on this side of the house have a very different approach. We know that the only way out of this hole that the Allan Labor government has put this state in is by restoring the faith of the Victorian people in their government so that they can trust in their government again, that they can have hope for the future, that they can rely on their government, and we are already building that architecture. We believe in integrity, oversight and scrutiny. As the Leader of the Opposition has said and all of us have argued on this side of the house, we have begun that architecture. We started some time ago with fiscal integrity, getting the budget back on track, a budget you can believe in. Even the Auditor-General has said you cannot rely on the budget papers anymore, and in particular budget paper 4, which deals with all of these capital projects.

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: Go read the report, Minister for Health and Leader of the House. We have also said that we will strengthen – we have championed this – the powers and ability and resources of our integrity agencies. There are two already: we will restore confidence in transparency and reliability in the budget papers, and we will beef up and support our integrity framework and the regime that supports all of that. This represents an important third part of that architecture. It is saying that for one of the largest parts of the Victorian budget, something all Victorians rely on in one way or another, we are going to put that back on track. We are going to restore integrity. We are going to ensure that all people who work on major projects can go to work in a safe environment, that they will not be subject to intimidation and criminal behaviour and that they will be able to believe in and support a

government that really has their backs and that will ensure that every dollar that is spent on their behalf is spent for a purpose that they will see in the infrastructure that they enjoy around their state.

It is hard to believe that in the face of all of this evidence, the outcry, the scandal from the community, we could have a Premier who has been in this place for over a quarter of a century and cannot see what is obvious to everybody else. I join with the member for Sandringham in what is an important measure. It appears to be a measure that only we will ever be able to implement, a measure that has proven to be successful, including in evidence before the royal commission some years ago that the code established under the Baillieu–Napthine governments worked. I support the member for Sandringham and commend him.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (09:48): I do not support the introduction of this bill for some very simple reasons. Firstly, I thank the member for Hawthorn for setting out their view of the government's infrastructure projects: that we are building too much. He has looked at the budget, he has looked at the list of projects, and he has said 'This is too much investment for Victorians; this is too much building for Victorians.' I think we should see the introduction of this bill through that prism – that they want to cut back and claw back the investments we are making for Victorians.

The member for Sandringham spoke about hardworking Victorian families, and that is who we are building for. They have got no experience of doing these sorts of investments and these sorts of projects. In my electorate, when they were last in government, they spent zero dollars on major projects, which is shameful. When we talk about hardworking Victorians, that is what we should talk about.

Everything that they are saying that this body would do is already being covered by other parts of this government. That is why I oppose this bill. Those outcomes are already being achieved through the action that we are taking, the hard work of our police in cleaning up any construction sites that need it. The member for Hawthorn's view and those opposite's view is that we should stop our infrastructure, childcare building, hospital building and the apprentices I have met on those worksites who are developing skills as sparkies or as formworkers. We will always support them. We will keep investing for Victorians, because we know what Victorians need.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:49): I rise to support the introduction of this bill and support the member for Sandringham. As we have just heard from the other side of the bench, there are builds that are going on around Victoria. That may be so, but it does not give the government the green light to actually employ criminal elements that are wasting Victorian taxpayers money. It is not the government's money, it is the money of mums and dads and small business owners in this state – it is their money – that the government are trying not to say that they are wasting, but they are turning a blind eye to criminal activities right across the builds of whatever they are trying to do. There are criminal activities which they are burying their head in the sand about, which they do not want to know about. The Premier knows –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet is required to be factual, and in order to be factual he should outline the number of steps that the Premier has taken in relation to the allegations that have been made.

The SPEAKER: I am not sure what your point of order was.

Martin CAMERON: We have asked the Premier many, many times, especially in the last two years as we have been here in the chamber: what is happening, what steps are they taking on these allegations – the allegations that are being brought up from right across everybody in Victoria, from people that are working in the Big Build, from people on this side of the bench – and what actions are being taken? And what we are told, from the Premier to the Attorney-General, is 'There is nothing to see here. We have it in hand.'

This bill that the member for Sandringham is putting up to be introduced here puts forward steps that will hold the government to account, no matter which side of government is in charge. You cannot have a free run at building projects that funnel allegedly billions of dollars into criminals' hands – criminals that are building empires so they can put their tentacles out into the community and cause grief to Victorian taxpayers by coercing others into these criminal activities. It needs to stop. They need to be made to stand to account. We need to be able to follow the money. We need to be able to find where it is going. And there will be a trail – but have the courage to put it up. The coalition have got the courage to stand up and put a bill forward that will absolutely follow the money and find out what is going on. We will not hide from it. We will guarantee the Victorian public that we will not look down the camera and say to you 'There is nothing going on,' because we know that there is.

We know that this needs to be tested right across the state, whether it is builds that are going to be here in Melbourne or builds across regional Victoria. There is no confidence in the government at the moment that they want to find this trail. They do not want to try and see who is in charge. Where has the money gone? That is a pretty easy question that is being put forward: where has the money gone? Who is actually making sure of it and contributing to this money being funnelled into criminal activity? It is pretty easy to see from this side of the chamber and it is pretty easy for the Victorian public to see that there is an issue. There is a major issue with the construction industry at the moment. This bill that we are putting forward now will put measures around that to hold people to account, to enforce the law, to find the money and to stop the rorts. I commend this bill.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:54): It is well known that the government has already taken decisive action; with Operation Hawk there have been almost 70 charges laid. Obviously those opposite do not have any faith in Victoria Police, and I am sorry they do not. The Labour Hire Authority has already cancelled 126 licences. There is already a complaints referral service set up.

It is a shame that the opposition think we have delivered too many projects, that it is too much for the Victorian community. One hundred new schools – what would you say? Fifty new schools? Should we get rid of Narrawong primary school? Should we get rid of Port Melbourne Secondary College? Let us take a pick. Frankston Hospital, the rebuild; Footscray Hospital – should we just smash them down? Those opposite obviously do not think that the community deserve them. What about Metro Tunnel? What about the West Gate Tunnel? What about the level crossing removals? What about free TAFE? We were going to discuss free TAFE today, but those opposite do not want to go there, because they do not want to deliver for the Victorian community. They have said already that we have delivered too much and the Victorian community does not deserve it. What about their $11 billion black hole? Where are they going to cut? We can see already that they do not want the new hospitals, they do not want the level crossing removals, they do not want the Metro Tunnel and they do not want the West Gate Tunnel. Where are they going to cut? Health –

Brad Rowswell: Speaker, a number of points of order come to mind. I will raise a point of order on this occasion on relevance.

The SPEAKER: The member for Albert Park will come back to the debate before the chamber, which is why the bill should be introduced or why the bill should not be introduced.

Nina TAYLOR: I will close there. I believe I have attested as to why we should not proceed with this bill.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (31): 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, 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, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, 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.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Major Projects Performance Reporting 2025 – Ordered to be published

Major Events Act 2009 – Major Sporting Event Order for the Formula 1 Australian Grands Prix 2026 to 2030.

Bills

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025

Council's agreement

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (10:03): The Speaker has received messages from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Supporting Stable and Strong Families) Bill 2025 and the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.

Motions

Motions by leave

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:03): I move, by leave:

> That this house notes that, where possible, preventing youth violence before it escalates is essential and rejects the opposition's claim that early intervention initiatives such as the violence reduction unit are mere bureaucracy rather than evidence-based crime prevention.

Leave refused.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:03): I move, by leave:

> That this house condemns the Premier for refusing to support stronger powers for the anti-corruption watchdog to clean up the $15 billion of corruption lost on Labor's Big Build sites, and for failing to stand up for Victorian taxpayers.

Leave refused.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:04): I move, by leave:

> That this house:
>
> (1) notes that the Shadow Minister for Planning and member for Caulfield owns 17 properties and has ambitions to purchase more;
>
> (2) condemns the Shadow Minister for claiming he wants every Victorian to have the best opportunity to own their own home; and

(3) calls on the shadow minister to increase the supply of homes in Victoria by selling his properties.

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:04): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for failing to back IBAC recommendations to fully –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Pascoe Vale can leave for half an hour.

Member for Pascoe Vale withdrew from chamber.

Danny O'BRIEN: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for failing to back IBAC's recommendations to fully investigate the estimated $15 billion lost to corruption and ensure those responsible are prosecuted.

Leave refused.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:05): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the valuable and effective work of the violence reduction unit in preventing crime and supporting community safety across Victoria and calls on the member for Narracan to publicly disassociate himself from his ideological counterpart in the other place Mrs Hermans and to affirm his support for the violence reduction unit.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (10:05): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for turning a blind eye to a decade of corruption within the big rotten build and siding with the CFMEU mates instead of defending hardworking taxpayers.

Leave refused.

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:06): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Liberal Party's reckless call to scrap the violence reduction unit, recognising that coordinated, cross-government intervention is essential to supporting young people, preventing violence and keeping the community safe.

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (10:06): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Agriculture for refusing to support stronger powers to clean up the $15 billion of corruption lost to Labor's big rotten build and for failing to stand up for Victorian taxpayers and the agricultural sector.

Leave refused.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:06): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the opposition's reckless call to scrap the violence reduction unit and calls on the Leader of the Opposition to confirm whether her party would cut the VRU and early intervention services to fund the Liberals' dangerous $11 billion black hole.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:07): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Attorney-General for failing to accept IBAC's calls for stronger powers so they can fully investigate the estimated $15 billion lost to corruption and ensure those responsible are prosecuted.

Leave refused.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:07): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Victorian Greens are using the towers redevelopment to fund their own re-election campaigns by weaponising the distress of tenants and trivialising a once-in-a-generation investment in social housing.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (10:07): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Police for turning a blind eye to a decade of corruption within the big rotten build and siding with the CFMEU mates instead of Victoria Police members who are burnt out covering more than 2000 vacancies on their rosters.

Leave refused.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:08): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Liberals and the Greens for voting together 60 times during the public housing towers inquiry, proving that they are united in their goal of blocking better and more housing for 30,000 people across 18 Melbourne suburbs.

Leave refused.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (10:08): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Transport Infrastructure for failing to back IBAC's recommendations to fully investigate the estimated $15 billion lost to corruption in her own portfolio and ensure those responsible are prosecuted.

Leave refused.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:08): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the recent data released by the Grattan Institute shows that Labor's housing reforms are working, given the ratio of median house prices to household income in Melbourne has risen less than in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth and Hobart.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:09): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Carers and Volunteers for refusing to support stronger powers to clean up the $15 billion of corruption lost to Labor's big rotten build and for failing to stand up for Victorian taxpayers.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:09): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Consumer Affairs for turning a blind eye –

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:09): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Women for refusing to support stronger powers to clean up the $15 billion of corruption lost to Labor's big rotten build and for failing to stand up for women and Victorian taxpayers.

Leave refused.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Education for failing to back IBAC's recommendation to fully investigate the estimated $15 billion lost to corruption and ensure those responsible are prosecuted.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (10:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Finance for turning a blind eye to a decade of corruption within the rotten Big Build and siding with CFMEU bosses instead of defending hardworking Victorians and taxpayers.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Minister for Youth for refusing to support stronger powers to clean up the $15 billion of corruption lost to Labor's big rotten build and for failing to stand up for Victorian taxpayers.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:11): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Leader of the House's sledge motion, which she drafted for the member for Cranbourne and could not even get the right upper house region.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY: I move, by leave:

That this house notes the standing orders are required to be applied equally across the chamber, not just against the opposition.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Mansfield hunting and fishing expo

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:12): The Mansfield Hunting & Fishing Outdoor Expo on Saturday was again a huge hit, with over 18,000 people flocking to Mansfield to celebrate the great outdoors and the region. Expo organisers and Mansfield Hunting & Fishing shop owners Shane and Mandy Kirley, in partnership with the Mansfield shire, pulled off the day seamlessly. Shane and Mandy were quick to praise the 120 team members working with them on the day, the Mansfield Shire Council, mayor Steve Rabie and his team and sponsors who helped to make the expo such a success. This free major regional event showcased everything in fishing and hunting and was backed by generous donations and support by local sponsors, suppliers and vendors. There were over 100 stalls showcasing family-run businesses and leading outdoor brands promoting their latest releases. The crowd was vibrant and relaxed, enjoying the most of what Mansfield has to offer.

International Women's Day

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:13): On Sunday 8 March we will celebrate 115 years of International Women's Day. Although women's rights have come a long way in those 115 years, we still have a way to go to reach gender and pay equality. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2024–25 report on employer gender pay gaps was released yesterday. It reported that the majority of employers reduced their gender pay gap in the last 12 months. Although this is a positive result, the pay gap still exists in Australia, with women earning 88.8 cents to every $1 for men. The data is collected from more than 10,500 employers with 100 or more employees.

Bread Hub Victoria

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:13): I rise today to acknowledge the incredible work of Bread Hub Victoria, a grassroots, volunteer-led organisation serving our community with compassion, dignity and heart. Bread Hub Victoria began just two years ago with Brendan Murphy and his mum Zippy, who are in the Parliament today, and his daughter Ava. What started with 40 bread rolls, a bit of butter and Vegemite at the Queen Victoria Market has grown into an extraordinary community movement. Today, Bread Hub Victoria operates across three sites, supporting more than 5000 people every week. With over 30 volunteers, the organisation operates seven days a week and even opens on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day, ensuring that no-one is forgotten. Beyond food relief, Bread Hub Victoria delivers free basketball programs and fully funded swimming programs to ensure families can access lifesaving skills. They have also successfully advocated for the homelessness outreach services in Banyule and Whittlesea and helped to develop the winter shelter resource movement.

I particularly want to acknowledge the organisation's outstanding volunteers, including Zippy, who I understand is known as the mother of the west, and Nabil Salem and Leora Creak, whose tireless work exemplifies the spirit of this organisation. As an example, for more than a year and a half every Wednesday evening, rain, hail or shine, Leora and her son Anthony collect surplus bread from Bundoora Square and distribute it to an elderly couple in Greensborough, multiple disability homes and breakfast clubs at two local primary schools. On behalf of my community, I thank Brendan, Leora, Zippy and everyone at Bread Hub Victoria for their extraordinary service to our community.

Taxation

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:15): For every dollar business owner Travis Taylor earns, he is taxed 63 cents – 63 cents in every dollar through land tax, payroll tax, the emergency services tax and a growing list of other charges. Since 2014 the Allan Labor government has introduced or increased 60 taxes and charges, leaving Victoria the highest taxed state in the country. I recently sat down with Travis from Mitre 10 Heathcote, Seymour building group and Taylor transporting, and what I heard was his complete exhaustion. Travis bought his business in 2000 and built it into a regional success story, turning over more than $13 million, and along the way he backed regional Victoria, investing in industrial developments, residential projects and businesses that created local jobs. Travis once employed 53 people, but today that number is down to 24, and not because demand disappeared or ambition faded, but because the relentless pressure of payroll taxes, rising rates, unreliable power and layers upon layers of red tape have made it too difficult to keep going at this scale. When we lose businesses like Travis's, we lose jobs, apprenticeships, suppliers and confidence in our local economies.

But while so many businesses are pushed to the brink, so many are still stepping up in extraordinary ways. I visited Mitre 10 in Benalla and met with Barb Dyer and her outstanding team, who have been supporting communities impacted by the recent bushfires. They donated more than $20,000 of goods to people impacted by the bushfire.

See Yup Temple

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:16): It was an absolute delight to be part of the launch of the *See Yup Temple: The Next 170 Years* exhibition. It also coincided with the Lunar New Year and was funded with the support of a Victorian government multicultural grant. It is really about helping to share the story and the history of the See Yup Temple. It is absolutely extraordinary. It is a great pity it experienced a fire as a result of an electrical fault, and there is some good, very careful restorative work well underway. It is also a place that stores the memories of ancestors, so people from community can go there to honour them. It is extremely popular, particularly during the Lunar New Year, and there were many, many people going through the temple. It is certainly a treasure and something to really be supported into the future.

Middle Park Primary School

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:17): I also had the pleasure of attending the Middle Park Primary School fete. I want to do a shout-out to principal Tim, vice-principal Sue, the school council and all the parent volunteers who were manning the many stalls and offering so much fun for the whole community. It really is more than just a fete. It really is a community event. The students who performed live and were entertaining everyone were really fantastic. It was a delight also to sponsor the cake stall. It was the best doughnut I have ever had in my life, and that is a big statement. It was a really good fundraiser for the school but also a community connector, and they should be congratulated.

Brighton Hebrew Congregation

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:18): Our community has warmly welcomed the appointment of Rabbi Gershom Baraza as the new congressional rabbi at the Brighton Hebrew Congregation. We also welcome his wife Rebbetzin Grace and their four children. Rabbi Baraza was born in Barcelona and raised a Christian. He then lived in a number of countries and speaks English, Chinese, Hebrew and Spanish. In Hong Kong a request from his mother led him to Judaism. On his arrival to Brighton, Rabbi Baraza said:

> I am very excited to become the Rabbi … I was immediately impressed by the welcome my family received … which already has a reputation as 'the friendly shule'.

On behalf of the broader Bayside community, we joined Brighton Shule president David Wittenberg and the shule in warmly welcoming Gershom and his family.

St Andrew's Brighton

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:19): St Andrew's church in Brighton leads a wonderful Chinese community and often celebrates opening their doors for significant cultural events. Recently we came together for Lunar New Year. Gōng xǐ fā cái. The incredible festival and dragon took over Church Street. Thank you to Reverend Ian Morrison and especially assistant priest Xeverie De-Leon. Thank you also to Bayside council and the traders association.

St Leonard's Uniting Church, Brighton

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:19): One of the memorable big-hearted efforts in Bayside is St Leonard's Uniting Church's coffee cup challenge. The challenge asks each of us to forgo the cost of cups of coffee for homelessness. The Brighton congregation has raised $160,000 in previous years, and we hope to achieve a grand $200,000 in total this year. Congratulations to the challenge's Barry Schofield and minister Kim Cain for their leadership.

Early Learning Victoria Ngalambi

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:19): It is with great pride that I rise today to celebrate the official opening of the Ngalambi early learning centre in Noble Park. Just last week I had the pleasure of joining the Minister for Children in the other place to cut the ribbon at this magnificent facility. Ngalambi, with a name that carries deep local significance and means to be at home, is much more than just a building. It is a home for little ones in our community, and it is a promise to the families of Noble Park and the wider Mulgrave community that their children will have the very best start in life. This centre is a wonderful example of the Allan Labor government's commitment to early childhood education. We know that the first years of a child's life are the most critical for development, and by providing free three- and four-year-old kinder we are removing the financial barriers that too often stand in the way of a child's potential and helping families manage the cost of living while knowing their children are receiving a world-class education. What makes this opening particularly special is its location. Ngalambi is situated right onsite at Harrisfield Primary School, and by co-locating these services we are creating a seamless transition from kinder to prep, and most importantly for our busy local parents, we are making the double drop-off a thing of the past. I want to thank the minister for

making the trip to Mulgrave, and I want to thank the educators and staff at Ngalambi, who are already making such a difference.

Wildlife road strike

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:21): This statement condemns the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the Department of Transport and Planning for their failure to respond to serious community concerns and advocacy regarding wildlife road strike trauma along Wellington Road, particularly through Lysterfield. The Allan Labor government must urgently commit funding to the Wellington Road duplication upgrade project between Napoleon Road, Rowville, and Berwick Road, Narre Warren East, to help stem the carnage – a project previously funded by the Liberals but axed by the current federal Labor government. This critical project must incorporate road strike mitigation measures like electronic virtual fencing and variable message signs to stop the cruel wildlife carnage occurring along Wellington Road. Since I first raised the issue of increasing wildlife road strikes in July last year, the distress in our communities has only deepened. Annual wildlife road strike data for 2025, compiled by local rescuer Lea, reveals a staggering 490 animal fatalities on the 22-kilometre stretch of Wellington Road in Rowville, including 262 kangaroos, 51 wallabies and 28 wombats. Most disturbingly, more than half of these deaths – 248 animals, including 231 kangaroos – occurred on just a 6-kilometre stretch where the road cuts through Lysterfield Park. Local hero wildlife rescuers continue to plead for help to stem this wildlife trauma.

Emergency services workers

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:22): Paramedics are not only on duty when they are physically treating a patient, they are on duty from the moment they begin their shift until the moment it ends. They carry a radio and can be dispatched at any time. They are required to respond immediately, whether refuelling, restocking or on a meal break, crib break or paid break. They are in uniform, they are visible and they remain responsible for the safety of the community. In light of the alleged assault on paramedic Kathryn McCormack, many in the emergency services community have raised concerns about the way the definition of 'on duty' has been interpreted by police prosecutors. I am very conscious that court proceedings are ongoing, and I will not comment on the specifics; however, it has questioned whether that interpretation reflects operational reality. It is also disappointing to see that this matter has been politicised. The member for Mornington has attributed this outcome to weak drafting. That provision – section 10AA – was inserted into the Sentencing Act 1991 in 2014 by the then Attorney-General Robert Clark, the former member for Box Hill. So if members opposite believe the drafting is defective, they may wish to reflect on its origins. The Victorian Ambulance Union secretary Danny Hill has written to the Attorney-General seeking to ensure operational staff are recognised as being on duty for the entirety of their shift, and that is reasonable. Paramedics should not lose protection between patients. Violence against any emergency service worker is unacceptable, full stop. There is no circumstance in which assaulting a paramedic, a police officer or other emergency responder is acceptable.

Disability services

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (10:24): I recently met with local disability service providers from the health and community services and independent living sector. Peter, Marianne, Martin and Abu raised their concerns regarding the independent living funding shortfall between the state and federal governments that is having a significant impact on people with disabilities, their families and workers. On 1 January this year the Allan Labor government brutally cut transition funding without any resolution, leaving many residents and families in limbo, with homes at imminent risk of closure. Hearing firsthand the distress of this decision that the government has caused for people who depend on specialised in-house care, as well as the uncertainty for the families with loved ones living with a disability, was truly devastating. The caring representatives that came to my office clearly feel overwhelmed, and the level of their concerns and despair is hard to put into words. As Peter pointed out, often the families do not have anyone else to support their family member with a disability. The

certainty of safe, specialised and suitable stable housing for their loved ones has been pulled out from beneath them. It is unacceptable that the minister responsible for this portfolio has refused to meet with impacted organisations or step in and intervene despite 2000 Victorians with profound disabilities having their supported independent living homes threatened with closure. It is hard to fathom that people with disabilities are at risk of losing their homes while this government has lost $15 billion on criminal rorts – taxpayers money that should have benefited Victorians to keep these houses open and not gone to criminal activity.

Women's health

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (10:25): I would like to highlight the growing number of women who have been affected by the serious medical negligence of Dr Simon Gordon. After last week's ABC *Four Corners* program by Louise Milligan – and can I thank her for her great journalism – I was contacted by a friend of mine Sarah Hayden, who herself was a victim and who has set up a group to help women advocate on behalf of all victims. These women have experienced profound physical, psychological and reproductive harm at the hands of a greedy narcissist. May he burn in hell one day. They need support. They need access to information. They need assistance from medical professionals to review medical records without cost, and they need our advocacy in this place to make sure that this never happens again. Can I thank the Minister for Health and Minister for Women, because she understands women deserve support during this difficult time. We know Dr Simon Gordon's past patients have questions and concerns. That is why we have established a dedicated phone line delivered by Women's Health Victoria. I will just read out that number: 9664 9330. It is for any victims that may need assistance. This comes in addition to us referring allegations to Victoria Police and updating clinical guidelines.

Attorney-General

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:27): Historically, matters raised with ministers in letters from MPs were prioritised for response, not just as a professional courtesy but also acknowledging ministerial accountability. So it was disappointing to have to raise the failure of the Minister for Planning and Attorney-General to provide any response to two important matters. The first is my letter dated 23 July 2025 relating to the fraud perpetrated by now-deceased solicitor John Adams, who operated a Ponzi scheme registering false mortgages to lure investors into giving him money. On behalf of people who suffered catastrophic financial losses, I asked the minister what safeguards have been put in place to prevent this fraud from happening again. Some 225 days on, the minister has not bothered to respond.

I also wrote to the minister on 17 December last year regarding the admitted failure of her department to properly consult with residents of the heritage-listed Gascoigne estate in Malvern East, who will be impacted by the proposed Caulfield station activity centre. Affected residents were therefore denied the opportunity to attend either of the two in-person sessions, even though they were held in Elsternwick and McKinnon for 2 hours only. Let me be blunt: the so-called consultation process in my area over Labor's activity centres has been incompetent at best, if not deliberately designed to disenfranchise my residents. Despite writing to the minister over 11 weeks ago, I have not had even an acknowledgement, let alone a substantive response. If the Attorney had ignored correspondence when a lawyer as she does as a minister, she would have been sued for negligence. She needs to lift her game.

Peninsula Aero Club

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:28): Well done to Peninsula Aero Club, who have been announced as the 2025 Australian Aero Club of the Year. This prestigious award is given by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority in partnership with the Royal Aeronautical Association. In addition to having an outstanding flight training school and providing valuable flight transport infrastructure to our region, PAC's focus on community engagement through signature events, such as the annual toy run, FunFlight and the award-winning Tyabb Airshow, is a credit to its members and volunteers.

Congratulations to Peninsula Aero Club on your outstanding achievements and support of the local community.

Tyabb Airshow

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:29): On Sunday I had the pleasure and honour of opening the 2026 Tyabb Airshow. The show is truly awesome, and part of what makes it so special is that you can almost reach out and touch the planes as they go past. Added to that, we are fortunate to have Judy Pay's warbird museum as part of the air show. Some of the planes in her collection and other planes owned by other members are the only fully operational flying examples left in the world. This makes the Tyabb Airshow truly unique. Peninsula Aero Club also chooses two local community groups to be the major beneficiaries of money raised by the show. This year they are Kindred Clubhouse and It's Okay Not to Be Okay. Both are incredibly worthy and vitally important community groups. I would like to thank the 130 volunteers, the pilots and club members who work so hard to give the community such an exciting show. I have said it before, and I will say it again: Tyabb airport is one of the jewels in the crown of the Mornington Peninsula.

Polwarth electorate train services

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:30): My members statement today is a condemnation of the Allan Labor government's perpetration of Third World public transport services to the people of Polwarth. Since 1870 we have had a train service where people could have a seat, have food and travel safely to and from Melbourne on a daily basis. Fast-forward to today, to 2025: $15 billion stolen from Victorian taxpayers, a waste of Big Build spending in the city and absolute and utter neglect of people and public transport services in the seat of Polwarth. Today we have 6125 fewer seats a week – 6125 less seats for the people of western Victoria to sit on a train and travel safely to Melbourne each week. What does this mean? This means that on every single train service in western Victoria people are standing for 2 or 3 hours – as long as the train does not break down or come to grief along the journey, which could extend it to 4 or 5 hours standing. People with disabilities, the elderly and others are left stranded. What is worse, the government says to book your seat to make sure you have a seat. And, do you know what, they do not enforce the bookings. There are elderly people and disabled people, day in, day out, left to stand for hours.

Monbulk Rangers Soccer Club

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:31): If there is one thing I have been convinced of over the past few weeks it is that the future is bright indeed, for several reasons. On Monday I was able to officially turn on the new lights for our much-loved Monbulk Rangers Soccer Club, which means the return of Friday night football to the hills. It also means more opportunities for training, and the energy-efficient LED lights will save the club money and reduce emissions, so it is a win all round.

Monbulk electorate student leaders

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:32): I have had the distinct honour of handing out captaincy badges to the grade 6s across several of our great schools, and they have been inspiring to say the least. They understand the qualities of good leadership and have shown courage in stepping forward to undertake the role of setting good examples for their peers. I would like to give them a shout-out here: at Monbulk Primary School, school captains Macy and Rory and subject captains Jamieson, Jasper, Emmaline, Emmett, Zarie, River and Arlo; and at Kallista Primary School, school captains Mason and Astrid; house captains Alice, Jed, Dain, Jarrah, Joh, Grace, Mila and Josh; and subject captains Luca, Felix, Ezra, Hendrix, Elliot and Van. At Upwey South Primary School the school captains are Fletcher, Isabelle H, Jude and Maya; house captains are Lincoln, Aylah, Evie, Elliott, Lucas, Isabelle D, Juneau and Sullivan; and subject captains are Adelle, Esme, Ella, Natalie, Seth, Finn, Mabel, Charlotte, Billie, William, Margot and Olivia. At Mount Dandenong Primary School we have got school captains Daisy, Micah, Violet and Seth and house captains Ruby, Taylor, Bella, Grace, Tyler, Sophia, Alice and Brandon. At Macclesfield Primary School the school captains

are Archer, Mitchell and Joey and subject captains are Rory, Flynn, Ben, Alistar, Hamish, Jayden, Harrison, Cruze, Taran and Summer.

Surrey Hills Music Festival

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:33): On Saturday evening Surrey Hills came alive for the 17th annual Surrey Hills Music Festival, proudly hosted by the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre as part of the Boroondara arts program. Every year this wonderful free family-friendly festival strengthens our connection to place and to one another. I want to acknowledge and sincerely thank the neighbourhood centre manager, the amazing Rochelle Anderson; the music festival committee; the performers and volunteers; and the many local families who turned out in force. We all danced in a genuine expression of the joy this event generates. I especially acknowledge Bob Stensholt, a former member for Burwood, for the support that Bendigo community bank provides to the festival, including a cheque for $11,000. Bendigo and all the other sponsors deserve our sincere thanks.

Clean Up Australia Day

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (10:34): On Sunday morning it was Clean Up Australia Day. At Patterson Reserve in Hawthorn I joined the Rotary Club of Glenferrie and students from Xavier College to begin my Clean Up Australia Day activities. I then joined the 1st Glen Eira Scout Group, the John Gardiner Rover Unit and friends groups from the KooyongKoot Alliance led by Benjamin Chesler to clean up along Gardiners Creek. Finally, I worked with the Friends of Back Creek, led by Robert Brearley, in their 26th year, to remove rubbish from this precious local waterway. To each and every volunteer and to Clean Up Australia Day: thank you for strengthening both our community spirit and our environment. We are all better off because of it.

Pako Festa

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:34): Geelong's Pako Festa was a huge success last Saturday, attracting over 100,000 people. I want to acknowledge and thank Cultura for another successful Pako Festa; it truly was a spectacular day. Thanks of course go to all of the wonderful multicultural communities represented on Saturday with a street parade led by Wathaurong dancers. The food, dancing, music and cultural sharing were enjoyed by everyone. I want to thank the multicultural communities of Geelong for their contribution to our beautiful city of Geelong and everything they do to make this such a rich multicultural community. This is one of the region's greatest strengths – bringing together people with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds who contribute to our vibrant community. In Geelong we are a fantastic multicultural community, but we also know that we must work hard to keep it. There is no place for hate and division in our community.

I am proud that the Allan Labor government continues to support Pako Festa. We know that diversity enriches our local economy through a broad range of skills, innovation and entrepreneurship, while also strengthening social cohesion by fostering understanding, inclusion and shared community pride. Geelong's multicultural communities help shape our dynamic region, where different cultures are celebrated and where new ideas and opportunities continue to grow, benefiting both locals and visitors. I also took the opportunity to announce that the Minister for Small Business and Employment advised me that Pakington Street, which is the host of Pako Festa, has been awarded a grant through the multicultural business precinct – *(Time expired)*

Woady Yaloak Football Netball Club

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (10:36): Last Wednesday our community received some shocking news. Without warning, the Ballarat Football Netball League decided to exclude the Woady Yaloak Football Netball Club from the 2026 junior competition fixture. This decision is deeply disappointing and frankly unacceptable. The Woady Warriors are a proud and growing country club built through years of dedication from volunteers, families and community members. They represent 150 kids and their families from Smythesdale, Scarsdale, Haddon, Snake Valley and surrounding communities – young people who love their footy and netball and who deserve every chance to play. To deny them

the opportunity just weeks before the season begins is devastating. At a time when we should be doing everything possible to support children's participation in community sport, this decision does the opposite. It undermines the efforts of a club that has done everything asked of it to grow, develop and provide opportunities for local kids.

I have written to the league urging them to reverse this decision immediately. Our federal member for Ballarat and I have also written to AFL Victoria and AFL Goldfields calling for the decision to be overturned and for the league to work constructively with the club so that every child who wants to play can take to the field and court this season. To the Woady Warriors, you deserve your rightful place in the league. And to the Ballarat Football Netball League, have a heart: do not bench our country kids. Let the kids play.

Clarinda Primary School

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:37): I was delighted to attend the junior school council badge ceremony at Clarinda Primary School last week. Clarinda Primary School is an amazing local school and has produced some amazing school and community leaders. Another huge congratulation to new student leaders there – I know you will be fantastic representatives for your school and our community. Well done. It is an exciting time for Clarinda Primary School with their projected enrolment of 360 students and this year's prep enrolments far exceeding last year. There is so much happening in the local area around the Suburban Rail Loop, Talbot Village and other local developments. I am looking forward to continuing to work with principal Robbie Mallett to continue advocacy for a facility and project in Clarinda Primary School.

Westall Secondary College

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:38): Finally, thank you to Westall Secondary College staff and students for having the Minister for Consumer Affairs and me last week. It was great to be part of the minister's consumer affairs school program and to visit for a chat about consumer rights such as buying their first car or renting their first home. Thank you to the acting principal Jason Tickner for helping to facilitate and to year 11 VCE vocational major students for their great questions and participation.

St Agatha's Catholic Parish, Cranbourne

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:39): It was wonderful to join parishioners in celebrating St Agatha's feast day. St Agatha was a woman of extraordinary courage and tenacity and is the patron saint of breast cancer patients. It was a terrific honour to join Father Antony, Father Ajin and our wonderful Sisters of the Nativity sisters Faustina and Victoria, and the surprise visit of Bishop Greg Bennet added a sprinkling of joy. Principals from the local schools, including St Agatha's Michelle Bruitzman and St Peter's David Hansen, enhanced the joyous day. St Agatha's is a place where we can truly belong. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the many people observing the holy time of Lent through fasting and prayer and almsgiving, which is in fact, as we know, founded in acts of mercy and compassion, not just charity. My own mother and aunty are fond of reminding me not to eat meat on Fridays.

Pinoy Olympics

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:40): I have an extraordinary Filipino community in Cranbourne, so I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Casey Pinoy community for a wonderful day at the Pinoy Olympics. They brought the energy of traditional Filipino games to our community. Legend Pardenilla and Genelou Bagayao and the whole organising committee hosted Mr Tarlamis from the other place and me with great compassion and great joy. Thank you for the joy and thank you for the work. The Filipino community is strong and just what we need.

Pascoe Vale Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:40): On 11 February I was pleased to welcome the Premier to Pascoe Vale Primary School for a student-led tour of the $18 million new facilities and upgrades we have provided for, including a world-class indoor gym, a STEAM centre, a new library and overall better facilities. It was a wonderful opportunity for the grades 5 and 6 students to also take part in a unique Q and A with the Premier. Thank you to the entire school community again for welcoming us, especially the teachers and the leading students: Zoe and Louis, the school captains; Vienna and Elliot, the vice school captains; Grace, the sports captain; Lachlan, the community captain; Charlotte, the arts captain; and Ayda, the sustainability captain.

Pascoe Vale Girls College

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:41): On 24 February I was delighted to visit Pascoe Vale Girls College to officially cut the ribbon and unveil the school's $970,000 refurbishment and upgrade works throughout the campus, including to the historic Mount Sabine homestead that was originally built in 1900 and has formed part of the school campus since 1957. Works provided for a new roof, ceiling, repainting, staining and electrical switchboard refurbishments. The visit also allowed me to admire the beautiful new school mural, proudly and vividly displaying Australian flora and fauna, including two iconic red wattlebirds, painted by Melanie Caple as part of a fantastic school incursion program where students played a hands-on role in designing and bringing the final piece to life. I was delighted to meet with the student leaders for, again, a dynamic Q and A session, all of whom were delighted with the new free public transport initiative for people under 18, which they were all taking advantage of. I commend the students, including school captain Dilni Jothiratnage and the year 12 leaders, who made us feel so welcome. The weekend again was a very busy one in the community.

State Emergency Service Whittlesea unit

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:42): I want to thank Whittlesea SES for caring for our community during the recent rains, for the service on the day and all the training leading up to it.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:42): Today I am rising to speak on the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee report into the security of Victoria's food supply, the impact that population growth has on our farming industries and the availability and accessibility of arable land. This was an inquiry that examined an issue that is fundamental to every Victorian: food security. It surprised me that the government felt compelled to undertake such a study. Call me cynical, but it is not because the Allan Labor government actually care about farmers or food production; it is probably more to look good and look like they are doing something. But it did not surprise me that much of the focus was on the urban fringes of Melbourne and the large regional cities like Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong, because people in South-West Coast, who contribute an enormous amount to agriculture, often feel very overlooked, and this study probably did not highlight the value of agricultural land and the challenges and stresses that are upon it, causing food security issues into the future that should also be scrutinised and highlighted, with policy developed around them. South-West Coast punches well above its weight – I say that in this place often when it comes to agriculture in particular – and contributes enormously to the economy and food systems.

The committee's findings confirm things that farmers have been saying for years and years: that Victoria produces a significant proportion of Australia's food, much of it export oriented, and remains the largest food- and fibre-exporting state by value. Victoria accounts for around a quarter of Australia's total exports despite occupying only a small proportion of the nation's landmass. It is not just impressive; it is strategically important. One finding stood out to me in particular, and that was

that the governance and policy approach to agriculture requires a strategic agricultural review if we are going to secure our food supply into the future. As someone who spent decades advocating for agriculture, both as a farmer myself and as a representative on industry boards and committees, this is not only a recommendation that is long overdue but one that we called for consistently for decades.

For more than 10 years, though, in this chamber, I have watched legislation pass with little evidence that this is a government that truly does recognise the value of agriculture. In fact we have seen agriculture disappear, even, from the department title. What was once the Department of Agriculture is now the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Farmers get really frustrated with the fact they are working so hard and they are not even valued enough to be in the title of a department – a department that really does need to be supportive of farmers and developing policies to recommend to government to actually make sure that we progress in agriculture and do not go the other way. We have seen the agriculture department have its resources stripped, the ability to do the research and –

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Roma BRITNELL: Yes, absolutely. The amount of staff that have gone from the agriculture department in the last two years is significant, and the member across the chamber disputes that. Well, if you just talk to the staff in there, I am afraid that is absolutely the case. The ability to deliver and support on-farm programs, such as how to grow grass effectively and how to fertilise effectively so you are protecting the environment, has absolutely been changed.

Farmers do not ask for special attention, they ask for understanding and partnership. Look at the effect of our bad roads on farmers; farmers talk to me about this all the time. Why doesn't the government realise how important the roads are for the government to get its taxes? The food grown in South-West Coast must travel on regional roads, and as we move towards the processors and ports and global markets to which the products must go, the roads are deteriorating. The transport costs rise because trucks are getting damaged and that costs money to fix, so production costs increase, and that makes Victorian producers less competitive internationally before the products even leave our shores. It is a missed economic opportunity. Investment in our roads is not a cost; it is an investment that strengthens productivity, exports, tax revenue and regional communities. Governments benefit from agricultural success, and logic suggests that benefits should be reinvested.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:47): I rise to speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee's report on the inquiry into capturing data on people who use family violence here in Victoria, and this was tabled last year. We know that when it comes to preventing family violence the Labor government has done so much heavy lifting over the past almost 12 years, but there is still so much more work to do. This side of the house are constantly looking at what more we need to do to not only prevent family violence but in this case capture the data on people who use family violence here in Victoria.

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I will take that interjection as an appropriate time to say I do commend the minister for going ahead and scrapping good-character references. Good-character references can be used for many things, including serious assault against men and women, but for our victim-survivors in rape cases, having to sit in court after experiencing what can only be described as the most horrendous crime involving so much trauma – trauma that will stay with that victim-survivor for the rest of her or his life – it is just so good that those good-character references are finally scrapped and done and dusted. I know that announcement has been very well received in my community, particularly by women, so I do thank you for that interjection.

Like I said, we know that when it comes to preventing family violence there is so much more work that needs to be done, and because we are on the verge of International Women's Day and we are looking at celebrating the tremendous contribution of girls and women to this state and how far we have come and how far we still have to go, I do want to say that the Royal Commission into Family Violence was incredible. I was not here in the house when it took place, but I have certainly been here over the years in which all 227 recommendations have been rolled through this place. A previous member of this place, who has now very sadly passed away, brought this to the house and got it through, and a royal commission was undertaken. I do want to point out, in light of International Women's Day coming up, that having women here in a place that is traditionally male dominated, having a voice at the table where important life-changing decisions are made, is the perfect example of why women belong here in the Parliament of Victoria, in the halls of the Parliament, to make these decisions, because life-saving reforms have been made through these 227 recommendations.

But like I said, there is still so much more to do, and thanks to some of these recommendations and reforms, including establishing the Orange Door network, I have two Orange Doors in my region in Melbourne's west. We have one in Sunshine and one in Wyndham, and they are tremendously important places that women know they can go to to seek help and escape violent partners. It is not just a resource for women; it is women and children who unfortunately all too often experience family violence. It is here at these places we can actually learn a lot about the victim-survivors who experience this.

The same cannot always be said for those who perpetrate violence. If we want to stamp out family violence from our community and our society, we need to know everything we can about the perpetrators of family violence. Like I said, this is something that needs to change, mainly because it makes perfect sense that the more we learn and understand about the factors that may cause someone to perpetrate family violence, the more likely we are to prevent that behaviour in the first place. So this has been a really, really important inquiry.

I do want to acknowledge the tireless work of not only committee members but the committee secretariat, who I know do not often get the shout-out that they deserve. These people perform tremendous work on behalf of the Parliament. I do want to thank all of the staff that were involved in the coordination of this inquiry, the preparation of the reports and the operation of hearings. In my experience they go absolutely smoothly with the committee secretariat. This is a really great report, it makes good recommendations and I commend it to the house.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Legislative Framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:52): It should come as no surprise to anyone that today I will be reporting on the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report on the inquiry into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. This was tabled in December last year, and it made quite a few recommendations with regard to definitions, which we have heard the Greens speak a lot on. In fact it made 31 different recommendations, the first of course being the change to 'corrupt conduct'. People ask me all the time, in my electorate in particular: how on earth do they get away with it?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mildura, can you just reiterate the committee report you are speaking on?

Jade BENHAM: The Integrity and Oversight Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Committee. It has not actually been updated on the Clerk's list. It was tabled on 4 December last year.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you for your patience, member for Mildura. You have the call on the report.

Jade BENHAM: Honestly, patience is not something I am known for usually, so you are quite welcome. I will continue because I am losing patience with the level of alleged corruption that is going on on Victoria's Big Build sites, as I am sure all Victorians are, and they should be outraged as well. The Integrity and Oversight Committee has done a lot of work. There were a lot of hearings that went into presenting this report. In September last year we had the IBAC Commissioner and CEO come in, and they were asked during that public hearing what needed to be done to actually empower IBAC – our Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – to crack down on corruption in the public sector.

We need follow-the-money powers first and foremost. Okay, great. That was recommendation 5 in this report. There was also a recommendation to investigate corrupt conduct by third-party and private subcontractors where there is a substantial connection between alleged corrupt conduct and government funding. We posed the question to the commissioner then: has the Premier referred the case of alleged misconduct and corruption on Big Build sites, as reported by Nick McKenzie, to IBAC? They would not tell us. We now know that happened. Since then there has been nothing. No proactive action has been taken by either the Premier or the IBAC Commissioner, as we found out during a public hearing on Monday when I asked a very simple question: have you formally, after this report and after this hearing, written to the Premier to seek those powers that you so desperately need to do your job, given that you are the anti-corruption commission? There was a long pregnant pause. The answer certainly was not yes, which leads me to conclude the answer was no.

You can imagine my frustration sitting on that panel and the frustration of the member for Rowville, who has been on that committee, I might add, for 12 years now – Monday was probably his last hurrah – the frustration of sitting there and not getting answers from the independent body that is supposed to be investigating corruption on these worksites. They do not have the powers, which was illustrated and recommendations made in this report. It was reported on in September, and nothing has been done since then, so it does beg the question: does IBAC actually want to do anything about it? But it also illustrates the lengths that this government will go to to cover it up.

Not only are they passing the buck every chance they get, they are now proactively dismantling legislation in this place and in the other place to not give IBAC the powers it needs to investigate corruption on public worksites. It beggars belief. When people ask me often how they get away with it, it is because the definitions do not empower it. They do not have the powers to do anything about it, and it is all on the government because they are proactively blocking any change to legislation.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:58): I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the 2025–26 budget estimates. The estimates process can sometimes sound technical – fiscal strategy, performance measures, contingency allocations – but at its heart, this process is about something that is far simpler. It is about whether the promises made to communities like Glen Waverley are being delivered. It is about whether the numbers in budget papers 3 and 4 translate into real outcomes – better schools, better health care, safer streets, reliable transport and genuine cost-of-living relief. That is what this report is about.

The committee examined Victoria's return to a projected operating surplus in 2025–26, a significant milestone in the government's five-step fiscal strategy. But what does that mean in Glen Waverley? It means we are investing in services while taking steps to stabilise debt. It means we are not asking our children to carry the full burden of today's decisions. The committee rightly recommended clearer reporting on debt levels and interest payments because long-term financial sustainability protects the very services our communities rely on. Responsible budgets protect local outcomes.

In Glen Waverley education is not just a line item; it is why families move to my district. The committee examined the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and Victoria's performance in literacy and numeracy. Locally this budget delivers funding for a master plan to upgrade Vermont Primary School, continued expansion of three- and four-year-old kinder, increasing Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund payments to $400 and support for positive behaviour programs in schools. When the committee talks about aligning performance measures with national improvement targets, that is not abstract. That is about ensuring that students at Glendale Primary, Mount View Primary, Wheelers Hill Primary and all our outstanding secondary schools continue to lead the state. Our community expects excellence, and this budget backs that expectation.

The committee scrutinised ambulance wait times, mental health care delivery and infrastructure timelines, and in Glen Waverley that scrutiny matters, because health care close to home matters. The budget supports the continued operation of the Forest Hill urgent care clinic, expansion of the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, investment in mental health beds and frontline services and the permanent expansion of the community pharmacy pilot. When I speak to pharmacists like Silvana from Direct Chemist Outlet or families who rely on urgent care, they are not asking for statistics, they are asking for access. The committee's work ensures these investments are not just announced but delivered.

The committee examined the Metro Tunnel and the Suburban Rail Loop in detail, including cost transparency and Infrastructure Australia's recommendations. For Glen Waverley residents these projects are transformative. The Metro Tunnel, now opened, will increase frequency and reliability across the network, with the 2025 graduating high school students now easily able to use the Metro to get to Melbourne University and RMIT so much faster. The Suburban Rail Loop will connect our community to employment and education hubs without forcing people through the CBD, and free public transport for children and free weekend travel for seniors delivers direct hip-pocket relief. This is about giving families back time – time not stuck in traffic, time not waiting on overcrowded platforms and time spent with loved ones. The committee's recommendations around transparency ensure that when projects of this scale are undertaken Victorians can have confidence in how they are delivered.

The committee examined cost-of-living measures across the budget. For Glen Waverley households that includes free public transport for kids; the increased camps, sports and excursion funding; the power saving bonus; and food relief initiatives for vulnerable families. In a community as diverse as mine, with young families, retirees, international students and new migrants, these measures matter deeply. When we scrutinise performance measures around food relief and homelessness services it is because compassion must be matched with effectiveness. Support must reach those who need it.

The committee also examined prison capacity, bail changes and victims of crime financial assistance schemes, but locally this connects directly to investment in police training at the Victoria Police Academy in my electorate, court infrastructure upgrades and stronger victim-focused processes. Safety is not about slogans, it is about ensuring that families feel secure walking home at night and that victims are treated with dignity.

The committee recommended stronger reporting on emissions reduction and environmental performances. For Glen Waverley, a community of young families deeply conscious of the future, this matters. From renewable energy investments to the revival of the State Electricity Commission, this budget aligns environmental responsibility with affordability. A cleaner future must also be a cheaper future.

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee does not write the budget, but it ensures that the budget works. It ensures that targets are measurable, savings are transparent, infrastructure timelines are accountable and programs are evaluated. For my community in Glen Waverley this scrutiny protects our schools, our transport links, our healthcare access and our cost-of-living relief.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Legislative Framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:03): I am rising today to talk on the Integrity and Oversight Committee report on the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. It has a long title.

Jade Benham interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you, member for Mildura. I managed to get myself through the title, and your input is always fantastic. I am going straight to recommendation 5 of this report because I think this recommendation is the one that sums up what we need to do in this state, particularly when we see follow-the-dollar investigatory powers.

There is a lot of conjecture around at the moment about the corruption in this state – the absolute corruption in this state. The figure, obviously, that we are all talking about is $15 billion, and where has it gone? This is what Victorians want to know the answer to, and what this report has recommended is to give IBAC these powers. I am not quite sure why the government are so resistant on this and why, when we have committee reports that give recommendations, they are not taking up this particular recommendation. The government has come out against the opposition in a lot of this and said that figure is not true. Well, if that figure is not true, let us investigate and find out what the figure is. Let us give IBAC the powers to follow the money, to find out where the money has gone. That to me is common sense. We do not know where it has gone. The Victorian public do not know where it has gone.

Why won't we have this investigation? Why won't we go after the money and recoup the money? Think of this: if we only recouped 1 per cent of $15 billion, that is $150 million. I would ask anyone in this chamber: what would $150 million do for your community if we could recoup that – if we could follow the money? This is the question, and this is the recommendation in this report. No-one knows where it has gone. Is it the builders? Is it the subcontractors? Is it the suppliers? Is it the bikies? Is it the CFMEU? Or maybe there are government officials involved. I am not implying that, but I am saying we will not know unless we give IBAC these powers to follow the money. Victorians deserve to know the answer. I would have thought if the government were resistant to the $15 billion figure, that they would be proactively investigating this and proactively giving IBAC the powers as per the recommendation in this report. I do not understand the resistance; I really do not. There should not be resistance on this. When we are talking about a range from $15 billion to $30 billion, they are big numbers. They may be exaggerated, but they may not be exaggerated. This is why we should give IBAC these powers, as per recommendation 5. It is incumbent on the government to do this so Victorians have absolute transparency on where the money has gone.

What is the level of corruption on Victorian building sites? Everyone in this chamber knows that I love the construction industry. I love seeing things built, whether it be a road, a bridge, a hospital, whatever – I just love it. It is the one thing, as a builder, where you can drive past in 30 years time and say, 'I did that.' You take a lot of pride in what gets done. This is why I am concerned about this industry – the government is so reluctant to get to the bottom of the corruption within it. To give IBAC these powers and give IBAC the opportunity to investigate where the money has gone is imperative to transparency and, I would have thought, to the integrity of the government. If the government wants to talk about integrity, here is a good start: give IBAC the powers as per recommendation 5 in this report. If you do not want to be sledged by the general public and if you do not want to be sledged by the opposition about being corrupt or deceptive or whatever description they want to give, give IBAC the powers to follow the money. Let us be transparent about it. Let Victorians know where it has gone. The government should be immediately doing this, and they lost an opportunity this week.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (11:08): It was good of the member for Narracan to learn how to pronounce some words at the back end of his contribution there. I rise this morning to make a contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2025–26 budget estimates. Last year the Treasurer and the government delivered a budget which was both fiscally responsible and also delivered the cost-of-living relief and the services that Victorians need, particularly those Victorians living in outer suburban areas like Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing. The budget delivered an operating surplus for the first time I believe since COVID, which is obviously understandable given the investments that we had to make to help businesses and workers during that period. It also forecasts strong economic growth in the forwards and strong growth of gross state product for the best-performing economy of any jurisdiction anywhere in Australia – that is not opinion, that is fact. It also, as I mentioned, delivered the cost-of-living relief, the services and the infrastructure that our growing suburbs need. Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing were incredibly fortunate to be provided with that in the budget last year, and I will go through and speak about some of those fantastic projects and fantastic services that will be delivered in my community in Tarneit.

At Hogans Road Reserve, where the Hoppers Crossing football and cricket club play, there was $120,000 for a brand new scoreboard for the main oval there. Hoppers Crossing football and cricket club is more than just a sporting club; it is an integral part of that community and it really forms a community hub. The new scoreboard will allow that community organisation to run movie nights through the summer periods. It will support their junior teams as well. It will support their cricket team. It will support obviously their senior football teams and women's teams as well. The Hoppers Crossing football and cricket club, as I said, is more than a sporting club. It is an organisation that is rooted deeply in that community and has been in existence since the 1970s, which is when the first division or subdivision in Hoppers Crossing was, so to be able to provide that critical piece of community infrastructure for that club was absolutely amazing.

There was a share – I think about $500,000 – of planning money for The Grange P–12 College as well. The Grange P–12 College has two campuses, and it is an absolutely amazing school. There are two campuses: a P–6 and then a 7–12. The 7–12 campus, under the previous member, who is now the member for Laverton, was able to get a capital works upgrade, which was absolutely fantastic, but the P–6 college is in great need of a capital works upgrade as well, so to be able to provide the planning money for the school and the Victorian School Building Authority to do the detailed planning with an architect to set up that plan and that structure and the plans for capital works upgrade for the primary campus to hopefully be funded in coming years was something that was incredible as well. I know that that school community that do such an amazing job in Hoppers Crossing were so very grateful, and actually I cannot wait for their year 10s and 11s to be in here for Youth Parliament in the coming months.

On the education front, we also funded the second stage of Brinbeal Secondary College. Brinbeal Secondary College is a new secondary college. I believe it is in its second or third year at the moment, perhaps third. The Minister for Education and I opened the school a couple of years ago. In terms of infrastructure, Brinbeal Secondary College in Tarneit is as good a government school as you will find anywhere in Victoria, and the funding for its second stage will make that even better again.

We also funded new and extended bus routes: a new bus route 140 from Rockbank station to Tarneit station and also the new route 186, which will go through and service the brand new West Tarneit station – a fantastic budget for my community in Tarneit.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (11:13): As the Victorian Liberals and Nationals lead speaker on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026, I first wish to take a moment to give a big shout-out to the 5000 hardworking TAFE teachers right across Victoria doing an amazing job in the face of some very challenging conditions. Our state relies heavily on our TAFE teachers to educate and skill up Victorians and provide them with the qualifications that they need to get decent jobs and help grow our economy. TAFE teachers play a critical role both in the education system and in our community, and I want to personally acknowledge our TAFE teachers and record my appreciation for the work that they do educating Victorians.

In recent times TAFE teachers have been overworked and underpaid. Under the Allan Labor government, an alarming number of TAFE teachers have been required to work unpaid overtime, which has resulted in burnout, unwarranted stress and anxiety. This has resulted in many teachers leaving the TAFE network, which has put incredible pressure on other teachers and students as a result. It has also resulted in the current shortage of TAFE teachers, which is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. It took almost three years of campaigning by our TAFE teachers, fighting for TAFE teachers and fighting with this government, for our TAFE teachers to be finally recognised and to be provided a decent pay offer by the Allan Labor government. To all the TAFE teachers, thank you. Thank you for the incredible work that you do in helping give the next generation of Victorians the skills that they will need for the jobs of today and the jobs of the future.

Vocational education and training is a critical part of our economy. In so many respects VET is an essential component if Victoria wants to continue to grow its economy and maintain a strong standard of living. The Victorian Liberals and Nationals support a strong VET system that includes a TAFE network that delivers for students and industry. I am a huge advocate for TAFE. My older brother went to TAFE, he got qualified and he has done very well ever since. I have many in my family – almost all of my cousins – and many friends who have attended TAFEs or registered training organisations and have obtained qualifications that have allowed them to embark on successful careers in electrical, plumbing, manufacturing, automotive, construction and horticulture, just to name a few, owning and operating small businesses as a result of their VET training.

I am also proud of the fact that in my electorate of Evelyn we have one of the highest proportions of residents with trade qualifications and one of the highest proportions of residents who are employed in a technical or trade occupation, and I count many of them as my close friends. On a personal note it is wonderful to see so many of my son's friends who are now undertaking various trade and VET courses as the first stepping stone to their future careers, and my son himself is considering training options and opportunities as he works part-time in a local gas supply business. I wish these young people all the best in their training and their future careers. Whether it is the chippies, the sparkies, the brickies, the health and aged care workers, the early childhood educators, the hospitality staff or emerging farmers, we value the tradies and skilled workers in my local community and across Victoria.

The bill that is now before us represents, regrettably, a missed opportunity for our state to truly strengthen our VET sector. Nonetheless the Victorian Liberals and Nationals will not oppose this bill. But it has to be said that the bill from this tired Labor government is big on spin and rhetoric but very lightweight on substance. On Labor's watch Victoria has been plunged into a skills crisis. This tired Labor government, in power for 12 years, has mismanaged and underfunded Victoria's VET system, and we now see a massive skills shortage across a range of sectors. According to the Victorian Skills

Authority, Victoria will need an additional 373,000 new skilled workers to enter the Victorian workforce by 2028 and 1.5 million new workers by 2035 just to meet current demand. The most recent data released by the Productivity Commission earlier this month found that Victoria has the lowest VET completion rates per capita in the nation, with the exception of the ACT, and student satisfaction levels were at or below the national average. To add insult to injury, real recurrent VET expenditure per annual hour in Victoria under the Allan Labor government has plummeted by 18 per cent, from $23.77 per hour in 2020 to $19.44 per hour in 2024, the lowest in the nation. Labor's disgraceful record on VET funding and completion rates has plunged Victoria into a skills crisis.

This bill represents a massive missed opportunity to introduce real reforms and measures to combat Victoria's skills shortages and reverse the consistent decline in the skilled workforce after 12 years of Labor rule. Youth unemployment in Victoria is currently sitting at 10.3 per cent, which is 6 per cent higher than the current adult unemployment rate in Victoria. What is even worse is that in Melbourne's west the youth unemployment rate is currently at a staggering rate of 14.2 per cent. Right now, 8.5 per cent of Victorians between the ages of 15 and 24 are not in work or education. These young Victorians are at serious risk of becoming part of the long-term unemployed. We need policies from a government that will engage these young Victorians and provide a pathway to a productive future that will enable them to earn a decent salary and allow them to save to buy a home and contribute towards Victoria's economy. This bill will not achieve any of that. As it was made clear during the bill briefing – and I do thank the minister's office and departmental officials for their time and information – this bill essentially, in almost all respects, puts into law what is already the status quo. Almost everything that is contained in this bill is already happening. There is really nothing new to see in this bill. All of it has been happening for years, and the government ahead of the election is just after another headline to reannounce what is already happening. It seems this government is completely bereft of policy ideas and just decided to put a fancy title in the bill that will do nothing to fix Victoria's skills crisis and nothing to create more jobs for young Victorians.

Labor members will claim in their speeches that follow mine that they had to enshrine free TAFE into law to protect it from a future government – what absolute rubbish. The bill is 45 pages long, but only five pages actually deal with the free TAFE guarantee and funding. The rest of the 35 pages give significantly more power to the minister for an interventionist approach in a TAFE network that is struggling under Labor's rule. It is disingenuous for the government to spruik this bill as merely about free TAFE guarantee, because it is not. It is not until page 38 that the bill even deals with the substantive measure of creating a free TAFE guarantee. The first 37 pages of this bill have nothing to do with free TAFE courses or funding. Rather, they are full of new provisions providing the minister with new wideranging powers, including veto powers, to intervene and control the operations of TAFE. This bill is more about ministerial control and power than anything to do with free TAFE and funding, so the title of the bill is completely misleading. Instead of being called the 'free TAFE guarantee' bill, it should be renamed the 'Labor's power grab over TAFE' bill. That would be a more accurate title and would truly reflect the proposals contained in this bill.

While Labor members will likely trot out prepared lines from the minister's office, such as 'nation-leading free TAFE' or 'free TAFE has been a game changer', this bill will not do anything different to what the government has already been doing for the last four years. It does nothing to improve that at all – no additional funding, nothing. It has already been doing this for the last four years, so there is no game changer here. TAFEs have already been receiving 70 per cent or more VET funding for the last several financial years. There is nothing on offer to fix Victoria's skills crisis, and there is nothing that will put more young Victorians into jobs. It is just more of the same from a tired Labor government after a decade of mismanagement.

Part 2 of the bill concerns the creation of a TAFE network, which only consists of TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities. It does not include independent registered training organisations, which are a valuable part of Victoria's VET system. The bill sets up a TAFE network as the principal provider of vocational education and training in Victoria, and it is not clear why RTOs have been specifically

excluded from the network, especially given that the independent sector in Victoria does well and supports approximately 88 per cent of all students in skills training.

Interestingly, one of the key objectives of this network will be to deliver the critical skills required by Victorian industries, employers and local communities. Whilst this objective is desperately needed, there is no detail as to how the network will actually meet this objective. Under new division 1B inserted by the bill, the minister is required to issue a statement of priorities to the TAFE network, and the statement of priorities will include strategic priorities for the TAFE network, which may include financial priorities and performance targets. At the bill briefing, the officials advised that this was not a new measure and that the minister has been issuing statements of priorities to the sector since 2022.

I have reviewed the statement of priorities for 2025, and it is a fairly uninspiring document. Most of the contents is what any student or teacher would expect from the network as a bare minimum. It does not set out any performance benchmarks or key performance indicators, and it says absolutely nothing about financial priorities. It does not mention anything about the massive skills shortage that Victoria is experiencing, and it does not say a thing about how Victoria is going to supply 1.5 million skilled workers by 2035. I would have thought that if you were going to have a statement of priorities, then your number one priority as a government would be measures to address the skills shortages. Labor has let the skills crisis spiral out of control during its 12-year rule.

After the minister issues a statement of priorities, each TAFE will be required to provide a response to the minister as to how they are going to implement the strategic priorities and meet performance targets. The minister is then required to approve the TAFE response, and if the minister is not satisfied with the TAFE response, the minister can refuse to approve it and can impose their own response on the TAFE. In a nutshell, the minister can impose her own veto power on a TAFE's response and unilaterally impose her own response on how the TAFE will be required to achieve the targets and priorities. This is the Labor Party way. If they are not happy with something, they just ride roughshod over it. You only need to look at the gaslighting this government has engaged in when it attacked Geoffrey Watson SC for daring to put a conservative estimate on the $15 billion that has been corruptly stolen from taxpayers under this government's watch on the rotten Big Build.

What is even worse under this bill is that if the minister does exercise her veto power and unilaterally imposes her own response on a TAFE there is absolutely no requirement for the minister to consult with the TAFE prior to doing so, and the minister is not required to have any regard to the resources or financial circumstances of the TAFE. It is just a cheap and nasty grab for power by Minister Tierney to impose more control and authority over TAFEs after the network has struggled on her watch. In fact this grab for more power and control is emblematic of the intent of this bill and the way in which the government is seeking to take control of every aspect of the VET sector. The TAFEs will also be required to provide progress reports every six months on whether they are achieving their targets, and if I did not know any better, it would sound like the minister is seeking to micromanage TAFEs and subject them to performance management targets. The additional reporting, red tape and bureaucracy that will be imposed on TAFEs to respond to the minister's strict reporting directives will only serve to put TAFEs under further pressure and strain.

Unlike the TAFEs, the dual-sector universities are more protected from the minister's intrusion into their affairs, as a result of the independence that they enjoy under their own acts of Parliament. While the minister will still be able to ask dual-sector universities to prepare responses to a statement of priorities, the minister does not have any power to veto any response provided by the universities.

The ministerial intervention and interfering with the internal affairs of TAFEs do not stop there. Under this bill, TAFEs will be required to prepare annual budgets and submit them to the minister. Under this bill, the minister will have the power to either accept a budget, amend it or veto it entirely. If the minister vetoes a TAFE's budget, the TAFE will be required to go back to the drawing board and submit an amended budget to the minister. But if the minister is still unhappy with the budget, the minister can veto it and impose her own budget on the TAFE. It is an incredible amount of power that

the minister will obtain under this bill if it is passed, and not only will the minister be able to intervene in the internal affairs of a TAFE's operational activities, but the minister will be able to impose her own budget on a TAFE as she sees fit. What is worse is there are absolutely no protections in this bill from what the minister could do. There is nothing to stop the minister from making cuts to the internal operations of Victorian TAFEs. Basically, all this bill does is centralise all power in the minister and give her complete autonomy and unilateral powers to control every aspect of the TAFE network.

The bill also proposes to insert a new provision in the act known as 'reserve powers of minister', which I found quite surprising. This provision sounds familiar to what happened in 1975 when the Governor-General used his reserve powers to dismiss Gough Whitlam. I found it quite odd that any government, let alone this Labor one, would want to refer to ministerial powers as 'reserve powers', but that appears to be the prerogative of this government. These new reserve powers will allow the minister to appoint a ministerial representative to the board of a TAFE if the minister considers the TAFE board is acting incompetently or being inefficient. In short, the reserve powers will allow the minister to appoint their ministerial puppet to a TAFE board in order to further interfere in and control the operations of these TAFE organisations, and the TAFE boards will be required to allow the minister's puppet to attend board meetings, consider advice given by the minister's puppet and hand over any information the minister's puppet requests. Basically, TAFE boards will not be able to sneeze without the minister knowing.

But wait, there are more grabs for power in this bill. This bill will also provide the power to the minister to issue guidelines to a TAFE on how the TAFE will be required to submit their response reports and budgets in a format acceptable to the minister. Basically, the minister is seeking to take away any self-determination and freedom from the TAFEs in how they conduct their operations, and they will only be allowed to operate in a manner acceptable to the minister. Further, the minister is also provided with general powers under this bill. So not only does the minister get reserve powers under this bill, but the minister gets general powers as well. Under these general powers the minister will be able to require TAFEs to provide her with any information that she asks for, including in relation to any commercial arrangements and third-party contracts a TAFE may have. Under these powers there is basically no information that the minister cannot obtain from TAFEs. The ministerial intrusion this bill will allow into the internal workings of TAFE is truly astonishing.

The bill will also reduce the number of directors on TAFE boards from 15 to 12. This does seem to be a sensible amendment and will likely improve governance. It will hopefully result in some rebalancing of the membership of these boards, many of which are dominated by former Labor MPs, which I am not sure has helped.

When you finally get to page 38 of this bill you finally find something that resembles the title of this bill. Part 3 of the bill inserts what the government calls a 'Free TAFE guarantee'. It is an interesting choice of words because whilst the word 'guarantee' is used in the title of this new section, it does not actually appear anywhere in the actual content of the provisions. All this supposed guarantee provides is that the minister must each year list the VET courses that will be provided on a tuition-free basis by TAFEs and dual-sector universities and determine the class of students that will be eligible for the courses free of a tuition fee. That is it; there is nothing else. That is the extent of the supposed guarantee that is being lauded by Labor. Well, newsflash: this is already happening. There are currently around 80 courses that are provided free of tuition fees, and this supposed guarantee will change nothing except allow the Labor government to cut courses and only guarantee, say, 10 courses or even just one course. It can happen under this bill.

This guarantee is completely pointless, because there is nothing in this guarantee that states that there will be a minimum number of courses provided on a free tuition basis or that certain courses will be provided on a free tuition basis. It is a fact: there is absolutely nothing to stop the minister from cutting the number of free tuition courses that are currently being provided under this bill. And if you need

any further proof that this guarantee is a complete hoax, then I encourage members to turn to page 38 of this bill and read new section 3.1.1A(4), which states:

> This section does not create a legal right in any person or give rise to any civil cause of action.

It is there in black and white: Labor's so-called guarantee is not creating any legal rights under this bill. The section confirms that under Labor no Victorian has a right to free tuition courses, and the Labor government will have complete immunity if it fails to comply with its hollow guarantee. Clearly this guarantee is a total artifice. It does not guarantee the number of tuition-free courses that will be provided, it does not guarantee whether courses will be free in the future and it does not even guarantee that tuition-free courses will not be reduced in the future under Labor. That is why I said at the top of this contribution it is just spin in an election year. It is nothing but a very shallow attempt by this tired Labor government to try and deceive students into thinking their free courses are guaranteed in the hope of scoring some political points.

The next guarantee provided under this bill concerns TAFE funding. At the 2022 election Labor committed to ensuring the TAFE sector received the majority share of government funding and expanded free TAFE to ensure that more Victorians have access to free courses. Four years later, the government has finally decided it is going to introduce legislation to give effect to its 2022 election commitments. The proposed TAFE funding guarantee will require the government to direct 70 per cent of all VET funding to TAFE institutes and dual-sector universities. As I mentioned before, this is nothing new. As was made clear during the bill briefing, in the 2024–25 financial year TAFEs and dual-sector universities received 73 per cent of VET funding. In the current 2025–26 financial year TAFEs and dual-sector universities are on track to receive 80 per cent of all VET funding. TAFEs and dual-sector universities are already receiving this amount of funding, so this is hardly groundbreaking stuff.

The other thing to remember, but the Allan Labor government conveniently forgets to mention, is that it relies heavily on Commonwealth money to fund its VET programs. Under the National Skills Agreement, Victoria will receive $3.1 billion in Commonwealth funding over a five-year period until 2028. Commonwealth funding represents at least one-third of all expenditure on VET programs in Victoria, and in the 2024–25 year Victoria received $558 million in VET funding from the Commonwealth government. What this Labor government is also conveniently forgetting to mention is that as a condition of receiving VET funding from the Commonwealth Victoria must spend at least 70 per cent of all Commonwealth funding on either TAFEs or dual-sector universities, so it is not like this guarantee is making some massive new investment in our TAFEs or universities. Rather, all the funding guarantee is doing is giving effect to Victoria's obligations under the National Skills Agreement and continuing the funding that it has already been providing.

In addition, the 70 per cent funding guarantee can be averaged over a three-year period. The question needs to be asked: what is the point of a funding guarantee if you can average it out over a three-year period? It is not a guarantee at all; it is just another way for this Labor government to give itself wriggle room if the funding gets tight in the future. Like with most things, you can never take this tired Labor government at their word. The devil is always in the detail. These guarantees are anything but ironclad. All these provisions do is give effect to the current status quo, and what is of most concern is that none of these provisions will do anything to fix Victoria's skills crisis.

At this point it is worth considering the assessment of VET and TAFE in Victoria by Helen Silver AO in her independent review of the Victorian public service, commissioned by this Labor government. To that end, let us come back to the provisions that make up the majority of this bill, being the conferral of significantly expanded powers to the minister to control the TAFE network. I read with interest the following comments made by the minister in the second-reading speech:

> Our reforms to date have seen the TAFE Network operate more efficiently and collaboratively to deliver services that draw on the full capability of the Network, maximising value for money and student outcomes.

If the minister is right that the TAFEs are working more efficiently and collaboratively, then why does Minister Tierney need all these additional powers to control the operation of TAFEs? The minister's remarks do not align at all with the findings made by the recent Silver review. The Silver review was scathing of the performance of Victoria's VET and TAFE system under Labor. It found:

> Performance of the VET system is mixed, with continued skills shortages in priority industries, completion levels lower than the national average, and student satisfaction at or below national averages. The system also has financial challenges: the Review understands financial viability remains an issue for several TAFEs.

These are the findings of the Labor government's own review. The Silver review has absolutely called out this government on its abject failure in the VET sector. Silver found continued skilled shortages in priority industries, completion levels lower than the national average and student satisfaction at or below national averages. That is a damning assessment from the government's own appointed reviewer, calling into question Minister Tierney's performance, or lack thereof, and nothing in this bill seeks to fix these appalling findings.

As Silver also noted, financial viability remains an issue for several TAFEs. You do not have to just rely on the Silver review; the Auditor-General has already been saying this. In July last year, after undertaking an audit of the TAFE system, the Auditor-General found that only eight of the 12 TAFEs reported a net surplus in 2024. However, only five TAFEs would have achieved this outcome if the government had not provided additional one-off capital grant income. You only need to look at the annual reports of some of our TAFEs to see the financial distress they are currently in under this Labor government. In the 2024–25 financial year the Box Hill Institute recorded an $18.3 million loss, the Chisholm Institute recorded a $14.8 million loss, William Angliss recorded a $6.1 million loss and Melbourne Polytechnic recorded a $1.2 million loss.

While TAFEs are not expected to make large surpluses, generating a small surplus is important to ensure they have sufficient funds for future operations. Ideally these surpluses can be reinvested to maintain and improve the quality of education and services offered by the TAFEs. If this underlying net deficit trend continues for these TAFEs without effective management or expenditure or own-source revenue growth, their long-term financial sustainability is at serious risk. In the 2024–25 financial report, it was discovered an additional $93 million has been taken out of the Treasurer's advance to fund various TAFE programs.

Whilst the government likes to wax lyrical about how much funding it has put into the TAFE programs, we have a TAFE sector that is facing massive financial problems under Labor, while at the same time Victoria's skills crisis only goes from bad to worse. In order to address the financial crisis that many TAFEs are confronting, the Silver review recommended that TAFEs should be looking to merge and TAFE assets should be sold off. The Silver review found there was significant underutilisation of assets across the TAFE network. In its response to the Silver review, the government accepted these recommendations. This Allan Labor government needs to come clean with TAFE students, TAFE teachers and the sector and tell them which TAFEs they intend to merge and what TAFE assets will be sold off.

This Labor government's policies are failing Victorians. While TAFE teachers continue to work incredibly hard and students continue to get into these courses, the government continues to fail on every measure to deliver a TAFE network that skills the workforce Victoria desperately needs. In 2024 Labor reported that only 53.7 per cent of free TAFE students had completed their four-year course. Whilst Labor are always quick to say this rate is higher than university completion rates, it does hide the fact that they are failing still. Since this time, the government has refused to release free TAFE completion rates other than to say they are improving. We want students to complete their qualifications and be part of a growing skilled workforce, and because the current skills shortages are having a massive impact on the economy, we absolutely must do this.

It is something that we will introduce. We intend to introduce amendments in the upper house, in the Legislative Council, to this bill to require the minister to include in the department's annual report

student completion rates for VET courses that are provided on a free tuition basis. Also, like many policies of the Labor government, they pick winners and losers, and the funding allocations in this bill completely ignore the essential role that the independent registered training organisations play in skilling up Victorians. If the government were serious about addressing the skills crisis, it would absolutely have a holistic approach.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (11:44): I will come to a response to that fictional essay that was just read out to the chamber. But before I do and before I come to some of the components of the bill, I want to just talk about the importance of TAFE to working families and relate that to my own personal experience and other people that I know. As people would know, I began my working life as an electrician – the supreme trade, top of the tree. I acknowledge the other tradespeople that might be in the chamber at the moment – carpentry and plumbing and so forth – but people know that the electrical trades are the top of the tree. The people that were at TAFE with me when I did my TAFE course, which was a great course, a great educational foundation, were predominantly young people – there were some mature-age apprentices – from working-class families and families who wanted their kids to have a solid occupation, a trade to always have with them through life that they could rely on to produce a good income. It was that bargain of working hard in a trade or vocation and having a good, solid and secure career for the rest of their lives. So it is a really important foundation for working families, not just here in Victoria but right across the country.

In my own personal journey, I went back to TAFE a number of times through my trade career. I went back to do a refrigeration course and a business course, and then when I was moving from that trade work into helping in the offices of politicians, I did IT and computing courses and those sorts of things to get the skills that I needed to change trajectory. TAFE has always been there for me, and I am sure for many people in the chamber and many people in Victoria, TAFE is a constant and important source of education and upskilling for people to give them a good career and a step up. In fact I think as we reflect back on the 1980s, as the Australian economy was opened up to global competition, part of the contract, if you like – it might have been unspoken – between people and government was: 'We're going to open up the economy, and the industries that you have worked in that have been secure for a long time are going to be open to competition. But we're going to give you the skills and give your kids the skills to compete on that global scale.' It is, in my view, a fundamental contract that governments have with people to provide a really solid public vocational and training system, the TAFE system that we have here in Victoria. I think that is the reason – and I remember this very clearly because I remember this place when the Liberals and Nationals were in government and we saw those savage cuts to TAFE – why the community was so angry. They felt that the rug was being pulled out from under their feet.

There was a comment made by the honourable member opposite in her contribution that TAFE is struggling under Labor's rule, which I disagree with. I nearly choked when I heard that, because I remember the cuts to TAFE under the Liberals and Nationals. I remember $1 billion being pulled out of the TAFE system, 22 campuses being closed and around 2000 TAFE teachers sacked. For those on the other side of the chamber: you do not thank TAFE teachers by sacking them. You do not support TAFE by closing campuses and ripping $1 billion out of the system. The member for Eltham is at the table, my honourable ministerial colleague. We both remember so well the closure of the Greensborough TAFE campus, which was in the member's electorate at the time and with boundary changes is now in my electorate.

That local TAFE was shut, and I remember walking through the TAFE months after and it was like a scene out of a horror movie. There were pieces of paper on the floor as if people had just been told to leave, with semester timetables printed on them – semesters that never happened, for students that were never able to study at that TAFE because the Liberals and Nationals shut the TAFE down. I have never seen a government so heartlessly and callously rip the rug from under people's feet like they did with the cuts to the TAFE sector back at that time. I remember standing on the front steps of Parliament

with the member for Eltham and others with a huge petition – thousands of signatures of people saying, 'Reopen that TAFE campus.' The Liberal–Nationals did not reopen that TAFE campus. It took the election of a Labor government to reopen that TAFE campus. One of the proudest moments of my time in this place was going along to the opening of the Greensborough TAFE campus after it had been closed.

Importantly, as we head towards an election in November where people have to make a decision about who to vote for, we know the Liberal Party has $11 billion of cuts in store across government, and it is almost certain that a part of those cuts will apply to the TAFE sector. We have heard the opposition speak already with their concerns about the TAFE sector – this is just warming the sector up for the cuts that are to come. I hear the murmuring from those opposite; there is one way to put this to bed, and that is for the Leader of the Opposition to walk into this debate and rule out cuts to TAFE – rule out any cuts if she were to be elected.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this bill actually allows this Labor government to cut funding to TAFE, so on relevance I would ask you to ask the minister on his feet to come back to that relevant point and be factual in his contribution.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): The member was being relevant to the bill before us in discussing TAFE.

Colin BROOKS: That point of order was an attempt to protect the Leader of the Opposition, who will not rule out cuts to the TAFE sector. They will not rule out cuts to the TAFE sector, because we know that TAFE cuts are coming. With that $11 billion the opposition have not outlined where those cuts will apply. They have not said how they are going to make those cuts, so the opportunity here is for them to start ruling out things like TAFE cuts. We will see if that actually happens.

In my current portfolio of industry and advanced manufacturing I see on a daily basis the importance of the skills sector here in Victoria. Instead of running down the sector like those opposite do, I will tell you what, when I talk to international defence companies and advanced manufacturers, the reason that they want to come to Victoria is because of our highly skilled workforce. Our TAFE sector is one of the most highly regarded training systems in the world. On Monday I was at RMIT in the city launching our skills solutions partnerships, which is a program run under my portfolio that targets important areas of skills training and fills gaps, if you like, in the training sector. This is round 2 of our skills solutions partnerships and we announced $1.7 million for five grants. This was a particular grant for RMIT University, Navantia – which is a Spanish naval shipbuilding company – MEMKO Systems, Engineers Education Australia and LEAP to come together to develop micromodules for training for the AUKUS program. It is a highly competitive area, and Victoria again in these courses on AI, cybersecurity and autonomous systems is leading the pack.

One of the most important things in this bill is to allow the minister to set the strategic direction for the TAFEs and coordinate the TAFEs as a system. I am a big believer in both the TAFE sector and the public education system more broadly. A systemic approach is the correct approach to make sure that each part of the system is working in concert to deliver the very best outcomes for the people that it is supposed to. Of course it also legislates the importance of free TAFE and a minimum of 70 per cent of training and skills funding going to the TAFE sector, and I think that is probably what has upset the Liberals and Nationals the most, because we know that they do not believe in public TAFE.

After those cuts that I talked about earlier on, we have had a Labor government that has reopened campuses, that has backed TAFE. We have invested $16 billion in new and base funding in TAFE since 2014.

Tim Bull interjected.

Colin BROOKS: I am getting irrelevant interjections here. Free TAFE was introduced in 2019, and since then it has benefited more than 225,000 students – 57,000 of those in regional areas the

member for Gippsland East would be happy to hear – and the majority of those people benefiting from free TAFE courses, I think 59 per cent, are women. Overall that has meant savings of $727 million in fees for Victorians who are undertaking this training. We reject the cuts of the Liberal Party in the past. We will fight against the cuts that they want to implement if they get into government at the end of this year. We will continue to invest in TAFE. The Minister for Skills and TAFE is doing a great job, and this bill is another reform to deliver a stronger, better TAFE system for Victorians, which so many working families rely on. I commend the bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (11:53): I rise also to make a contribution on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. Let me just say at the outset and let me say this clearly: I, along with the Nationals, support a strong vocational education and training sector, because often that is how training and upskilling is delivered in the regions where the uptake of tertiary education is quite low, despite having a magnificent La Trobe University campus in Mildura which now has a world-class nursing wing, the Dr Deb Neal Wing. But our TAFE in Mildura, the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, has been calling out for more investment from this government for a decade or more now. I have been to visit on several occasions the campus in Mildura. I actually attended as a student, in my younger years, the Swan Hill campus of Sunraysia Institute of TAFE. But more recently I was invited to SuniTAFE by the CEO Brett Millington, who is doing a wonderful job there. He is a very good man, Brett Millington. He is a Maffra man, I am led to believe. He invited me in to just have a look around at particularly the trades area of the campus. With the explosion, like I said, of TAFE education and vocational training in the regions, it is not only an education provider, it is a funnel to industry.

We have to grow our own workforce in the regions. We have no other choice. If we do not grow our own, then we are left without a workforce, which is what we are facing now and which is why we are inviting in more of the tertiary education, such as the end-to-end GP training through the likes of Monash School of Rural Health. Latrobe University have the world-class Dr Deborah Neal wing now for nursing training. I was at Latrobe University doing some engagement stuff last week with Katrina Umback actually, who is part of a team doing incredible work towards a catheterisation lab in Mildura. But that is beside the point; I will come back to TAFE. They are actually restricted now with how many students they can train, particularly in mechanics. There is a need for more diesel mechanics, and we need mechanics that can work on EVs now, because as you can imagine, the remit of working on an electric vehicle is very, very different to a combustion engine or a diesel engine. They are stuck with the facilities that they have had since moving into that campus. There have been little bits of investment here and there, but when I hear the other side talk about how much has been invested in TAFE, that is fine in Labor electorates. I invite the minister, who has been to Mildura several times, and I would love to take the minister for a tour, and I am sure the CEO would love to take the minister for a tour as well. There is desperate need for expansion through the trades area there.

Also there is an interesting point here, and this is something that took me a little while to get my head around: the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE actually sits on land which is college-leased land. College-leased land will mean nothing to most people in this place, but the college lease was set up by the Chaffey brothers; without getting too technical, the land was leased, and all of that lease money was supposed to go into setting up an ag college in Mildura. Right now the college lease funds and the trust funnel it to the schools in the region – great; it means they do not have to do raffles every week. However, SuniTAFE, which is arguably the college that the college lease was set up to fund, actually pays a quarter of a million dollars a year in lease fees to the college lease, which is a little befuddling. No-one has been able to unscramble this egg, which is unfortunate, because it crosses over so many different portfolios such as education; we have tried many times. But it just seems a bit strange; the college lease is quite complicated. Anyway, it is an interesting point to note that despite the very reason that the college lease was set up, it is now paying a lease fee to the college lease.

So the Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, which is the campus that I am very, very familiar with and visit often, actually did a refurb of their student learning communal area a couple of years ago, which is

fantastic but not helping to accommodate more students in the trades in terms of mechanics, preapprenticeship courses and those types of things. Let me just say, as I mentioned earlier, the access to vocational education and training in the regions is so vitally important, and it has changed a lot in recent times, with the ability now to do that vocational education while still at high school and complete a preapprenticeship course, which is incredible, but we need more of that.

I want to get to the title of the bill, though – the free TAFE guarantee – and we heard the member for Evelyn, as she was delivering her contribution, talk about the 45-page bill, yet the title of the bill – the free TAFE guarantee – only takes about five pages of the free TAFE guarantee bill. There are a few issues that we have found running through this bill; the remaining 40 pages are largely dedicated to expanding ministerial control over the TAFE network. So when the government is telling Victorians that this bill is about guaranteeing free TAFE, it is not exactly that. The minister must determine the list of courses that will be free, but there is no minimum number of courses, as we heard the member for Evelyn point out, required to be on that list. There is no requirement for any particular course to remain free, and there are no legal rights created for students. In other words, that guarantee is not really a guarantee at all. At any point the minister can expand or reduce the list of free courses at their discretion, so the number could grow with a changing workforce and the changing needs of the workforce. It could grow, but there is nothing to stop it from sinking down to one, because there is no guarantee in there whatsoever of the number of courses that need to remain free. The government says that this bill locks in free TAFE, but the reality is that the minister decides what is free and that decision can change whenever the government chooses. So it is not quite the ironclad guarantee that the title and the marketing would suggest.

The second element of the bill is the TAFE funding guarantee. The rhetoric sounds impressive. The government says it is guaranteeing that 70 per cent of vocational education funding will go to TAFEs and public providers, but when you look at the detail – again, the member for Evelyn did state that the devil is always in the detail, and she is absolutely right – this simply replicates an existing requirement under the National Skills Agreement with the Commonwealth. Under that agreement, states and territories must direct 70 per cent of Commonwealth funding to TAFE and public training providers. So this is not bold new policy; it is just rehashing things, and we see that time and time and time again. It is simply legislating something that the government already has to do in order to receive that Commonwealth funding.

On top of that, the bill allows the government a fair degree of flexibility through the averaging mechanism. The requirement can be met if 70 per cent of funding is delivered on average over a three-year period, which gives no guarantee to any particular TAFE campus that they will have concurrent funding to deliver that. When we talk about other vocational education or adult learning spaces, neighbourhood houses in this state face exactly that problem right now. There is no guarantee of their funding, and every year they are having to reapply for funding. It makes no sense. The work that neighbourhood houses do in this state – they go over and above every single year with this stress hanging over their heads that they may not get the funding required to actually do their jobs and provide for their community. They do their jobs and then some every single year. They are desperate, as we saw on the steps of Parliament a few weeks ago. The neighbourhood house network in this state are desperate to keep their doors open. And Sunraysia Institute of TAFE is desperate, of course, to expand their capability leading into the future so that we can grow our own workforce.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:03): Well, we did bring it back to TAFE there at the end. That is great. This amendment that is before us has been one that I have been champing at the bit to speak about. It is a free TAFE guarantee, of course, guaranteeing access for all Victorians for all time to TAFE. It is a TAFE funding guarantee which mandates that a minimum of 70 per cent of training and skills funding is provided to TAFEs, and it enshrines the TAFE network in the act. We know that network collaboration and innovation lead to better results for all Victorians.

It was with some disdain, I must admit, that I sat here and listened to the Shadow Minister for Jobs and Skills. Frankly, you do not get to wreck TAFE, create a skills crisis and then act pious like you

have got a solution to the problem. In 2012 the Liberal government ripped around $1 billion from the TAFE sector. Campuses closed, thousands of teachers lost their jobs and about 80,000 students disappeared from the sector. They did not just cut TAFE, they ripped opportunity from Victorians. And we saw that in Frankston. We saw that in working families. Right now, under the Labor government, we have seen a resurgence. We have seen the Labor government in Victoria save TAFE and rebuild TAFE, injecting more than ever – a $16 billion funding injection – into building our TAFE and training sector. It was with the minister in the other place last week that I was able to stand in the $30 billion stages 1 and 2 at Frankston Chisholm TAFE, the flagship TAFE of the south-east, and help announce and launch the federal–state partnership of the centre of excellence for AI and digital.

I will say that the issue is bigger than TAFE, though. What we saw when the Liberals cut TAFE, and again I will say that a billion dollars was ripped out of TAFE in 2012, 80,000 students had to take a walk and thousands of teachers lost their jobs. But the Liberals cutting TAFE showed a real misunderstanding of how modern economies work, and I think people in this house who are standing up and speaking today should probably educate themselves on the value of that higher education TAFE format in any modern economy.

Advanced economies rely on three pillars of skills and education, one being vocational education – TAFE – the other being universities, and of course we have got on-the-job apprenticeships as well. Nordic countries – Germany, Switzerland – dominate advanced manufacturing because they understand this. They dominate technical industries because they understand this. They protect their vocational systems and they have for decades. They treat them as economic infrastructure for their nations that should not be touched, and that is what we are doing here today by encoding this into law. The Baillieu–Napthine–Geoff Shaw government reforms in 2012 treated TAFE as if it were just another service –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: Indeed. It was just a driver, I think. I am trying to be objective here. Without any judgement, I think what happened was the Baillieu–Napthine governments treated TAFE as if it was just another government service competing in an open market, and I can see what they were doing. But vocational education is not a normal marketplace, and training tradies, electricians – yes, member for Bundoora – nurses aides, mechanics and builders carries with it huge public benefits. It supports industry and productivity, and we have seen that across the last couple of weeks with the opening of the amazing Footscray Hospital. It does not have a helipad, but I will tell you one that has and that is Frankston Hospital. For these TAFE students, we have created a pipeline from kinder to primary school to high school, to the VCE vocational major, to TAFE, to university, straight into a job. From Chisholm you can walk to your job site where you are completing your apprenticeship and becoming an absolute master of your trade. It stabilises employment. It allows people who do not go to university to break that glass ceiling that some people experience in our communities.

When governments do treat TAFE as just another play in the marketplace, it is quite predictable what happens, and we saw that from 2012 into 2014. What we saw were private providers, some really, really shoddy, flooding the system, providing fairly useless, I might say, short courses and not the courses that are quite expensive and deserve government subsidies and that society needs. Engineering trades, construction and technical apprenticeships all collapsed because they cost more to run. When the Liberals cut the funding in 2012, they did not just cut TAFE, they shifted the incentives of the system, and the result of that was that campuses closed, teachers were made redundant and fewer people were entering those skilled trades. Then you have a skilled trade shortage, and that is what we saw. I am sitting here listening to the shadow minister say 'I am friends with TAFE. I love TAFE. I want to thank our TAFE teachers' when only a short time ago they took the axe to TAFE and destroyed TAFE. Even in that member's own electorate gates were locked, so to stand here now and deliver that revisionist history and act pious is absolutely stunning. The Liberals treated TAFE like a marketplace experiment, frankly. I think we have learned – and we have learned the hard way – that skills and

training are not a market commodity; they are economic infrastructure, and they deserve government support. That is what this government is doing today.

You could hear me rave about Chisholm TAFE in Frankston for the next 24 hours. I could talk that long about it. The investment in stage 1 and stage 2 of Chisholm is about $130 million. Every day I see the students – young and mature-aged – stepping into TAFE, and sometimes I just take a walk over there and chat to the CEO to see for myself what is going on. We all get parliamentary briefings, but sometimes it is nice just to go and hear at the coalface what is happening and what the challenges are that they have got. I was speaking the other day to a young lad from – I think it would have been the seat of Nepean. I think there is something going on there at the moment, isn't there? A by-election – that is right. This young bloke is studying a trade at TAFE, and he comes all the way from Rosebud West. I said to him, 'The thing about this is that you can study at Frankston and then you'll have a job to go straight to, because what is happening in Frankston and what is happening in Victoria is a pipeline of skills and jobs.' That is what we have seen.

We hear those opposite talking down construction workers and talking down trades, just like when they cut TAFE in 2012. There is no revisionist history here, it is actually fact. We know it is fact. You can spin as many stories as you want. What that did was decimate not just TAFE but a whole industry, and we have had to build that back up over the last decade. We are starting to see the fruits of that now with these major projects that are opening – it is just amazing. Victoria has not seen anything like that before. With $16 billion invested and over 200,000 students engaging in free TAFE, we have unlocked the value of that TAFE network, and we are delivering an ambitious growth agenda too.

I might just note in my concluding remarks that the only positive thing that I think the Shadow Minister for Jobs and Skills noted was that there are some governance amendments that reduce the maximum number of board members from 15 to 12. That reduction seemed to be something that she embraced. She said that was a good thing, and that is on trend: when you reduce something, they love it. It is just like when they ran away from a training system in 2012 and did not deliver the courses that our community needed. TAFE is not just about education, it is the bridge between working-class opportunity and also a productive economy. I see today that state final demand is up again this month. When the Liberals cut, they weaken that productive economy, they weaken that working-class opportunity, and it is electorates like mine, electorates like Nepean and electorates like, well, everyone's electorate here in this place that suffer. We have seen the results of those cuts, and we are guaranteeing today that will not happen again.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:13): I am pleased to rise today to talk about the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. Right from the start I am just going to correct a couple of things that have been said by previous speakers, and the first will be the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing. He got up and said electricians are the best tradies in the world. Well, to you, Minister, I will say, through the Acting Speaker, that carpentry is the most noble trade you could ever do. Even from when Jesus was a boy, we knew this. Electricity was not even invented then. I just had to pull you up on that, Minister. You were totally wrong; carpentry is the noblest trade of all trades.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: I have got a few adjectives for you, but I cannot say them in the chamber, member for Frankston. The minister will know very well that I love TAFE. I was there. I was also at tech school, which no longer exists. The TAFE system is a good system. It is required. We need it in this state. We need it for our future generations of tradies. Unfortunately, I think the absolute worst thing that happened in this state was the abolishment of tech schools. I went to Warragul tech. We had Warragul high and Warragul tech side by side. It was in about the mid-1980s when that started to change. It was actually the Cain–Kirner governments that started to get rid of the tech school system in this state. For kids like me – I was not an academic, I was never going to be an academic – that tech

school system was brilliant. I ended up going there in year 11 after I got kicked out of Marist-Sion in Warragul for being a little bit unruly.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: No shock there. I know that does not shock the chamber. I went to tech school. I ended up going to tech. I was a failure at Marist-Sion. I went to Warragul tech, and it was brilliant. I had all the options I could do as a tradie. I could do fitting and turning, boilermaking, panelbeating and carpentry.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: No-one wanted to do electrical. I think they cut the course, it was that unpopular – only joking. The minister is 100 per cent correct there; electrical was in there as well – any trade you could think of. You got the advantage at a technical college, from a very young age – if you were not academically brilliant, if you went there in year 7 – you learned your maths, your English and everything else, but then you got trained up as you were there. By the time we hit year 10, 16 years of age, we were fighting to get out to get into apprenticeships. That was the beauty of the tech school. It gave kids that training from a very young age and actually placed those kids into a workforce where they wanted to be. Not every kid wants to be at school. Not every kid wants to go to university. We have to have a space for those kids. Unfortunately it was under Cain–Kirner – and Kennett was responsible too. I will throw him under the bus on this one.

Members interjecting.

Wayne FARNHAM: I am happy to. I will call it out, but Cain and Kirner started it, Kennett completed it – exactly like the SEC. Exactly the same as the SEC: Cain and Kirner started it; Kennett completed it. The worst thing to happen to Victoria was getting rid of technical colleges – tech schools, as we called them. They were good.

The problem I can see with the TAFE system at the moment and the thing we have to invest in in this state into the future is getting tradies back out there. I know over the last few years we have probably lost about 22,000 or 23,000 tradies in this state. We need to get that workforce back up and going again. The problem we are having in the TAFE system is we are not having people complete those apprenticeships or complete that training. Roughly about 50 per cent of apprentices now finish an apprenticeship. We need that to improve. How do we improve that? What mechanisms have the government got in place to make that number a better completion rate? Because I think that is a really valid point. You can invest in TAFE, you can put all the resources into it you want, but if we are not having the completion rates we need for our next generation of tradespeople to come through, then that is going to be problematic for this state. It is going to be problematic for house building, infrastructure building – anything you can think of – and this is where we are failing.

I was visiting a TAFE down in my area, and the one thing they said to me was they are struggling to get the teachers to train the next generation of tradies. Should the government look at maybe incentivising ex-tradies to retrain them as TAFE teachers? That would be a good step forward, because we need trades – we do – especially the construction industry. It is one that is really failing at the moment to attract people – I do not know why – or to get apprentices to complete their apprenticeships. When you invest the money into the TAFE and they do not have the resources then to deliver what the government's intent is, that is problematic. There are a lot of ex-tradies out there at the moment that have had a gutful of the industry, and that is an opportunity for the government to retrain these older electricians, like the minister over there, although his battery drill is flat on tipping. He is probably colourblind now and does not know the difference between red, black and green either, and that is a problem for a sparkie. But we have an opportunity here where we should, I think, incentivise ex-tradespeople – plumbers, electricians, carpenters, all those – and get them into that TAFE system to train our next generation. Because if that is becoming a problem as to why we cannot get apprentices to complete or to train them up, we need to fix that. We need to look at that.

The TAFE system is very important to Victoria. I went to TAFE. I went to Yallourn TAFE when I was about 18, and you had to fight to get a place there, there were that many kids, and all our teachers were ex-builders or tradespeople. It was great; I loved it. I loved TAFE; it was fantastic. I loved the tech school, and then I went to TAFE. It is something that should be invested in and, as I said, there are certain aspects that I think the government is failing in. It does concern me that the Silver review really rated the performance of our VET system not well. It states:

> The performance of the VET system is mixed, with continued skill shortages in priority industries, completion levels lower than the national average, and student satisfaction at or below national averages. The system has financial challenges: the Review understands financial viability remains an issue for several TAFEs.

I take on board what the government says about their investment – I am not disputing that – but there is still obviously a problem here. Now we are passing this into legislation, and it has been the same for the last four years, so I do not know why this is new, but it is passing into legislation. But we have a review there that says there are still problems in the system. I see a lot of problems within the system, but as I said at the start, my main concern on this system is the completion rates, especially in those trade-based apprenticeships.

We need this future workforce. We need it for the state. The government itself has housing targets, which they cannot meet, but we also have trade shortages which will be contributing to the reason why they cannot meet the housing targets. If you have got a shortage of labour and a house is now on average taking 12 months to build, you are not going to meet the targets you have set for yourselves. This is where the government has to look at this problem within the VET or the TAFE system. As I said at the outset, I love TAFE, I went to TAFE, and we just need to really, really focus on that. We need those completion rates to get up, because if they do not, our skill shortage into the future will be a lot worse than what it is now. With tradies becoming older and older and bodies wearing out and leaving the industry, we need to look to the future for that – unfortunately, some do get into politics, but that is what we should focus on. Just in closing, I will remind the member for Bundoora: chippies are best.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (12:23): I am truly delighted to stand and speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. It has been extraordinary to sit here and listen to the contributions from those on the other side, each and every one of whom has professed to be friends of the TAFE system, and yet we all know so well what happened when last they were in government. What I find particularly interesting is that, even more than that, they all seem to be reading off a set of notes without any true understanding of this bill.

I would just like to correct a couple of things. The member for Mildura in particular talked about the impact in regional Victoria. I would like to point out that of the 22 campuses that were shut, 18 of those were in regional Victoria under her government. There is also lots of detail missing. The member for Narracan, who we all hold dear to our hearts, seemed to want to make a suggestion that what we need to do is incentivise people to go into TAFE teaching. I have got great news for him: we are already doing it. TAFE teaching is a free TAFE course. How about that? We also offer scholarships for people that are coming out of a trade to become a TAFE teacher. You should join our side. You have got our ideas, and we are already doing them.

I also took umbrage, and it made me giggle, because the member for Mildura liked to talk about the devil being in the detail. Well, indeed it is, and perhaps if they did a little more than read notes and actually got into the detail, they would realise what rubbish is coming out of their mouths. They talked quite a bit about the notion of ministerial control, no minimum number of courses, no requirement to remain free, and out the other side of their mouth they were talking about the fact that we have skills shortages. What they fail to remember is that this government in 2021 established the skills authority. Guess what the skills authority does. The skills authority looks at where there are skill gaps across the state and makes recommendations for free courses. The free courses that we are enshrining here today are about making sure that they move with the needs out there in the community. As I say, they do not

seem to particularly understand what the skills authority does, and that shows a basic misunderstanding.

The other one that I particularly love – the devil in the detail – was about the fact that nothing has changed and this is a federal requirement. Guess what, those on the other side: this was an election commitment. The 70 per cent expenditure into TAFE was an election commitment of this government, and the federal government picked it up because it was such a damn good idea. Perhaps if they did look at a bit of detail and less in the eyes of the devil, they might understand a bit more about it.

Let me now go to what this bill is really about. This bill is about people. Last Thursday I was honoured to attend the Federation Uni TAFE awards for excellence. It was a fantastic night showcasing all of our wonderful students, and I really want to congratulate Fed Uni on the night. I was truly – and I mean this genuinely – moved by a speech which was given by the recipient of the teacher of the year award. I want to say a big thank you to Sharon Bartholomew for her commitment. If I may read to the house just a small part of her speech, it will tell those on the other side why we are here and what this bill is about:

> What makes adult and vocational education so powerful, is who we teach.
>
> Our classrooms are filled with people rebuilding their lives, changing careers, supporting families, learning a new language, or returning to education after years … Living in rural Victoria, many of our students face significant barriers: financial hardship, limited prior education, cultural and language challenges, caring responsibilities, or simply a lack of confidence shaped by past experiences.
>
> Yet they show extraordinary courage.
>
> They walk into a classroom not knowing if they belong – and leave knowing they can succeed.

Thank you, Sharon Bartholomew, for reminding us of what this is all about. This bill is about people and giving people opportunities.

Since its inception in 2019 Fed Uni has had a total of 6296 free TAFE students. What I really want to point out is 60 per cent of those are women. Free TAFE has been an absolute game changer for women re-entering the workforce. Fed Uni is also very well known for its pathway. As a dual-sector it offers people the opportunity to start a TAFE course, use what they have learned and go on to an undergraduate. You know why I think this is incredibly important? Because that is what happened to me. I needed to get back into the workforce after being a stay-at-home mum for 10 years and decided to retrain. I went to Fed Uni because I did not have the confidence to go off to uni. I was not sure if I could do it and manage the kids. I went to Fed Uni; I started a TAFE course and absolutely loved it. I will always give a shout-out to Irene Warfe, who was my wonderful TAFE teacher who gave me the confidence to go on and do an undergraduate and then finally a masters in politics and policy. I owe my spot right here today to TAFE. They gave me the courage to get back out there and retrain and get into the workforce. So this bill is about enshrining that right for all of those people out there like me.

Those on the other side begin every speech saying they are friends of TAFE. They are not friends of TAFE; they are not. They cut $1 billion. The member for Evelyn brought up how much she loves the 7000 teachers; there would have been 5000 under them because they cut 2000 teachers last time. The member for Mildura talks about the neglected regions; under them we had 22 campuses shut, and 18 of them were in regional Victoria. We need them in regional Victoria.

I want to acknowledge the Minister for Skills and TAFE. She has been there since the outset. I mean this genuinely: she is one of those ministers who has gotten a portfolio – and this matters – and has fought long and hard over this government to rebuild TAFE from what it was. We stand here proudly now looking at places like Fed Uni, where they have had this absolute growth in enrolment through the free TAFE courses. We look at the people out there who have been given new opportunities because of free TAFE. We look at those skills gaps that are being filled because the skills authority which the minister established is identifying who we should offer free TAFE courses to or what skill sets we need to fill. I know at Fed Uni in Ballarat the nurses courses are just producing so many more wonderful people in our healthcare services.

I am pretty passionate about this bill. TAFE changed my life. I listen to people like Sharon Bartholomew, who talked the other day about her passion for her students and about changing people's lives. That is what this is about. Those on the other side have got some pretty ordinary speaking notes which are trying to tell us that this already all existed; well, the 70 per cent guarantee was our idea, and I am very glad the feds picked it up. Free TAFE will be enshrined; it did not exist under them. What did exist under them was an absolute decimation of what is an incredibly important part of our whole-of-life educational system. It has been under this government that TAFE has been rebuilt, and our minister is determined that those people will have those opportunities going forward. That is why it is so important to enshrine it through this legislation, because if God forbid those on the other side ever get into power we will see those padlocks go back on those TAFE campuses, we will see those teachers sacked, we will see those students left high and dry and we will see those skills shortages grow and grow.

This bill is about making sure that the people out there that we are here to fight for have a better, easier life. Free TAFE saves on average $3000 a year. That means that there are people out there who can enter the workforce when they may not have been able to afford it before; they certainly would not have been able to under the private providers that those on the other side support so much. This bill is about making sure that lives for Victorians are easier, better, fairer and cheaper. This is such an important bill for so many people out there. I commend it wholly to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (12:33): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026. I will begin my remarks by noting that we are debating this bill at a time when the TAFE system has been let down by this government and when TAFE students have been let down by this government. We will go through some of the data points in a moment; do not worry, it is coming. I think the most serious indictment of this government when it comes to our TAFE system – which, despite the blathering of those opposite, is a crucial part of our system, and we will not fill the skills shortages without a strong VET sector – is this government does not get how to build the VET sector. It actually does not, and it has dropped the ball on it. It wants to talk a big game, but when you look at the results the evidence is damning.

We had a universities accord a few years ago, and one of the take-outs from the universities accord was the idea that academic qualifications and VET qualifications are going to increasingly be intertwined. The sorts of skill sets, the aptitude and the capabilities that we want of all of us working in the workforce are increasingly going to be driven by the needs of a high-tech economy where skills can easily cross over. What the data against this government shows, and what the dearth of aspiration in this bill shows, is the government does not get that. We do not have a bill here today that says 'We are going to address the massive skills shortages that we see in construction, in the energy sector, in hospitality, in small business and in tech.' The government has no story to tell on that. Instead it comes here with a bill which is designed to sanction what it is already supposed to do. It wants a gold star for meeting a requirement it is already required to meet. It is extraordinary that they should come here, those members opposite, and pat themselves on the back as if this bill does something that is going to improve the lives and opportunities of TAFE students. It is not going to do anything to do that.

I said I would come to the data in a moment, but I am concerned that at a time when we are competing for skills, domestically and internationally, this government shows no aspiration or plan for how it is going to address those skills shortages. You can look at Skills Australia, which points out the number of occupations that are facing critical shortages across some of those areas that I mentioned, but many more. There are hundreds of qualifications and occupations where in Victoria – to be fair, in other states as well – we are facing massive shortages. This bill does nothing to say 'We are actually going to produce more VET graduates who are going to fill these roles and enjoy thriving careers in these occupations' – not a word. It is just a stunt in some ways to say 'Hey, aren't we good that we're going to legislate to do something we're already required to do?'

I said a moment ago that the evidence is damning. It is true that under this government – and we are in the 12th year of this government – the VET sector is smaller; it is actually smaller than it was before.

We have fewer VET providers. We have, even on the government's own concession of a couple of years ago, a little over half of the graduates in free TAFE courses actually completing their courses. You have to ask: what is the government doing wrong, and why hasn't any member on the government benches explained that important and unavoidable data point? They cannot explain it. They cannot explain why real recurrent VET expenditure per person has gone backwards under this government. They are not spending more per person in VET, they are actually spending less per person. There are fewer VET providers. There are fewer VET locations. On just about every measure the VET sector is smaller, and the skills shortages are more acute under this government the longer it goes on. Yet we debate this bill today with not one word about how this government is going to address it.

We had the Silver review, on top of those data points, which are sourced out of the report on government services. You can go and check it out for yourselves, those opposite. Go and see how damning the data is about your failed stewardship of the VET sector. It is appalling, because for 12 years you have boasted about how committed you are to the sector, but when it comes to actually delivering, the evidence just is not there. In fact you talk to employers who are crying out for workers with the skills they need, and what do they say? They say, 'We have a government that's stuck in the past. It doesn't understand the modern economy, the needs of a modern economy, the versatility' – I spoke about that before – 'and the increasing cross-fertilisation between academic qualifications and VET qualifications.' There is none of that going on. You talk about young people who are looking for a job. If you talk to employers who are looking for graduates of the VET sector who have the skills they need to give them a long and lasting career, after 12 years you still hear the same complaint: 'We can't find graduates who can do the jobs we need.' We are talking to government and telling them they have got to be able to deliver on this, and the government are not listening.

There is an exciting transition going on across the country and across the world in terms of looking at qualifications as being more modular and looking at them as being stackable. I am quite happy to acknowledge some of the public commentary that Bill Shorten, who is now the vice-chancellor of Canberra University, has been making on this, but he is not alone and he is certainly not the first. It is the idea that your qualifications and your experience are dynamic. It is not set and forget. It is not that you come out with a piece of paper or a digital certificate and there you go for the rest of your life. You can go back and you can obtain further credentials. Some people call it micro-credentialing, but it is actually broader than that. It is the idea that we can build into the VET sector and the tertiary sector a system of skills accumulation and qualifications that can respond to your particular needs. This government seems to be stuck in a decades-old approach to education. Everything is changing, and it is changing before our eyes. We, under this government, are being left behind. I know that in other jurisdictions they are responding to this whole concept of modular learning that responds to individual needs and micro-credentialing that can ensure that we can give young kids a real job that will set them on their way for a future that for them will be very fulfilling.

We do not see that in this bill. I do not know what the government's plan for TAFE actually is. But what we do know is that there is an absence of any explanation of a plan from them. I have outlined some of the aspirations I see for the sector as one that is increasingly integrated, not siloed like the government seems to see it. It still sees a siloed approach. You have got VET and you have got the tertiary pathway. That is just wrong. It is outdated, and it is not giving young people the opportunities they deserve.

As our lead speaker pointed out, this bill does no more than, if you like, codify what the government is already required to do. But as our lead speaker pointed out, the government is giving itself an opportunity to lowball its own commitments so long as it meets a three-year average, and that is pretty cute by any standard. It should be saying 'Every year we are going to do more to produce more graduates who complete their courses, we are going to ensure that the funding meets the needs and we are going to ensure that the courses that we are funding are actually leading not just to jobs but leading to careers, careers that give the graduates the agency that they want.' People want more agency over their careers, and the idea that there is a straitjacketed approach to this where it is one size fits all and

it is top down is not only wrong in terms of policy but it is short-changing the futures of people who choose the VET sector, increasingly, I hope, as a sector of education that is more, as I say, ingrained.

As the lead speaker said, we will not be opposing this bill. But I do want to end where I began. This government does not deserve plaudits for a system that is smaller, a system that is producing fewer graduates, a system that has fewer providers and a system which says to young people that it is not going to give them the flexibility and the choices they deserve in their education and their career.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (12:43): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026, and I want to start by thanking the minister in the other place for the work that she has done on this really significant bill. I have to say, this is one of the reasons why I joined the Labor Party and why I wanted to be a member of Parliament, because it is these sorts of supports in our education system that are so important to my community.

In Geelong we have the Gordon TAFE which, as I have mentioned in this place before, is well over 100 years old. Pretty much everyone in Geelong has either been to the Gordon TAFE, knows somebody that has been or has a family member that has attended the Gordon TAFE. It is held in such high regard in our community. I do want to thank Joe Ormeno, the CEO of the Gordon TAFE, for all the work that he has done. Free TAFE has been an absolute game changer for my community, and it is always so heartwarming to meet students there who have come from families that have never had any real level of education beyond secondary school. They are so proud of the fact that they are able to get a good education through the TAFE, but even more importantly free TAFE, and to see those individuals and their families attending graduation sessions just makes me think of how important good government policy is to people in my community of Geelong and across the whole state of course. Free TAFE has changed lives when dealing with cost-of-living pressures.

Back in 2014, when we came to government, the Gordon was on its knees. It was almost about to close because the Liberal government at the time had stripped it of so much funding it was almost impossible to continue. The Gordon and the management at the time – I really felt for them – were in desperate need and trying to scratch together funding to keep their doors open. The Kitjarra Centre, which was the Aboriginal education centre, was shut down pretty quickly. Many programs were lost, and they were just scraping through when we came to government in 2014. To invest in the TAFE was one of the first things that I wanted to see our government do. The minister at the time, Steve Herbert, was really committed to making sure we got our TAFEs back on their feet. That started to happen, and of course the Gordon has been virtually rebuilt, from being on its knees to being a huge provider of education in our community. So I am really supportive of this bill and note that the Allan government has invested more than $16 billion new and base funding into our TAFE and training system since 2014. Such a significant amount of funding was necessary because those opposite had devastated our TAFE – ripped it to pieces.

This bill, as I said, is really important. It is important to me, but it is also important to those students that are there now and to future students, so they know that this is guaranteed into the future so that their kids can have a TAFE education, and obviously that leads to good jobs. They go through the TAFE, through their training, and it leads to good jobs and leads to a better income, and some of those families are now starting to see the benefits. We know that poverty is a huge contributor in our community, and we need to ensure that we are introducing policies that deal with poverty. For me, this is a big one, because it gets people out of poverty, it gets them into good jobs and it also addresses the cost-of-living issues that we know are impacting on people in our community.

The TAFE guarantee bill is significant for my community, and I have had a lot of people in my community say, when they heard that this was coming to our chamber, how much they supported the continuation of free TAFE. The Gordon has, as I said, been virtually rebuilt since 2014. We have been able to rebuild the culinary school, and the Gordon is renowned for putting out students that are top class through the culinary school – chefs and cooks and baristas all going through that. When we took government in 2014 that facility was so run down there were broken ovens and pretty much appalling

conditions really, and when you are teaching students to become a chef or work in the hospitality industry, trying to teach them in dilapidated facilities is pretty difficult. So we made that commitment and rebuilt that culinary school, which is now a world-class culinary school. Chefs from all around the world in fact have made comments about how good the Gordon TAFE culinary school is. Of course we rebuilt the Kitjarra Centre, the Aboriginal education unit, which has been going in leaps and bounds since it was restarted with its own facilities, and that has been an incredible journey for many of those Aboriginal TAFE students who otherwise would not have a culturally safe space for their education.

We have also been able to start construction of the school of excellence in disability and access at the Gordon. This is another incredible initiative by government and by the Gordon TAFE, given we have WorkSafe and the TAC and the NDIS in Geelong, and that is currently underway – co-designed, I might add, by people with disabilities, both students currently and past students. So that is a really exciting project, but that would never have happened under those opposite; it would never have happened. So we are really proud of that in Geelong.

Our TAFE in Geelong is an incredible opportunity for so many students. As I said, I talk to students over there all the time. Their feedback is really important, and I take on board what they say. I know that despite the cost-of-living pressures that are currently being experienced by families at least they can go to TAFE for free. We need to guarantee that, and that is what that this bill is about all about. Since 2019 there have been 225,000 students that have benefited from free TAFE, and I am sure that figure will grow. 129,000 of those were women, 57,000 were regional Victorians and 22,500 were people with a disability. They are huge numbers, and now, if we guarantee this, we know there will be many more to come as we move forward. For TAFEs right around Victoria this is really important. As a regional member I see the importance of TAFE in our regional centres and the role that it plays and the opportunities that it does give to young people and to families to build on what they need in terms of getting into better employment and having those opportunities. So I would hate to see those opposite get their hands on our TAFE ever again. I know what damage they will do because I saw it, and my community lived through that, as did many others in the Victorian community. The damage that they did to TAFE has cost us far more than you could imagine. The billions of dollars that have had to be poured into it, rather than building on what was already there, is an absolute disgrace, and I never want to see that happen again in Victoria. I think our Gordon TAFE and all those TAFES around Victoria deserve to be supported and continue to get the funding that they deserve. I commend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:53): I rise to talk on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2025, and in listening to contributions from both sides of the chamber there have been a couple of members that have had a few liberties – the member for Narracan and also the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing when he was up speaking as well, talking about trades and noble trades, and the electrical trade is a noble trade. The member for Narracan, he can have his noble trade, but the best trade is the plumbing trade. It was long before we had power in the state and long before we were building dwellings and houses that people needed to go to the bathroom and toilet, so from as soon as we could stand up. The plumbing trade has been around the world forever and a day, because we do need to go and we do need to get rid of it in a timely fashion and way.

It is actually really good to be able to stand up and talk about TAFE. It was a huge part of my journey to where I am standing now, the grounding that I did get going to TAFE as an apprentice plumber way back in the day at the Yallourn campus down in the Latrobe Valley. It was a matter of not only winning and obtaining an apprenticeship but the pathway forward teaching you. The only way to get to TAFE normally was to get on a bus because we were not old enough to drive. Back in the day you were getting an apprenticeship at 16 or 17 years of age. That journey of having to get yourself out of bed and get prepared to get to the bus to get to TAFE and then back home again put the ground rules in for having that work ethic before you even got into the mainstream of plumbing.

Today, in terms of TAFE in the Latrobe Valley, we still have the Yallourn campus, but we also have a very modern Morwell campus which now houses the plumbing trade and building trades and the like. It also houses robotics. The expansion of trade levels into actually obtaining jobs is certainly needed. Traralgon also has a TAFE as part of the Gippsland TAFE precinct. They do a lot of hairdressing and beauty at the Traralgon TAFE, so you can see the wide range of skills that are provided.

I think everybody on both sides have talked about the TAFE teachers. These teachers have normally come from a building background, especially in the electrical trades and also the plumbing and building trades that we house there. These are teachers that have run their own businesses and who step in as they become older and, as the member for Narracan said, cannot physically do the work anymore and are enticed into the TAFE way of learning.

TAFE is very hands-on, particularly in the trades, and you need to be able to hone your skills while you are at that trade school, being able to either build things, safely put electrical components in place or, in my case as a plumber, being able to do roofing and sanitary and gas. We know that the gas fraternity has been under the pump a little bit, but it is having a return as such through some bills that we have seen come through the house. But we need to be able to entice these teachers in and keep them.

Talking about the TAFE structure and free TAFE, they do have a lot of people that come in and start the courses, but a little bit of a concern with the free courses available is trying to keep the engagement so that the courses are completed. The TAFEs down my way talk about how they fill up very quickly, and there are people that actually miss out on being able to do TAFE courses. As the course goes along, people drop out. We need to come up with a plan also incorporating this free TAFE so that we get our completion rates as close as we can to 100 per cent. Some of these courses are losing half of the students that are partaking in these courses.

As we said, especially on the building fraternity side at the moment, we are screaming out for trades that we need with our Big Housing Build. We all know that we need to be building more houses. We need to make sure that we have that pipeline, pardon the pun, coming through our TAFE courses so they can move through from being an apprentice to sometimes owning their own businesses, and then it is their turn to teach the next generation coming through.

Stepping into when I did have a tour of the Morwell campus and the modern technology in the plumbing side of things and how it has changed from when I was at the Yallourn TAFE, the Morwell TAFE has also now changed with an incredible amount of modern technology moving through there. It is not only in this robotics side of things that we are seeing this, but we are also –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! Member for Morwell, the time has come to interrupt debate, and the house is suspended until the ringing of the bells.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

Minister for Education

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I wish to advise the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Government Services will answer questions for the WorkSafe and TAC portfolio and I will answer questions for the education portfolio.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Construction industry

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Why does the Premier oppose a new and independent construction watchdog to enforce the law and stop the rorts on taxpayer-funded major projects?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Point Cook is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): As I have said to the house on previous occasions, allegations of criminal activities on worksites are a serious matter, which is why, in taking the strong action I and my government have taken, we are seeing as a result of the additional powers vested in Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority that Victoria Police has laid 70 charges and the Labour Hire Authority has cancelled 147 construction licences, with a further 47 being blocked. This is what taking strong action looks like, and acting immediately.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:03): Isn't it the case that the Premier is refusing to support an independent construction watchdog because the Premier is disinterested in stopping the $15 billion of corruption under her watch and instead wants to protect known organised crime figures such as Mick Gatto?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you rule the question out of order on the basis that questions should not suggest an answer.

The SPEAKER: I will allow the question.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): The answer is no.

Ministers statements: working from home

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): From 1 September this year thousands of Victorian workers will get something they have never had before: a legal right to work from home – a right that means that if you can do your job from home you will be able to have that right protected for at least two days a week. This right to work from home gives families back time in their day. It saves working people and families money. It makes that daily life a little bit easier for workers and their families. We are not just creating this right, we are protecting it in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 so Liberals who oppose this right for people to work from home cannot cut it, cannot rip it away.

My attention has been drawn to some comments online from a woman named Louise, and she talked about what working from home meant for her. Two days a week working from home saved Louise real money. She talked about how she used less petrol. She gets 2 hours of travel time back every single week. And do you know what Louise also talked about? She gets more work done because she has got that time to focus on her job. Louise is a real Victorian, not a bot. She is a real Victorian who is benefiting from the opportunity to work from home.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: It says a lot when the Liberal Party are more excited about bots than real Victorians. That is what their focus is on; they are never focused on real Victorians. Well, we are. We will always support working people and Victorians, and we will back their right to work from home, putting it in law, because Victorians know only a Labor government will do that.

Government contracts

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:06): My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier confirm that M1 Traffic & Labour, a business contracted by Mick Gatto, is currently contracted to provide services to Goulburn–Murray Water?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): That information would best be sought from the statutory corporation that is Goulburn–Murray Water, and I would ask the member to direct his question to that organisation.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is the most powerful person in the state and is answerable for all taxpayers money.

The SPEAKER: I am not sure what the point of order is. There is no point of order. The Premier has answered the question.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:07): Given they are contracted, what action will the Premier take to kick –

Members interjecting.

Tim McCURDY: To see if you knew the answer. What action will the Premier take to kick Mick Gatto's business off Goulburn–Murray Water projects?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): Let me repeat that allegations of criminal behaviour on worksites are a serious matter. If any member in this place is choosing to make allegations in this place rather than raise them directly with Victoria Police, I think that says more about the person asking the question on these matters.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this question, on relevance, asks whether the Premier's fan is a contractor to the government – whether the Premier's fan is a contractor with government services.

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question. There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I would suggest again that anyone with any allegation to make should be making it to Victoria Police, who now have the additional powers and resources, being the largest policing force in the nation, to be able to investigate behaviour. These matters will be referred to the Minister for Water in the other place to raise with the statutory corporation, but again I repeat: anyone with an allegation to make should be making it to the law.

Ministers statements: working from home

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:09): As you have heard, commencing 1 September this year Victorians will have the right to work from home, and our Labor government will defend that right. That is why we will enshrine it in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, because we know Victorian workers and families want flexibility. They want more time with their families and less time stuck in traffic. They want workplaces that reflect the way people actually live and work today, not the way they worked a decade ago. On this side of the house, we will always fight to give workers the conditions they need and deserve. Embedding these protections in the Equal Opportunity Act is deliberate. It creates a clear, enforceable legal right, and it means workers have somewhere to turn if their rights are denied, and it makes these protections much harder for the Liberals to rip away from working people.

Here is the truth. Victorian families value working from home. They know it saves them money. They know it saves them time. They know it boosts productivity and workforce participation. It strengthens family finances and increases workforce participation. It reflects the modern economy Victorians understand. Those opposite cannot handle this truth. Those opposite do not support these reforms, and we know that given the chance they would rip these protections away. It is precisely why we are embedding this right in the equal opportunity framework, making it harder to dismantle and stronger to defend. So let us send a really clear message to anyone who wants to tear these rights away: we will fight. We will see you in court because these rights are worth defending. Labor is on the side of workers and families. Wherever that fight happens, we will protect it.

Construction industry

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:11): My question is to the Premier. How many M Group companies, a business connected to Mick Gatto, are operating on the North East Link project?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:12): That would be information that would be held by the North East Link Authority, which is responsible for delivering this project. Again I repeat: if the Liberal leader has an allegation to make, she should be making it and also making it to Victoria Police if she is –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question to be evasive. The question was very specific, and the Premier is trying not to answer it, rather than dealing with the question that was put to her.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is not debating the question. The Premier was responding to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: In answering the question – and for the benefit of the member for Brighton I will say it again – that information would be held by the delivery authority responsible for delivering the North East Link. Of course let us remember what the North East Link is. The North East Link is another important project that is going to get Victorians home safer and sooner. It is going to support Victorians –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the rules of this house require the Premier to be direct. Is the Premier saying she does not know whether Mick Gatto is on government sites? Is that what the Premier is saying?

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, a point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. The Premier is being relevant, and she is not debating. She is answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: This question again exposes that the Liberal Party have opposed every single one of these projects, and they oppose the workers who work damn hard to deliver them.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, attacking the opposition is clearly debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): Can the Premier guarantee that no M Group company is operating on the North East Link?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): For the benefit of the Leader of the Liberal Party, I refer to my earlier answer where I indicated very clearly – and perhaps the interjections from the member for Brighton clouded out what the leader could hear – that I have already answered that question. That is information that is held by the North East Link Authority. We can seek that information from the authority. But again let us be clear: if there is an allegation to make, it should be made, because we are seeing, as a result of the action our government has taken, that Victoria Police, the largest policing force in the nation, have the powers and they are making the arrests and charges. As a result of strengthening the Labour Hire Authority, they have cancelled 147 construction licences and blocked a further 47. This is strong action and it is working.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The question simply asked if Mick Gatto had contracts on government sites. Yes or no?

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton knows not to repeat the question in his point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: working from home

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Women) (14:15): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government's commitment to enshrining the right to work from home in law from 1 September this year supports the health and wellbeing of Victorians and their families. When workers are given the right to work from home, they gain time for rest, time for exercise, time for family responsibilities and time to manage their own care. Everyone knows that time spent commuting is time that is lost to other pursuits, like a quick 5-kilometre run around the block perhaps or a trip to the gym, to the dentist, to the doctor, to visit ageing parents or to attend to other family responsibilities. Time spent in the car or on the train means less time to do the grocery shop and to prepare a simple, healthy meal for the family. Around the world and here in Australia research demonstrates that giving people the choice to work from home is associated with better sleep, better food choices and less stress, which of course in turn leads to healthier lifestyles and improved physical and mental health and wellbeing for more Victorians.

The Allan Labor government's plan to make work from home law makes clear that, if a worker can reasonably perform their role from home, they will have the right to do so for at least two days a week, regardless of the size of their workplace. Our government supports working people, we support flexible work and we support families to live their best and their healthiest lives. Of course this support for working families and this commitment to their health and wellbeing is not guaranteed. There are some in this chamber who, given the chance, will scrap the hard-won rights of working people. Flexible work is healthier work, and only Labor will protect it.

Formula One Australian Grand Prix

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. Premier, why is the Victorian Labor government spending over $400 million of taxpayer funds for luxury corporate box upgrades at the grand prix when our public schools and community health centres do not even have the basic funding that they need?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): The second part of the member for Melbourne's question is just flat out wrong. Only Labor governments have invested and keep investing in important public health and community health infrastructure but also the workforce – the workforce inside our great public health system. We have doubled the size of the public health workforce because we back our nurses, our allied health specialists and our healthcare workers to take care of Victorians, because it is everyday Victorians that need access to a strong public health system.

In dealing with the first part of the member for Melbourne's question, it is very clear that we back the grand prix because it is an important event for our state. We know the Greens political party have a view on this. We back not only our big major events calendar; we do so because, again, there are workers in this industry that need a government focused on delivering a major events pipeline that supports them to have security of employment year in, year out. That is why we have the grand prix. That is coming up this weekend, and I think the minister is going to tell me that tickets have sold out – record crowds for the grand prix this weekend. The member for Melbourne will not be going to the grand prix, I am sure, but if she was she could get there by getting off at Anzac station. We are making it easier for people to get to the grand prix by getting off at the Anzac station and popping over to Albert Park. Alongside the grand prix, we have just come off the biggest Australian Open ever. This month in Melbourne – let me get it right – we have got the food and wine festival and we have got the comedy festival. I have mentioned the grand prix, and the start of the AFL –

Tim Read: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I think we have wandered a long way off the topic.

The SPEAKER: The Premier rejected the question at the outset. The Premier is answering the question.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: I do like Ed Sheeran, and I neglected to mention him, member for Frankston. My point is this: we are proud of our major events pipeline. We are proud of it because it brings visitors to our state. It keeps Melbourne and Victoria on the international map, and it also supports the thousands and thousands of hardworking Victorian workers in hospitality, in tourism and in the major events industry, who work incredibly hard event in, event out. They are proud of what they do, and I thank them and remind them that it is only a Labor government that will back them.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:21): Premier, this Labor government has refused a request for a measly $4 million to keep our local community health centre open. This Labor government cannot find a tiny amount of money to remove asbestos at my local primary school, but they can find over $400 million for luxury upgrades at the grand prix. How is this fair?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): The first part of the member's supplementary question is not correct. The Minister of Health is working very hard –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is misleading the house. It was factually correct that they have refused a request for $4 million for community health.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Melbourne.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Greens have never let facts get in the way of an answer or a question. As I was saying, the Minister for Health is working with her federal colleague on these matters. But again, we are backing the workers in our major events industry, and I want to thank them ahead of what is going to be a blockbuster weekend where Melbourne is on the international map because our Labor government backs the event and backs the workers who work in this industry.

Ministers statements: working from home

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:22): Every Victorian deserves a home that is safe, secure and stable, and that is exactly what the Allan Labor government has been delivering through our rental reforms. For Victorians who work from home, it is important to recognise a simple truth: working from home is only possible when the home itself is secure. That is why the Allan Labor government's rental reforms matter so much. Working from home can be cheaper for Victorian families, cutting the cost of fuel, fares and parking. Now renters cannot be uprooted without warning or left in a property that is not fit to live or work in. We have banned no-fault evictions, so renters can feel secure working from home. They can now plan their work and family routines with greater confidence. Our minimum rental standards ensure homes are safe, comfortable and fit for modern life, including working from home, and our portable rental bond scheme will guarantee that renters who move are only ever out of pocket for one bond, not two, saving them time and money. These reforms matter because secure housing is the foundation for modern work.

As Victoria moves toward stronger working-from-home rights in September this year, workers will have the security that they need to participate fully in the workforce. These reforms work together: stronger protections for renters and greater security for workers who choose to work from home. That is what governing with a plan looks like, and that is what the Allan Labor government is delivering. I was listening to Raf Epstein's program this morning. I found out that not everyone supports our working-from-home reforms, and come to think of it – Deirdre Chambers – it is the same people who opposed our rental reforms. The Liberal–National–One Nation coalition will cut it all if given the chance.

Construction industry

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:24): My question is to the Premier. Has any M Group company linked to Mick Gatto been awarded, subcontracted or engaged to perform works on any Suburban Rail Loop site?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): Consistent with my answer to previous questions on this matter, that is information that is held by the relevant delivery authority, and that –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier was the minister.

The SPEAKER: That is not a not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, that is information that is held by the relevant delivery agency, and that question is best directed to that delivery agency. But again I say to the house and to the member for Brighton that, if anyone has an allegation to make about the very serious matters around allegations of criminal behaviour on worksites, they need to immediately raise them with the relevant independent investigative body, whether it is Victoria Police or the Labour Hire Authority or the federal police. I make the point again that the strong actions that we have taken are working. Victoria Police are not only laying charges, as recently as an hour ago they released a statement providing details to the Victorian community about additional charges they have laid today.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I asked whether Mick Gatto and his linked company has any work on the Suburban Rail Loop. I did not ask about anything that the Premier is talking about, and I would ask the Premier to come to the actual question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was providing further –

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, *Rulings from the Chair* is very clear. There are a number of rulings from the Chair that a minister cannot respond generally and must deal with the substance of the question. The Premier has not dealt with the substance of the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier responded to the question at the outset. Can I just add that there are also rulings from the Chair that contradict what the member for Brighton has just raised. *Rulings from the Chair* cannot be taken selectively. The Premier was answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was providing what I would have thought was helpful information for the member for Brighton to demonstrate the fact that the strong action that we have taken to support the largest police force in the nation with additional powers, and through the work they are doing through Taskforce Hawk, is seeing people being arrested and charged as recently as today. We have taken strong action – it is working – because these are very serious matters. They need to be investigated and acted upon immediately. If any member has an allegation to make, they know that through Victoria Police they should be made and they will be acted upon.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:28): Can the Premier confirm after checking and make a public statement that an M Group company linked to Mick Gatto is not working on a Victorian government worksite?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): I will refer those matters to the relevant delivery agency. In fact I think I have said that on a number of occasions for the benefit of the member for Brighton, and the member for Brighton, I do not think, was this –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the question I asked was whether the Premier would make a public statement confirming that fact.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. There were two parts to the question. The Premier has answered one. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, those matters have been referred to those relevant delivery agencies, and again –

A member interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Well, I just did during question time, for the benefit of the member for Brighton. But again, these are serious allegations, which is why we have taken immediate action, and that action is working in cleaning up the culture. But again, the agencies that the member for Brighton refers to are responsible for delivering projects that the Victorian community needs, and I want to thank those workers who are delivering these projects. We are proud of what they are delivering. And the message to those workers is that they know that Liberals will cut those projects and cut their wages and only a Labor government will back the work that they do.

Ministers statements: working from home

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:30): When it comes to cutting commute times and the cost of travel for Victorian workers, it is the Allan Labor government that delivers. Working from home is the new norm for many Victorians, and it is changing the way people move and when they move. That is why we have been busy updating public transport timetables to reflect work-from-home travel patterns, with more services on weekends, off peak and in the evenings. We have invested $98.7 million into more frequent services throughout the day, with additional services going live later this year at the next timetable change. Of course that builds on –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals and the minister at the table, the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, are being very disrespectful to the minister on her feet.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Of course that builds on the 1200 new services that we added as a part of the big switch earlier this year. The new Metro Tunnel timetable is now providing 10-minute services or better along the Cranbourne–Pakenham to Sunbury corridor seven days a week. While we add more services, though, we are also making public transport more affordable. Our free public transport for kids initiative is putting more money back into the pockets of working families, and of course that is on top of other initiatives like the regional fare cap. While parents are getting more flexibility around when they travel, kids are travelling for free, with service patterns that meet their needs too.

For those working from home, we are not just backing local public transport links. We are connecting local communities through active transport infrastructure too. We have delivered over 410 kilometres of new and upgraded walking and cycling paths, as well as crossings, safer bike routes and walking options that save Victorian families on petrol, on parking and on time navigating traffic. We all know where those opposite stand on working from home. Let us face it, they would chain people to their desks on a minimum wage if they could, but this government is getting on with making life easier and more affordable for Victorian families.

Constituency questions

Caulfield electorate

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:33): (1538) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Residents in Caulfield have raised urgent safety concerns about the designated school crossing on Glen Eira Road near Hood Crescent. This is a very busy crossing located near a bus stop servicing Mount Scopus Memorial College and close to a Caulfield Grammar campus, resulting in significant pedestrian traffic from multiple schools as well as local primary school kids. Despite the

presence of a school crossing supervisor, motorists are frequently failing to stop during peak periods, with repeated near misses involving children and crossing staff. Can the minister advise what action is being taken to address these safety concerns, including whether a signalised pedestrian crossing is being considered?

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:34): (1539) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. How will the Victorian Labor government's commitments to improve access to ADHD diagnosis and treatment help improve the health and wellbeing of locals and save local families and households time and money? ADHD, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how the brain regulates attention, impulse and activity levels, and how someone focuses, organises tasks and manages and controls those impulses. ADHD is generally divided into three groups: inattentive type, hyperactive–impulsive type and combined type. ADHD is linked to differences in brain development and dopamine regulation, and treatment can include behavioural strategies, educational support and sometimes medication. Across Victoria ADHD affects 480,000 people – 320,000 adults and 163,000 children – but of course we know that accessing diagnosis and treatment for ADHD is so difficult for so many people. It costs time and money and can take around 12 months for the process and $2000 out of pocket. That is why we are making those changes to allow GPs to safely diagnose, treat and prescribe medication for ADHD for children over six and support families through the virtual emergency department.

Lowan electorate

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:35): (1540) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information I seek is: when will the Western Highway be made safe? Whether it is the repairs that are required or whether it is the long-overdue duplication of the Western Highway, we continue to see the catastrophic impact of the delays of these repairs on one of the most important roads in Victoria – in fact it is the second-busiest highway in Australia. Again, sadly, on the weekend we had another fatality on the Western Highway. We had another accident on Sunday, which caused serious injuries. Enough is enough. We have had enough talk about the duplication of this highway. When we know that there is $15 billion which has gone missing through corruption on Big Build sites instead of being invested in our roads, it makes people rightly very, very angry. This money could have instead duplicated the highway from where it is. It needs to be done right through to the border, and I urge the government to act.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:36): (1541) It is very exciting, with works soon to wrap up at the newly constructed upgraded pavilion at Tormore Reserve in Boronia, so my constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport: when exactly will construction wrap up? I ask that because the clubs involved at the Tormore Reserve, where I have proudly worked alongside the federal member for Aston Mary Doyle as well as Knox City Council – the delivery partners there – are really concerned about a busy period that is occurring in their season. They would love to be in there, in the pavilion, in the month of May. Of course the facility was due to be completed around about June, but I believe works are ahead, and I want to formally put on record in this place the question to the minister, which will hopefully then be put through the department to council: with works being ahead, when can the clubs can move in as soon as possible?

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:37): (1542) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health: what cuts has the minister approved to clinical services at Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood? Yesterday in question time the minister stated there have been no cuts to frontline services under this government. Maroondah Hospital is in my electorate of Ringwood and is the primary acute hospital servicing the eastern suburbs, including communities across Ringwood, Heathmont, Croydon and the

Yarra Ranges, and for many families in the east Maroondah Hospital is their local hospital. It is where people rely on care close to home, and a rapidly growing region depends on timely access to treatment. Last year reports that paediatric services were being relocated generated community concern, and the minister intervened to stop those changes; however, residents are again contacting my office after hearing reports that other services at Maroondah Hospital may soon be relocated. These concerns are arising at a time when the redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital, promised at two separate elections, has still not commenced. My constituents need clarity.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (14:38): (1543) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health: how does the Chemist Care Now program benefit the residents of my electorate of Mulgrave, particularly in improving access to timely health care for busy families and women in our community? As a former health professional I know that for many in my electorate getting a timely GP appointment can sometimes be a challenge. The Labor government's expansion of Chemist Care Now to include 22 common conditions, including treatment for UTIs and resupply of contraceptives, is a game changer. With over 800 pharmacies participating across the state, including at least nine in my electorate, I am eager to hear how this investment is easing the burden on our local GPs and ensuring that Mulgrave residents can get the safe professional care they need right at their local chemist whilst also saving money for hardworking families.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (14:39): (1544) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Several residents across Prahran have contacted me regarding serious concerns about owners corporations under the Owners Corporations Act 2006, and they have raised issues including inflated costs for maintenance and services, long-term contracts that contain no reasonable exit clauses and excessively high quorum thresholds that make it difficult for lot owners to have their voices heard at meetings. Many residents feel trapped in arrangements that lack transparency and accountability; in particular there are concerns about the punitive exit clauses and the absence of mandatory conflict-of-interest declarations for owners corporation committee members, especially where decisions involving substantial financial commitments occur. One resident even reported a charge of over $80,000 for window cleaning when the market rate is actually half of that. My question to the minister is: when will the government release this report in regard to the act?

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:40): (1545) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport. What is the Victorian government doing to encourage, support and empower women in our local sporting clubs? This week in Parliament we are celebrating International Women's Day by acknowledging the role of women in community sport, and on Thursday I am thrilled to be hosting two women from a local sporting club in the Lara electorate. Stephanie McDonald and Adele Casey are representatives from the Corio Bay Sports Club. Both are committee members and volunteers and are doing an incredible job in promoting a safe and welcoming community club. Women like Stephanie and Adele are two of the many strong, smart and capable women we are lucky to have on committees in our local sporting clubs throughout the Lara electorate. They are helping to drive inclusive clubs, where they are inspiring the next generation of leaders in community sports.

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (14:41): (1546) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister update me and the Mornington electorate community on the completion, eventually, of the Peninsula Link resurfacing works, including giving a firm timetable for completion of current stages as well as stronger oversight for the contractor doing the works? This is a project that has been going on for over five months now in the Mornington electorate. Stage 1 was meant to be completed by the end of October last year. That was then extended to 15 November. That

was not completed then. Then we had a break over summer when people were restricted to 80 kilometres an hour. Now they have finally gone to stage 2, which is causing mayhem on our roads once again. They still have not finished stage 1. When is this project going to be completed, and when will this government do something to ensure that their contracts are properly managed?

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:42): (1547) My question is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment, and I ask: what assistance is this government providing for our growing multicultural business communities? We have got some fabulous local shopping strips. You can get anything you want, from biryani, baklava, banh mi, barra, bolognese, baba ganoush, borek, bragioli, babka or the humble bacon and egg roll. Our small and family businesses bring so much life and flavour to the north, and it is all made with love, which is why it tastes so good. It was such a pleasure to visit the famous Katik on Saturday along with the minister, the member for Greenvale, the member for Calwell, the mayor and local councillors to announce state Labor's funding to support the shopping strip. It was also great to drop into Olsen Place afterwards and let them know about their funding too, with the beautiful smell of freshly baked bread from the Olsen Place bakery permeating throughout the centre. Mahoneys Road shopping strip will also receive funding, and Glenroy will benefit from state government investment too, with lighting and art installations, improved shopfronts and public space upgrades.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Free TAFE Guarantee) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:43): I move:

> That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day

Electoral Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

> That this bill be now read a second time.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:44): Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:45): I rise to speak on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025. As the house has noted, the government has just moved a substantive package of amendments of which I have just received a copy in the chamber. The government has previously advised those amendments relate to knocking out the nominated entities provisions of the bill but also a public service secondment power. Without being able to double-check the amendments that have just been passed to me, I take on face value the commitment that was given in relation to those amendments. In dealing with the bill today I do note that it appears the government has removed those provisions, as discussed prior to coming to the chamber, and I will speak about engagement with the government throughout my contribution.

I also under standing orders wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated. I will speak to the substance of my amendments, but I do note, as it appears that one of the amendments that the government has moved takes out a concern that the coalition had with the bill, that one of my amendments will no longer need to stand.

This bill had its genesis in two things. Firstly, a number of candidates at the last state election took umbrage with Victoria's donation laws and the system by which the former Premier reformed the donation system. Their perceived view was that the system was unfair and as such appealed those provisions as unconstitutional in the High Court. The matter is currently before the High Court. The question is still outstanding as to whether the nominated entity provisions specifically were or are unconstitutional. For background, when that case took hold the government felt the need to develop a bill that in part acquitted concerns that those candidates had with the nominated entity provisions in the act, and so they have developed a bill – and some might say a set of quite radical amendments – to put to the applicants in the High Court matter as a way of assuaging their concerns and therefore setting aside their application.

After the section of the bill in that form was drafted, we were consulted on the bill in that form. I do note that for the house, because I do think that when it comes to the donation and electoral system more broadly Victorians deserve a robust system – a system that is fair, a system that is transparent – and the best way to achieve that in terms of electoral law more broadly is through collaboration with all members of both chambers of this place. I do note that we, the coalition, have said for some time that we would be happy to work with the government on any electoral matter, because we feel that we have ideas, insights and inputs that we can bring to development of legislation in this area, which speaks to the principles I just spoke about – about bringing integrity, about bringing robustness, about ensuring that democracy can flourish and doing it in a way that is transparent for all Victorians.

I do note that the government, since the drafting of the bill, did engage with the coalition. At the time that the drafting was put to us we raised a significant number of concerns with the nominated entity provisions in the bill and made it clear to the government that we had a raft of concerns with those provisions. But setting that aside, we felt that that did not go to the heart of the question that the two former candidates had in their application to the High Court, and I did not feel – and I do not think the coalition felt – that the matter could be set aside at that time or that it would not assuage their concerns, which has turned out to be the case. I note, therefore, that the government has moved to remove the nominated entity provisions, I think that would be fair to say, in anticipation of that case, and I can understand why that would be. That gives a little bit of background as to how we got to the amendments that the government just moved in relation to nominated entities.

The second portion of the bill – the other half, as it were – is mostly operational in relation to how the Electoral Commissioner performs their duties, concerns they have had and requests they have made in relation to their function. Not all of those asks by the commission are not controversial, and not every electoral change in the other part of the bill has been generated entirely from the Electoral Commissioner, though the majority have, to be fair.

There have been two further amendments other than the nominated entities, from the discussions I have had with the government. As I said earlier, I have not had an opportunity to cross-check the amendments that have just been moved in the house, but based on the conversation that the government has had with me – and I take them absolutely at face value – one of the amendments that has been proposed today is to remove a formal process by which the government, in the form of the public service, can move into assisting with electioneering with the electoral commission. When I became aware of the provision in the bill, looking through the bill before it was to be considered, I raised at that time a very, very serious concern about that provision in the bill. I do want to take a few moments to put on record why I have concerns, and also some history that I discovered prior to today in relation to that power, and concerns potentially moving forward. In short, what the provision would have done is formalise an ask process whereby the electoral commission could say they need staff, and the public service could provide staff to the electoral commission. I am not saying this – the

Ombudsman has said the public service is politicised. I am not saying that – that is what the Ombudsman said. The Ombudsman has found and reported that the public service is politicised. In no way am I asserting that every single person in the public service is politicised – of course not. Again, that is not my assertion. This is the Ombudsman saying it.

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: I would not reflect on the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has found that the public service is politicised. It would be fair and reasonable to suggest that any mechanism whereby public servants are moved into the election process is concerning, especially where there is no oversight or transparency around those processes. What concerns me even more greatly is that, in being briefed on this bill, I was formally advised that that happened at the 2022 election. In 2022, before it was proposed that this power exist in this bill, the then Daniel Andrews government sent public servants into the electoral commission to electioneer. No-one knew about it. At no point has there been – and of course there was not – any transparency provided in a fair and reasonable way about that occurring. I think Victorians would want to know that. I think when they go into an election booth they think that Victorian Electoral Commission staff work there. That is who I think they expect to see there. I do not think they expect to see public servants from another area who have been pushed in. When I raised concerns about that particular power being put into the bill, and I note again part of the amendments will strike it out, the department advised the reason for that move of staff at the 2022 election was because the Victorian Electoral Commission could not find enough staff. When you hear that, you think, 'Four weeks before an election, they're short on staff and they don't know what to do. What do they do? They've run out of staff. They don't have enough. They can't get enough people in. With four weeks to the election, how are they going to operate an election? We need to ask the government: can you help us with staff?'

The department advised me that the process to second staff occurred nearly a year before the election. It was formally approved by the Victorian Secretaries' Board in February of that year, which means that the process to make that happen would have occurred at the end of the year prior, the end of 2021, to ensure that the secretaries were briefed on the issue, to ensure that a submission was put up to the secretaries' board. The secretaries just do not get together with an idea that happened yesterday. The request would have been formulated at the end of the year prior. So one year prior to the last election, an approval process was put in place. It was approved in February, at the start of the electoral year, to move public servants into electioneering for the 2022 election – a stunning revelation.

I thank the government for hearing our concerns, and I say that in a collaborative way. I thank the government for striking out that power from the bill. It was the right thing to do, taking that power out of the bill. They heard the coalition's concerns. I put it to them strongly and they have taken it out, and I thank them for that. I think it was the right thing to do. Clearly it was the right thing to do. However, as we saw at the last election, they did it without having the power in the first place. They did it before there was a power in a bill to do it. Before there was a power at law to do it, they struck an agreement and did it. So even though this new power has been struck out of the proposed bill, that does not stop the same thing occurring at the next election. The reason I have spent quite considerable time talking this issue through is because I would hope that we now have, on every possible occasion, questions being asked as to whether this government is sending public servants to electioneer, in what should be an electoral commission that is beyond reproach, at this forthcoming election. I hope by exposing this issue, giving context to it happening before the power was in the bill in the first place, we can ensure that there will be no requests from the electoral commission. I do not know in 2022 if the request came from the electoral commission or if the government proffered the idea. Maybe the electoral commission said it could not get enough staff and the government thought it would solve the problem. 'I will solve your problem,' said former Premier Daniel Andrews. 'I will give you some of my staff.' I do not know whether it is true or not, but what I do hope is that for the forthcoming election –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: And the government laugh. They laugh because the politicised public servants who were working in electioneering were working at electoral booths. I think Victorians would be concerned by that. Whether or not Labor thinks that is a clever idea is irrelevant, because I think the public would agree. I really do. Not only does the public agree but the executive agrees – not the members in the cheap seats, but the executive – because they have taken the power out of the bill.

Gary Maas interjected.

James NEWBURY: I cannot hear you back there, mate. I think we need to ensure that our electoral commission is, beyond any question, impartial. I hope that because this issue has been raised the media and the public more broadly can now do the collective job of ensuring that does not happen again, because it was wrong, and I thank the government for removing that provision. But I think we need to be very clear on making sure that does not happen at this coming election.

The other power I will note which links very clearly to that one, which the government agreed to remove previously and which the coalition raised concerns about, is the minister's capacity to set the location of election booths. A politically aligned minister would have had the power under the bill in its initial form to determine the location of booths. When we saw that provision in the initial bill, we said no way – no way, no way, no way – and the government took it out.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: You can ask the Premier's office, cheap seats. Ask the Premier's office. The government took that out, and so they should have, because a minister should not have any power in relation to selecting what locations booths exist at. Clearly a political appointee would not be impartial in relation to how our elections are operated.

I have just gone through three substantive changes to the bill that the government has made to get us to the form of the bill we are at today. There are a number of other changes that we have been concerned about. I will now note, though, that on the basis that the government has taken out the public service provision, the ministerial booth-appointing position and the nominated entity provisions, we will not be opposing the bill. However, I have circulated amendments. One, as I mentioned, relates to the secondment power. Without being able to check while standing the amendments that have been circulated in this chamber, with that being struck out, that knocks out one of our proposed amendments, and I would put to the chamber that amendment now no longer needs to be moved. But there are three other amendments that I have circulated. They are textual, so unfortunately – I cannot imagine the government taking this into consideration in detail – they will not be taken to a vote in this place, but we will be moving similar amendments in the upper house.

There are three other issues, one in relation to the request which I understand has come from the Electoral Commissioner for quite broad delegation powers. The new delegation powers proposed by the bill, as I understand it – and I take the government on face value – were at a request from the commissioner to delegate authority, either where it is specifically set out in the bill or by instrument. We have concerns around those delegation powers. I think it is important that we seek to amend in that way those powers, because they are very broad delegation powers. With the Electoral Commissioner having the job of managing elections, and setting aside that we have had six by-elections in this presumably four-year term – we have one election every four years – it is not unreasonable to expect that the Electoral Commissioner would have the role of managing elections. That is not an unreasonable thing. When it comes to making significant calls around elections I think it is only reasonable for the Electoral Commissioner to make the final call when it comes to significant vote counts, when it comes to significant determinations. Our concern is that the Electoral Commissioner should make those final calls, and what this bill would effectively allow is the capacity for the commissioner to delegate some of those powers. We are concerned about that. We would say that those delegation powers are too broad, and so we have moved an amendment on that.

The second amendment I spoke to, which related to the secondment, is now null and void based on the government's amendment to strike that out from the bill, if I take them at their word.

What this bill does in one of the amendments is remove a print house requirement on election material, and that print house requirement was put in place as a second point of contact with election materials. Currently election material requires an authorisation of the person, the candidate per se, and a print house detail. It ensures that there are two points of contact. Historically that was also put in place because if the candidate did not want to be found or had, for example, a phoney address, print house details are different in that it is a substantive business and so you could, it was thought, find the candidate through that business should you need to. That certainly is the case with material that is inappropriate or offensive – that if you cannot find someone based on the first point of contact you would through the second. It seems a very reasonable thing and a protection to the integrity of the system to have that second point of contact where potentially a candidate does not want to be found or gives a false address, so we have concerns about those print house details being removed from the act also.

There is a fourth amendment, and it is disappointing to have to put this amendment into a proposed package of amendments. From memory, from the last election, for seven of the 88 Legislative Assembly seats – I believe Sandringham is one, Brighton is another – the electoral commission still has not done full preference counts. It seems only reasonable that an electoral commission would do full counts on the outcome of a seat on election day. In fact I do not think anybody could disagree that a full count should occur in a seat. I would have thought that all 88 seats were done with haste.

I can speak to what happened in my seat, which may explain why it has not occurred in all seats and I think it has happened in others. On election night I discovered, in my seat, when the votes were being counted, that the Electoral Commissioner had determined who would come second in my seat. So for the first couple of booths they started counting, presuming to do a two-party preferred count against who they picked would come second. Well, they did not check with anyone on who might come second. They did not base it on any information. They did not start counting and then think, 'This person might come second, so we'll start doing a 2PP on them.' They did it on the person who came fourth. So an hour and a half into the night, they realised that they had picked the wrong person as coming second, which completely mucked up their entire two-preference count, and that started happening in other seats. I know that booth workers were in the booths counting votes, and they said to the divisional managers, 'You've got the wrong person as your second preference,' and they said, 'The Electoral Commissioner has said to us that we've got to use the name in the envelope. We weren't allowed to change whose name was in the envelope, even as we counted.' We got part way through the night on election night, and the electoral commission of course did first-preference counting, worked out who won on first preferences and said, 'We won't do any more.' They worked out who they preference counted to 50.0001 per cent, who got one vote over the line, and then said, 'We're not going to do any more. We're going to go home.' And they did it across, as far as I am aware, seven seats.

I have not spoken to him about this, but he has made a public statement about it, especially as it related to my seat. The electoral commission then never went back and started counting votes, so Antony Green, God bless him, went to the electoral commission and started counting votes for it, purely because he loves elections. Antony Green, who we are all sad has retired, went and counted the Brighton votes and got me a two-party preference count. Good on him – thank you, Antony Green. But it should not be that way. So an amendment that we have moved will require a full two-party preference count in all 88 seats in the Assembly. I hope that when the amendments are considered in the other place, all members – though, these amendments will be considered in detail in the Council, so they might see 'Assembly' and they might knock them out purely on the basis of –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: No, they should not, but they might, purely on the basis of the difference in chambers. But I hope that the government, I hope that the cross-party members, can see the obviousness of an election commission counting votes in seats to their final outcome.

This bill, as I mentioned throughout the contribution, has had a chequered history. To the government's credit, we have reached a bill today that the coalition will not oppose, because matters in the bill which were of significant concern to the coalition have been removed. I note that, and I noted the collaboration that has occurred, as it should have, because every Victorian wants to see a robust system that was formed through collaboration with all members of the Parliament. I hope that collaboration on electoral matters can continue. The coalition will not be opposing this bill.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:15): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025. It is always a great pleasure to follow the ramblings of the member for Brighton. I will give him immense credit for getting the full half hour in. I do not know how he does it with a straight face. I cannot call the member for Brighton a liar, because that would be unparliamentary, so I will not. He just really struggles with the truth sometimes and very rarely tells the truth. But we do agree on a couple of things. We absolutely and obviously agree on the importance of the independence of the Victorian Electoral Commission. I think we all agree with that. It is, and I have said it before in this place, a fundamental pillar of our democracy, the most important part of our democracy. Making sure that the VEC is beyond reproach, is independent and has all the tools that it needs to be able to run free and fair elections in our state is exactly what these amendments do. They assist the VEC in running free and fair elections, and it is a timely bill, obviously, given an election is coming up on 28 November this year.

The member for Brighton mentioned, rightly, that house amendments were circulated at the beginning of this debate by I believe the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Those are obviously important. There is a case pending in the High Court. The bill originally included amendments to the political finance scheme, which is in part 12 of the act, dealing with nominated entities. But as I said, there is a case pending in the High Court. The High Court chose to hear that case. There will be a ruling given in coming months, so it would be inappropriate for us to include content within this piece of legislation that will be deliberated upon by the High Court. Those amendments have been circulated and according to the member for Brighton they have been accepted.

This bill is in response to and acquits several recommendations across a number of reports by the Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee and also recommendations by the Victorian Electoral Commission and the Electoral Review Expert Panel. It makes what may seem like small changes, but they are changes that have been recommended for some time all the same. These are the first amendments to the Electoral Act 2002 since 2018.

Elections, in how they are delivered and how they operate, are changing. They are changing with every single election that we have, so we need to make sure that the Electoral Act stays relevant and gives the VEC the authority, the flexibility and all the tools that they need to be able to run elections efficiently, because it is becoming more and more difficult. We know that. I think elections are becoming tenser. I could go further than that, but they are certainly becoming tenser and harder. There are obviously complexities with staffing and resourcing at the electoral commission, so we need to make sure that when the VEC makes strong recommendations that the Electoral Matters Committee accepts we can be in a position to make the amendments that we need to to give the VEC, as I said, the tools to deliver elections in the best way possible.

The bill contains four reforms to address operational issues within the political finance scheme. They go to the VEC's ability to recover outstanding debt from former registered political parties, they enable the VEC to exclude GST from claimable expenditure for funding under the Electoral Act and they increase protections for the personal information of silent electors, which I think is incredibly important given some of the reasons why people are silent electors. If we think of people that may have experienced family violence or people that could be in witness protection programs – all sorts of

different reasons – that is obviously something that is incredibly important, and making sure that the VEC has the capacity to do that is really important for obvious reasons. They also clarify that nothing in the act is intended to disturb the common-law rule that an unincorporated political party's internal conduct is not justiciable.

It also makes several amendments to update electoral timings and processes. We have heard from the VEC that the timing of elections or certain things that have to happen within elections can make it incredibly difficult for the VEC in terms of having the time to turn this stuff around and to stand up an election prior to pre-poll specifically and for election day. So we have brought forward the deadline for applications for registering a political party to 180 days. Before this amendment it was at 120 days. I think we can all probably agree that about four months out from an election, registering a political party is pretty late and there is a fair bit of work that has to go around that, so bringing that forward to 180 days I think is just a logical step to take. That would mean – I do not know the exact days – if you want to register a political party prior to this election I think you would have about a couple of months left. I think we are at 200 and something days –

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: The member for Mordialloc did tell me yesterday, but I forget. We are also going to bring forward the close of the electoral roll to the date of the writ instead of seven days after the date of the writ – once again just giving the VEC some more time to get everything in order. We are also going to amend the final nomination date to become a candidate to be six days after the issue of the writ instead of 10 – after expiration of the Assembly – and align the deadline for nominations for registered political party endorsed and independent candidates to be noon of the final nomination day.

They may feel like small changes, but they are changes that increase the VEC's capacity to run free, fair and competent elections. As I said, the VEC cop their fair whack in this place during contributions, but the running of elections is becoming harder and harder and harder and harder as our population grows and as the amount of political parties and candidates that nominate explode. The running of elections is becoming harder, and we need to make sure that we are giving the VEC every tool and every opportunity we can to make their job of running free and fair elections easier. They will make mistakes from time to time, but in this place we do have the capacity to legislate to try and make it as easy as possible.

The last one that I will touch on is the pre-poll dates – shortening the length of pre-poll from 14 to 10 days, which I know everyone in here is pretty stoked with. I might be a weirdo, but I personally love pre-poll. I like standing at pre-poll. It will be at the VEC's discretion as to the timing of pre-poll on the specific days when the pre-poll opens, when the pre-poll closes and whether the Sunday will be a pre-poll day within that span of 10 days, but that is another major change as well.

As I said, the independence of the VEC and its capacity to run free and fair elections in a competent way is the most fundamental pillar of our democracy, and this piece of legislation hopefully makes their capacity to do that just a little bit easier. I commend the bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:25): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025. This is a very different bill than the one that was introduced late last year, and for good reasons. We are certainly pleased that it is a very different bill because there were a number of concerns. It is in fact the same bill, but it is now being amended by the government through a series of house amendments, and we are very pleased to see those house amendments coming forward because there is a level of concern in the community, not least among political parties, about the issue of nominated entities and public funding and donations – all of those issues wrapped up together. A current case in the High Court has created a level of uncertainty, which is why the government is seeking to remove those aspects of this bill in relation to nominated entities, because we await the judgement of the High Court on that matter.

There are a number of other aspects of this legislation that the member for Brighton has gone through and raised our concerns about, and there are other aspects of which we are supportive. As the member for Tarneit indicated, running elections is increasingly difficult, increasingly complicated and increasingly resource intensive, and I might say likewise for running in elections, as I am sure all members of this place know. I do not think anyone ever finds it easy or simple to find supporters and helpers to work and help out. That brings to mind the one change in this with respect to pre-poll. Early voting is loved by voters and probably loathed by most of us in the actual political game. I love pre-poll; I love the engagement you get. As a sitting MP, having the ability to go and stand there for the full period – and most of us have got at least two booths, particularly in regional areas – is great to get engagement. You see people that you do not see for four years sometimes, but it is a very important opportunity for people to be able to vote and to get in and do that.

I have had a concern, though, for a long time, that we have morphed from having an election day to an election fortnight, and that has fundamentally changed the nature of elections. There has not really been a lot of debate about that over time. Certainly electoral commissions across the country, including the AEC and the Victorian Electoral Commission, have embraced early voting because they see it as a way to ensure full enfranchisement of the voter, especially people who have issues in being able to get out and vote, and pre-poll does that. Early voting gives them that opportunity. But it has got to be within reason. When you have got postal voting, when you have got two weeks of early voting, when you have got voting on the day and when you have got late voting on Thursday nights as in the last couple of elections, there are plenty of opportunities, and there is really not a lot of excuses for people not to be able to vote.

Particularly in Victoria, and I think I am right in saying every other state where we have fixed terms, it is not like an election should be a surprise to anyone. It is not called in the middle of 'Oh, well, I was going on holidays, and you've called an election, so I can't get to vote.' We know when the Victorian election is going to be every four years, so people can make arrangements around that. I absolutely support and appreciate the ability to make sure that people can vote as comfortably as possible, but I think the clause in this legislation setting a default of 10 days rather than 12 is a step in the right direction. It has been very difficult for many of us to do the quick turnaround from the close of nominations and the ballot draw on the Friday to opening up voting on Monday morning. Giving us all a couple of days extra will make the electoral process better, so that is good.

One thing I would just make a comment on – it is not directly related to the legislation – but where it is possible the electoral commission should be trying to find the best locations for early voting and polling booths more generally. I know they do this, but the practice that has been around for a number of years of utilising a vacant shop, whether that is in a country town or in a suburb somewhere, is not ideal, particularly when it is in the middle of a shopping strip. It causes upset to neighbouring shops sometimes because you have got booth workers and you have got voters coming and going. I think as a principle if the electoral commission can find locations like civic centres – whether it is a hall, whether it is a senior centre or something like that – not right in the CBD of a town, not in the main shopping strip where booth workers are harassing people who are just going about their business shopping, because they do not know as someone walks up if they are going in to vote or they are just going past to get some milk. I think ideally we should see the commission try and find those sorts of civic centres – as I said, halls or community centres or senior citizen centres – where they are available. That would make it much easier to run early voting.

The member for Brighton has outlined some of our concerns. We are pleased, again, to see the public service secondment aspects of this bill taken out, because we had some concerns about those. He has raised our concern about the commissioner's delegations. I think the commissioner really has one big job and should be able to do that, particularly in relation to the declaration of polls and the like. It is important that the commissioner does that, and that should not be delegated.

On the issue of print house requirements, I can probably understand why there is a desire to remove the publishing of print house requirements on printed material. But as the member for Brighton has

pointed out, it is a bit of a failsafe, a bit of a backup for us, because whilst all election material needs to be authorised, sometimes it is difficult for the commission or those investigating potential breaches to actually find the person who has authorised material, and having a secondary requirement for the printer's details to be included just gives us another way to go and find someone who may have authorised particular material. I think that is important.

The member for Brighton touched on the issue of preference distributions, and we are seeking to move an amendment to ensure that they are done for all electorates. I know that it is the case that they are not always done, and I think it is important that the community understands the full preference allocations. It actually happened in my by-election in 2015. Because I was elected after the second or third candidate had been eliminated, they stopped and did not publish a full preference distribution. As the member for Brighton indicated, the electoral commission does not always get it right as to who the two-candidate preferred count should be taken with, and that was the case in point too. There was no Labor candidate, so the commission decided it would be between the Nationals and the Greens, but in fact the final two candidates were pretty much always going to be from the Nationals and the Liberal Party in that situation, and that was the case. But a full preference count was not published. I managed to actually get it from the local manager at the time, but I think an amendment that would ensure that a full two-party preferred preference distribution is undertaken and published is an important thing for understanding the state of every single electorate across the state.

We have seen the issues that occurred in 2022, and I think there will be other members who may go into some more detail about some of the concerns that occurred with the last election. I know in my own electorate and the neighbouring electorate of Bass there were issues with the availability of ballot papers in a number of booths late in the afternoon, and that is a significant concern. I know there are backup measures that a returning officer can deal with, but there were certainly some issues there where there were not enough ballot papers produced for certain booths and people had to be turned away. That is a serious concern as well.

There are other aspects of this legislation making some changes, including changes to the registration of political parties, taking it from 120 days prior to the election to 180 days. That again reduces some of the pressure on the electoral commission. Again I say that I do not have any issue with that. If you are serious about trying to set up a political party, you should be doing that well in advance of an election. In general, with the amendments that the government has now put forward to the original bill, we do not oppose this in principle. We will be moving some amendments in the other place, and I look forward to this improving things for the election this year.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:35): I also rise to make a contribution on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025. I know many bills arrive in this place as a result of ministerial or departmental deliberations, and it is always a pleasure for those of us who are on parliamentary committees to see a bill that has arisen at least in part from the work of the Electoral Matters Committee (EMC). We have heard already from the member for Tarneit, who chairs that committee, and we will be hearing I believe from the member for Lowan, who also with me is on that committee. We are very pleased to see some of the work of our inquiry implemented.

In acknowledging the work of the committee I should also of course acknowledge the work of the Victorian Electoral Commission and credit Sven Bluemmel and his team. I think the committee and the commission have a good working relationship – not a relationship of complete agreement on all matters but a good relationship. I suspect if the member for Lowan is speaking later on this bill she may raise, as the Leader of the Nationals has done, some serious matters regarding a shortage of ballot papers, particularly as occurred around Stawell. Whether that is to be fixed with operational changes or further legislation is perhaps something she might touch on. I just want to acknowledge that that is an important issue for all of us to address. I also want to recognise, in starting, the Electoral Review Expert Panel of Elizabeth Williams, David Feeney and Helen Kroger, who contributed significantly to this bill. Particularly, if I can, I will just recognise the work of David Feeney, who is a local to our

part of the world, used to represent Preston and Reservoir in the federal Parliament and still makes a significant contribution locally as well as through his appearances on the *Socially Democratic* podcast.

There are a lot of reforms – almost 100 – in this bill, but I thought I would just take a moment to touch on some of the other large issues in this area that are not in the bill in front of us but which are important considerations for us when we consider the Electoral Act 2002. The first one I want to touch on is group voting tickets. As you will be aware, the EMC recommended in favour of abolishing group voting tickets. I would just like to put on record a quote from Antony Green, which I think is important for people to keep in mind. Antony Green said:

> One of the basic factual errors thrown around in the debate about changing the Senate's voting system is that the group ticket voting system was designed by the major parties so that they could control preferences.
>
> This view is wrong. The system was proposed by the then Australian Electoral Office …
>
> The overwhelming justification for group ticket voting was the scandalous level of informal voting that existed prior to its introduction in 1984.

I feel it is always important to make this point – I have made it before – that group voting tickets have existed in this country since 1984, and they were introduced neutrally, not in a partisan way, to solve a very real problem of informal voting. They have existed in this state since 2003.

If I can be frank – it is a pity that the Greens have not joined us for today's debate – there was a serious debate in this country about group voting tickets that went at least back to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters hearings on the 2013 federal election. The Greens in this place did not ever complain about group voting tickets until after the 2018 state election – five years after the debate had started, decades after group voting tickets had first been introduced – and the reason they began to complain about them is because for the first time it was perceived that group voting tickets were hurting the Greens political party, and at the point where it was politically expedient for them to complain about it they did so. I make that point just because I think a lot of us find it a little frustrating when we watch some of these very tabloid social media videos that they produce on this issue without recognising the fact that their contribution to this particular debate has only arrived at the point where it was politically beneficial for them to make that contribution.

Another major topic of our inquiries I do want to touch on is the safety of voters, campaigners and candidates at polling booths and the importance of people being able to vote in a way that is comfortable for them and is not – unfortunately, as we saw sometimes in the 2022 election – difficult, with them being shouted at and witnessing very aggressive behaviour. I think it is an important issue for all of us to think about. Certainly in our part of the world that unfortunate behaviour that we saw in some booths took two forms, really. Predominantly at the far-right end of the spectrum, as I observed it, there was some very aggressive behaviour, which we all would agree was simply wrong. Unfortunately, certainly in our part of the world, it involved the police being called on a number of occasions to deal with the behaviour of those people. I think all of us recognise that that sort of very intimidating, aggressive behaviour is wrong in any context. It is certainly wrong in an election. I think there is also broad agreement amongst those who looked at this issue that there is more to do on enforcement and in particular on an escalation pathway for the VEC to deal with the kinds of people that do that kind of thing.

But there is a second challenge for all of us, I think, and that is behaviour that is more commonly associated with the Victorian Socialists, and that is the behaviour of standing 100 metres or so away from a polling booth and then walking beside a voter and delivering an intense monologue at them across their entire journey in to the polling booth so that no-one else can get a word in edgewise. In fact if you want to make any point to the voter, you are forced to raise your voice above their monologue, at which point they immediately raise their voice in a way that I think they are trained to do and you end up in a shouting match with the poor voter caught in between. It is a difficult issue. I am sure all of us have engaged voters passionately before, but the issue here was that it was done in a ruthless and systematic way to every voter coming into booths. The issue for all of us is that it was

clear that the Victorian Socialists had made a calculation that because they start with a low voting base even if they made 20 per cent, 30 per cent, 40 per cent of voters coming in feel uncomfortable, if they won over 5 per cent, they would be ahead in their own electoral calculation. I raise this particular issue because I think it is one we might come back to after the 2026 election.

There may be other members in this place who do not have quite the large Victorian Socialists operation that we do in Preston and Reservoir, but we –

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: Not in Malvern? I can fill the member for Malvern in because they are a party that see themselves as being on the rise. There is certainly a theory in those circles that the socialists will replace the Greens as the major party to Labor's left. Without going into detail, they are ideologically quite similar to the Greens really. They represent the interests of humanities graduates and the academic left, but they do not have the environmental background that has been a strength for the Greens and that has broadened the Greens, I think we would all recognise, for a long period of time. But if you talk to some of the Victorian Socialists, they will say to you that former strength of the Greens is no longer a strength. They will say to you that when young people hear talk about climate change, it is in the same way that we hear about acid rain or about the ozone layer. They simply see it as an issue that has now become mainstream, largely solved politically, and no longer has anti-establishment credibility. I am just putting this out to members.

It is the belief of the Victorian Socialists certainly that at the next election they have a chance, as they have done in some of our local elections in our part of the world, to move past the Greens on primary votes and become that party to Labor's left. I put that on the record because I would imagine – I do not speak at all for them, of course – the chances that they replicate the tactics that we saw in the 2022 election in 2026 are I think quite high. They will see this as an existential chance for them to surge ahead of the Greens and to maintain that momentum they have seen in some recent local elections, so I think that will be an important electoral matter. It is a difficult one for us because realistically it is very, very hard to draw a bright line between those things that they are doing and things that we would all think were fair and reasonable in political campaigning. It is a topic I am sure EMC will return to and this chamber will return to.

If I can come back, in conclusion, to the bill in front of us, despite it not tackling those two topics and despite not tackling section 61 and the distribution of counts which the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Brighton alluded to, I will, if I can, pick up on that, just to express some sympathy. As someone who has worked with electoral data, it would be great to have more data from the VEC sometimes. I would gently suggest to the member for Brighton that his amendment does not quite solve the problem, particularly because it does not solve the very problem he raised about who the indicative count is against. But I will recognise that there is some value in thinking further about that. I may leave his wild conspiracies about a small number of Victorian public service staff who joined the VEC to another day.

But I will conclude on a more positive note if I can by just saying this is nonetheless a very important bill in terms of making a lot of technical changes that the member for Tarneit touched on in relation to timelines, particularly in relation to ways that people can cheat donations through loans and things like that, in relation to not having internal party rules subject to court actions and in relation to postal votes. Obviously the nature of the post has changed, and it is tidied up in this bill. Obviously there have been other technological changes that have resulted in changes to authorisation. I think all of that good work out of the work that we have seen through the EMC inquiries is great to see here in this bill, and I commend it very strongly to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (15:45): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025. Voting is a very fundamental part of life in a democracy, and this bill deals with some aspects of our voting processes. But of course we do not just vote in elections at state level every four

years or at federal elections every three years, there are all sorts of votes, and I note that even the AFL Hall of Fame is done by voting. I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to one of the inductees in the 2020 AFL Hall of Fame, Dennis Cometti, who passed away today. I just take this opportunity to place on record that Dennis Cometti has been an absolute doyen of the sport of AFL and other sports, but particularly AFL, with one of the most silky-smooth voices you could ever hope to hear calling the game, a brilliant knowledge of the game and a turn of phrase that puts all of us to shame. He has been a great contributor to those who love AFL, and I want to place on record my appreciation of his great contribution over the years and my sadness at his passing today.

On to other matters perhaps more germane to the bill. The government has moved a number of amendments to this bill to remove references to nominated entities when it comes to funding processes. The government has done this I think on the basis that there is currently a matter before the High Court of Australia. My understanding is that the matter of *Hopper & Anor v State of Victoria* has been heard by the court. The court has now reserved its judgement. We expect to get an indication, hopefully, from their honours in the near future, because here we are in March, the election is in November and it would be terrific to know which parts of our electoral funding laws are and are not unconstitutional. That would be really helpful for everyone. Of course the High Court marches to the beat of its own drum. I am sure it does not particularly worry about things like state elections, but given the timing of this case, I am sure their honours are aware of the importance of their decision, and all I would ask is that we get a clear decision and a quick decision if possible.

The government has removed from this bill matters relating to registered entities and the way in which they can fund existing political parties. When it comes to fundraising, this is something which is quite an important topic because we have seen from the Wood Commission of Inquiry into the CFMEU up in Queensland reports of corruption in Victorian Big Build sites, and we have seen the reports of the involvement of the CFMEU in that corruption. That, I think, has been acknowledged by the Premier. The Premier may dispute whether $15 billion has been ripped from the pockets of Victorians and funnelled to their mates in the CFMEU and outlaw motorcycle gangs and drug dealers, so we can argue the toss over how much has been stolen. But there is no doubt that money has been stolen from the pockets of hardworking Victorian taxpayers and funnelled to criminals. It is why it is very interesting that the CFMEU has been such a big donor to the Victorian Labor Party. I refer to an article in the *Australian Financial Review* dated 1 February 2024, 'CFMEU and construction unions top donations to Victoria ALP'. The article starts:

> Unions contributed more than $5 million to Labor in the past financial year, with the CFMEU and its allied construction shops becoming the biggest donors to the Victorian branch in the months leading up to the 2022 state election …

It talks about money, not only from the CFMEU, but also we have seen other unions, such as the Electrical Trades Union and the plumbers union, which the article notes are 'both allied to the CFMEU in Victoria' and 'contributed $102,470 and $65,593 respectively in 2022–23'. So the union that has been named and shamed in relation to corruption on Big Build worksites has also been one of the biggest financial supporters of the Victorian Labor government. It really raises the question: why is the Premier so keen to avoid any work going into finding out how much money was stolen, who stole it, what laws have been broken and how we get the money back? That is a very important question which the Premier is not keen to answer.

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this is a wideranging debate, but let us bring it back to what we are discussing.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): The member was being relevant to elections.

Michael O'BRIEN: The government's house amendments relating to donation laws are exactly relevant to what I am saying, so I thank you for your ruling, Acting Speaker. This also betrays how sensitive the government is about this. We know that $15 billion, at least, has been ripped off from Victorian taxpayers, and we know the Victorian Labor Party has benefited from political donations by

those same corrupt organisations which did the ripping off. Some might say it looks like protection money. Some might say it is protection money when a bunch of crooks rip money off from taxpayers and the government of the day turns a blind eye to it.

Juliana Addison interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: I have nothing to be careful about, member for Wendouree. There is nothing I would say in here that I would not say 30 steps out to the side there either. This is a corrupt government. I am happy to say that in here; I am happy to say it out there. When you get protection money from the CFMEU in the form of political donations and you then turn a blind eye to their corruption, which is ripping off hardworking Victorian families, that is a dodgy situation. The fact is that this Premier not once but twice this week has voted to refuse to allow our legislation to strengthen the powers of the IBAC to give them follow-the-money powers, to have a tough cop on the beat, to get back the money, to stop the law breaking and to make sure we have the rule of law back on Victorian construction sites. I tell you this is a government that is fundamentally compromised when it comes to political donations. This is a government that has been bought and paid for by the CFMEU.

James Newbury interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: That is a very good point. Thank you for reminding me of that, member for Brighton. The same Mick Gatto, the notorious underworld figure, who I am sure would not object to being called that, says publicly what a big fan he is of the Premier. I mean, with –

James Newbury interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Well, why wouldn't he? How much money are his related businesses, this M Group – how much money is Mick Gatto and his businesses making out of the Big Build and are any of those businesses donating to the Victorian Labor Party? They are questions that need to be asked. Somebody has been asking them, member for Brighton. Nick McKenzie, for one, wrote a story on 17 February this year in the *Age*, 'Big Build's dirty money: how gangland, bikie-linked firms funded Labor'.

James Newbury interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: You have got to be quiet now, member for Brighton. He reported:

> Victorian Labor collected thousands of dollars in donations from firms that now face police action over suspected corrupt payments or that placed gangland, bikie or CFMEU identities on taxpayer-funded projects.
>
> The donors include a traffic management firm on Labor's signature $100 billion Big Build program whose owner has been charged by Victoria Police's anti-corruption and gangland building industry taskforce; another Big Build subcontractor facing a federal police probe for allegedly bribing a corrupt CFMEU boss; and the owners of two Big Build firms represented by gangland figure Mick Gatto.

These are the people who are funding the Allan Labor government. When Victorians go to the polls later this –

Chris Couzens: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member needs to go back to the bill. This has got nothing to do with the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): He was being relevant.

Michael O'BRIEN: This has everything to do with the bill, because the government's amendments are relating to the funding of registered organisations, and where does the Labor Party get its money? From its registered organisation Labor Holdings. And who donates to Labor Holdings is exactly what I am talking about: corrupt unions and corrupt gangland figures – people who have ripped off Victorian taxpayers on the Big Build and who pay the Labor Party donations as protection money. That is exactly how this government is funded. It is why this government is compromised. It is morally compromised, financially compromised and politically compromised.

So when Victorians see the host of ads – no doubt the union movement will come to the Labor Party's aid later this year – the attack ads from the labour movement against the Liberals, Victorians need to remember who has been funding this: crooks, bikie gangs, drug peddlers and other sorts of people who should be in jail instead of running around running amok on Victorian Big Build worksites.

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:54): I rise to speak on the substance of the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025 that is before the house. In preparing my notes on this I did do a little bit of research into some of the history of the different aspects of our election system that we are dealing with in this bill, particularly research from Monash University and the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) by Laing, Miragliotta and Thornton-Smith which makes some very interesting observations about the idea of convenience voting and some of the protections that we need to have in place to make sure that this is done with integrity. I will return to that soon. I think it is particularly important, being one of the few members, in fact the only member in this house, to have recently been to an election, to not only reflect on some of the reports that have informed this legislation but also thank my neighbour the member for Tarneit and the work of the committee that he chairs for some of the observations from the byelections that we saw in February last year and some of the changes that are foreshadowed in this bill to make sure that our operations of elections are done fairly and that they are done with a view to making sure that as many people who are eligible to vote can access their democratic right, while also ensuring that there is integrity in the process.

This bill will make sure that our Electoral Act 2002 is fit for purpose. There are a few particular things, that some of my colleagues have already spoken about, around having requirements for supplementary elections and re-elections – and I note the member for Narracan is here. This is a particularly important theme, the supplementary election and how that works, and it is a particularly tricky area of elections too. It is about modernising and simplifying authorisation requirements for electoral materials, particularly in this age of more and more artificial intelligence being used, particularly by some interesting small news sites and Facebook interest groups; making sure that we have very clear, modern authorisation requirements, acknowledging the changing way that political communication is happening in Victoria; tightening restrictions on party names and logos that can be registered, which is particularly interesting; and providing more flexible powers for the commission to respond to emergencies, timing and requirements for electoral processes – which I will go into a little bit, after being through the fire of a byelection that was quite a tight turnaround and some of the pressures that puts not only on the commission but also on people exercising their right to run in that election and try and convince their community to vote for them. I will also be looking at some of the other technical amendments in the bill.

One particularly important part of elections that has emerged in Victoria is postal voting. It is a particularly important mechanism in Victoria to make sure that as many people can access our elections as possible, regardless of circumstances that may restrict their ability to attend a voting centre on the day or beforehand. We had postal voting here in Victoria as early as 1895. We have always had concerns, and particularly this Labor Party over the years has had concerns, around the security of that and making sure that there is limited or no influence over that person casting that ballot and ensuring the security of it. But it is particularly important, too, to make sure that we have postal votes arriving in people's postboxes in a timely way so that they can cast that vote and have it returned in time for it to be counted at a reasonable time past election day. We are making some changes to the timing that the VEC may deliver or post declaration and ballot packs to postal voters, making it so that they can do it as soon as practicable and may do so before those early and mobile voting processes commence, which is usually in that week or so after the nominations have closed.

It is particularly important when we are looking at our elections, and particularly at some of the things that we saw in the 2022 election around party names and logos. We will tighten restrictions on party names and logo registrations. We will extend the prohibition on names that are overly similar to registered party names to take into account different abbreviations and acronyms for those parties.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Construction industry

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Caulfield proposing the following matter of public importance:

> That this house condemns the Allan Labor government's failure to address corruption and organised crime on Big Build sites, resulting in $15 billion in waste, and affirms the need for a comprehensive plan to enforce the law, find the money and stop the rorts.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:01): We now know that the Allan Labor government is a corrupt government. We have seen their signature project, the Big Build, become the big bill – the big bill which has extended to $15 billion of taxpayers money literally thrown down the drain. If you wondered for a minute what $15 billion would bring: if we stood here today and took $15 billion worth of $100 bills and every second threw one into a fireplace, we would be standing here for five years; that is how long it would take to burn $15 billion. But this government has burnt it literally in years and has completely wasted taxpayers money.

This government can laugh about it on the backbench – wasting taxpayers money. Already they are up and about laughing at the fact that taxpayers money has literally just been thrown down the drain, because we know Labor does not care when it comes to wasting taxpayers money. They have got good form in doing this, and we have seen it with this huge corruption scandal with the CFMEU and the Big Build. This Premier should hang her head in shame, because for years she has gone around and cut ribbons, put on the hard hat and said 'Look what we're building in Victoria.'

Today it was reaffirmed, because we spoke about the corruption on the Big Build sites, and you know what the Premier said and others said? 'You know what, that's okay. We're building things.' Is it okay, if somebody does something that is corrupt, to say, 'Well, you know what, that's okay.' Is it okay if you are a doctor and you are dishing out cocaine on the side while you are doing other things? That is not okay. What would happen in that situation? They would be locked up. What about on the Big Build sites? How about locking up some of those CFMEU mates?

Do you know why we do not have the same kind of justice in Victoria? When the ordinary Victorian does something wrong like speeding and gets caught, they get a fine for it. Why doesn't the same law apply when it comes to the CFMEU Big Build building sites? Why? Because this government is in bed with some of these bikies and their donations. We have seen the donations linked to this. There is a financial link, and the government has not done their job of investigation. We have been calling for a royal commission. We have two-thirds of Victorians calling for further investigation and a royal commission according to a poll today. Everybody wants a further investigation or royal commission except one group, and that is Jacinta Allan and her government. This Premier is hiding because she knows she is responsible for a government that is corrupt and absolutely connected with the CFMEU and her union mates. When we have seen the horrific situation that was revealed by Geoffrey Watson SC when he said, on the sites, in terms of bikies, drugs, strippers, women being used on Big Build sites.

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: The government goes, 'Oh, here we go,' as if there is nothing to hide. 'Here we go. It's not a problem.' Well, I tell you what, government: you have done nothing about it. And this government again –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly. Members will be removed. Member for Tarneit, I note you are on the speaking list. If you wish to remain in the chamber, I would sit quietly if I were you.

David SOUTHWICK: The minister at the table, the Minister for Veterans, says we should be referring to Victoria Police. We have had the highest law officer in the state, the Attorney-General, who initially gave evidence in this chamber saying, 'Yes, referred to Victoria Police,' and then had to give a personal explanation because in fact the Attorney-General did not refer something to Victoria Police. So again, if the highest lawmaker in the state is not following the Premier's orders of referring to Victoria Police, then I do not know what is going on, because, I tell you what, we do not know what is going on under this government. It is corruption and scandal after scandal, and I will tell you what, there is one group that is missing out, and that is the Victorian taxpayer. That is who is missing out, the Victorian taxpayer, because when you allow corruption to happen then unfortunately people have no confidence – zero confidence. As we heard the member for Brighton quite rightly say, it is not just allowing it but it is encouraging it to happen.

Why is this happening? Why is the government refusing every investigation that we have proposed? Everything that we have heard anyone say about this in terms of following the money, in terms of the member for Sandringham putting a cop on the beat or putting a corruption enforcement watchdog on these sites – all of it has been knocked back by this government. They do not want follow-the-money powers. They do not want to strengthen IBAC's powers. They do not want to be able to ensure they can follow the money. They are in fact reducing IBAC's money – reducing their money – to give them less opportunity to follow the corruption. And why? Because of the connections. You have to draw the link. Because when we are seeing donations from the CFMEU to the Labor Party, there is a definite link. We have seen that over $1.3 million in tainted money has been connected to the CFMEU. We have seen again that there are a whole lot of these additional tentacles that have been extended in this – not just the donations that have come from the CFMEU to the Labor Party but now all of these additional labour hire workers and labour groups. It was investigated and reported on by Geoffrey Watson that there is a deep set of corruption, of financial benefit, that has been happening to get these projects signed off, to be able to work on these sites.

Steve McGhie interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Member for Melton, we know that legitimate labour hire firms have not been allowed to work on the Big Build sites, and miraculously, those that are connected to financial benefit and to the CFMEU have been able to get those jobs. What is the benefit, and why isn't the government investigating it? Why does the government say, 'Not our problem. Leave it to Victoria Police'? Well, it is the government's problem. It is the government's problem to fix, and the government is not fixing it because they are absolutely up to their eyeballs in this corruption – up to their eyeballs in it. We will not stop until we finally get to the bottom of this. The Liberal–Nationals have said that we will have a royal commission and we will not stop until everyone that is connected is investigated – even many of the backbenchers that may be receiving donations from the CFMEU and many of the ministers that may have received donations from some of the companies connected to these labour hire firms. Who knows who has been promised – who knows who has had contributions to their funds going into all of this? This is the Labor Party at its best – scandal after scandal. When there is an opportunity for a free feed and when there is an opportunity to get themselves into the honeypot of the dough, the Labor Party are just both hands in – head in, the whole lot in – taking everything they possibly can. And again, taxpayers bear the brunt. What has the member for Point Cook done for the $15 billion in his electorate? Nothing.

Mathew Hilakari: On a point of order, Speaker, certainly we are building Central Avenue and Point Cook Road currently. If the member for Caulfield has an allegation –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member for Point Cook?

Mathew Hilakari: he should take it to police, on relevance.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

David SOUTHWICK: Again, there is clearly something that this government is covering up. Members like the member for Point Cook do not like it when we call them out in terms of the corruption that has been happening under their watch. This is corruption that has been happening under their watch. The Attorney misled the Parliament the other day.

Nathan Lambert: On a point of order, Speaker, you will be aware that standing order 118 protects individual members from serious allegations of corruption. If the speaker on their feet wants to go in that direction, they should do so by substantive motion.

The SPEAKER: I do remind members about imputations on individual members of Parliament. Be very, very mindful of that during this MPI, member for Caulfield.

David SOUTHWICK: These are again frivolous points of order because this government are continuing to cover up the corruption that has been happening under their watch. We saw today on the front page of the *Herald Sun*, 'We want the truth.' We want to know what has been going on in terms of the truth. It is very simple.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: If the member for Pascoe Vale does not like the *Herald Sun*, the *Age* today on the front page warns of corruption in the Big Build authority. The government can laugh – it does not matter what media outlet you use, they continue to laugh because they just think taxpayers money being wasted is a big joke. They do not care.

This government does not care about what the $15 billion would do for taxpayers: $5000 for every household, 130,000 additional police officers, 176,000 nurses, 150,000 teachers, 13 Frankston hospitals. Again, in terms of all of this, a government that is struggling to put more cops on the beat, struggling to put more nurses and doctors on the beat, struggling to pay teachers what they should be paid, is happy to literally spend $15 billion on corruption and cover-up. And why? If the government were serious, they would follow the money and get it back – that is what taxpayers want. They want their money back. It should not go to bikies. It should not go to dealers on these worksites. Again, this is a government that says they stand up for workers. Well, every worker that I know says they want a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Fair days under Labor? Not with the corruption we are seeing here. When you are seeing wads of cash being taken by the CFMEU and their bikies and Labor say that is okay, how do you explain that to hardworking workers that miss out and have their taxpayer money taken off them? How do you explain that? How do you explain the fact that hardworking taxpayers go to a job every day, work their guts out to get their pay and, by the same token, are not part of the CFMEU mates on the Big Build getting this kind of corruption kickback? That is okay under Labor. Do you know why? Because there are two rules: one rule for their CFMEU bikie mates and another rule for everybody else. That is how Labor rolls. Labor is corrupt, and we are now starting to see it. The wheels are starting to fall off, and they will come up and try and take protection and try and take points of order because they know they cannot handle the truth.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I do believe that you are holding a party document. I ask you to –

James Newbury: This is actually my document.

The SPEAKER: It has got party information on it.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Caulfield has just made a very serious allegation of corruption, and I do not believe you can do that in normal debate. It has to be under a substantive motion.

The SPEAKER: If it was against a particular individual member, no. But it is fine.

David SOUTHWICK: Again frivolous points of order because Labor cannot handle the truth. This is a corrupt government that has taken $15 billion and literally thrown it up against the wall. It is

a complete disgrace, and what would we do about it? We would have a royal commission, we would get to the bottom of it, we would enforce the law with corruption consequences, we would boot bikies off building worksites, we would not allow bikies to continue –

Anthony Cianflone: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 122, 'Members not to read newspapers', says:

> It is inappropriate for a member to read a newspaper or similar large documents in his or her place other than when addressing the Chair.

I put to you that he has been reading from a *Herald Sun* article and an *Age* article.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Speaker, I was reading from our plan to clean up crime in Victoria, and that is what we will be doing.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caulfield is warned. We will not have party documents in the house, and that applies to everyone.

David SOUTHWICK: This is a corrupt government that takes $15 billion of taxpayers money and wastes it, and again, Victorian taxpayers are worse off. If this government were serious about this, they would give the powers to follow the money, they would agree to a royal commission and they would get to the bottom of all of this. We know that Labor will not do it, because Labor cannot handle the truth, and again, you lot are all corrupt.

Michaela Settle: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Caulfield just referred to the Speaker as corrupt.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to just calm down a little bit. It is not okay to refer to people, whether they be members or the Speaker, in disparaging ways.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:17): I will take the temperature down a bit. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon. Actually, no, it does not give me great pleasure, to be honest. I was pretty surprised when the MPI came through yesterday. I was not surprised at its content. It is the same dross, the same garbage that they have been rolling with for a couple of weeks, when they manage to stay on message in question time. It is the same sort of stuff that they have been rolling out. What I was surprised at is that they let the member for Caulfield kick off an MPI, being the lightweight that he is. I mean, 8 minutes in he was dead in the water, reading a newspaper and playing on his iPad.

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Tarneit about talking about members of Parliament in disparaging ways. I will not remind you again. If you do it again, I will sit you down.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Caulfield! Member for Eureka, you are warned.

Dylan WIGHT: I listened to you shout at clouds for 15 minutes. The government –

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, he is referring to the Speaker – 'listening to you shouting at the clouds.'

The SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, if you cannot speak to the MPI, you can leave the chamber.

Dylan WIGHT: I was just getting to it, Speaker, thank you. The government's response to what we have seen in recent weeks through stories in the *Age* from Nick McKenzie and on *60 Minutes* has been solid and has been exactly what it should be. Criminal activity on building sites in Victoria – anywhere in Victoria – is not acceptable, and if that is happening, then matters should be referred to Victoria Police and should be referred to the relevant agencies to be dealt with. Now, this government, in response to these allegations, in response to these reports, has taken strong action. We have introduced new laws giving police greater powers to deal with bikies and organised criminals. We now have a tougher labour hire watchdog. Let us remember that it was this government that brought

in the labour hire commissioner. It was this government that did that to make sure that, not just on construction sites but everywhere, labour hire companies are registered and are doing what they should be doing. There is a protected complaints pathway with criminal offences for threatening whistleblowers, something that is obviously incredibly important in this space when we are talking, potentially, about organised crime figures. There have been 70 criminal charges laid. Seventy criminal charges laid is not insignificant, that is incredibly significant. The Labour Hire Authority, which we created, has cancelled 126 construction company licences. That is swift, decisive and real action. We are not into just coming in here and saying a bunch of words just to rile the public up. It is all about politics for those opposite. It always has been, and it always will be.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, I warned the member for Tarneit about interjecting when he is on the speaking list. I make the same warning to you.

Dylan WIGHT: I cannot wait to listen to that contribution! That is swift and decisive action. We are not about politics. If there are allegations of criminal behaviour on construction sites anywhere, then they should be referred to the relevant authorities, whether that be Victoria Police or the Labour Hire Authority or any other authority for that matter, and they will be dealt with swiftly.

To go to some of the member for Caulfield's contribution, his 15-minute contribution, he sort of rambled on for a bit. But to stand there with a straight face and go to things like donations – I mean, how did the Madafferis treat the member for Bulleen at dinner, hey? Like, to go to that sort of stuff with us – I mean the opposition would not know integrity if it was staring them in the face, and they have the gall to come into this place with an MPI like this to insert government corruption and to look members on the government benches in the face and, frankly, call them corrupt. I mean, the gall to do that is something that I have never seen before. I understand why they are a little bit edgy today for a couple of reasons. I get it.

Another thing that we have done is establish an independent review into this entire situation, and we have committed that we will carry out every single recommendation. I had the opportunity to read another review last night, the review into the Liberal Party's federal campaign.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit will come back to the MPI.

Dylan WIGHT: Indeed I will come back to the MPI. At the core of this MPI is the dysfunction and the rabble of those opposite. That is at the core of this. To come into this place with this MPI, stare us dead in the eye and try to talk to us about integrity, it just shows what a rabble that those opposite are. It –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker: relevance.

The SPEAKER: He is comparing and contrasting. An MPI is about a particular thing, though. Member for Tarneit, you might want to read it.

Dylan WIGHT: No, I completely understand. But to come into this place with this MPI shows what a dysfunctional lot they are. I am pretty sure, in that review that I spoke about earlier, which I am not speaking about again, the dysfunction of the Victorian Liberal Party was –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is an abuse of the matter of public importance time. The member is clearly attacking the opposition rather than dealing with the substance of the matter.

The SPEAKER: The MPI is quite a wideranging debate. There is no rule that a member cannot speak about the opposition. Member for Tarneit, I remind you about speaking to the subject matter of the MPI mostly in your contribution.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you for the ruling, Speaker. I thought that I was talking to the MPI and I was talking to the dysfunctionality of the Victorian Liberal Party. It has got everything to do with the MPI. We can go to the contribution of the member for Caulfield. We can just go to the contents of the MPI. For the opposition to come in here and think that this was a good idea shows complete and utter dysfunction. They show it every single day. They show it every single day, and we certainly saw the dysfunction of the Victorian Liberal Party on show at the federal election. We did see that.

As I said, the government has taken swift and decisive action when it comes to the allegations on Victorian construction sites. As I said, we have seen 70 criminal charges laid and 126 labour hire companies have had their licences removed through the authority that this government set up. What we will not do, though, is come in here and be anti-worker – come in here and trash Victorian workers, trash construction workers. We will not do that, unlike the Liberal Party. The member for Caulfield went through what $15 billion could buy you – how many nurses, how many teachers. I mean, it still was not as many as they sacked last time they were in government. They have never met a worker that they do not want to sack, they have never seen an infrastructure project that they do not want to cancel.

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: I am glad you found that funny.

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: East–west link – the flawed project that the former government signed a contract for in caretaker, or was it just before caretaker? The former government did a whole bunch of stuff –

Michaela Settle interjected.

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

Dylan WIGHT: in caretaker in the last government, so I have found out. A couple of precinct structure plans in Tarneit, which are not much good, were signed during caretaker too. Honestly, the audacity of this lot over there to come into this chamber and lecture us on integrity is the most laughable thing that I have seen since I have been elected, and I have seen some funny stuff in this place. This is by far the most laughable.

As I said, the government has absolutely zero tolerance for criminal activity on any of its projects – on any government project, on any infrastructure project, indeed anywhere within our community. That is why Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority now have the powers they need to stamp out that criminal activity on worksites, and as I said, they are using them: 70 people charged, 126 labour hire companies losing their licences. That is not insignificant by any means, but that does not mean that the job is done. We need to make sure that Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority have the powers that they need to be able to stamp out this behaviour. We have seen several arrests, as I said, but we have seen arrests on the news at night, a taskforce doing its job, and we would urge anybody – whether that is people that have been on construction sites or whether that is other people within the community – that has information in respect to these allegations to come forward to the relevant authorities and report it. Essentially that is what we need to do and that is what we need to be focused on. Taskforce Hawk is doing this work and is moving along and being successful given the numbers that I just gave. As I said, I would just urge anybody with information in respect to these allegations to relay it to the relevant authorities.

Those opposite have called for royal commissions, they have called for inquiries, they have called for all manner of different things. All that does is delay justice, delay charges and delay the work that needs to be done by these relevant authorities. Australia had a royal commission into this. I was a relatively new union official at the time. It took two years for that royal commission to conclude and it cost the country $46 million, but this frugal lot over there that like to talk about government debt and government spending would like to spend $46 million on a two-year inquiry when at the end of it I am pretty confident there would be not much of a material outcome.

Instead of more talk, as I said, we have got on with strong action, making sure that Victoria Police and the Labour Hire Authority have the tools that they need to charge anybody that is involved in criminal activity but also to deregister, or take licences away from, any labour hire companies that have been doing the wrong thing on government projects. As I said at the outset of this, it is a pretty laughable MPI for several reasons, which I will not go back into. This government has zero tolerance for any criminal behaviour anywhere in our community, in particular on government worksites, and the actions of this government have been swift, have been real and have resulted in arrests and in companies doing this being unregistered.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:32): It is a pleasure – well, it is not a pleasure – to rise and speak on this issue, because, while the member for Tarneit might call this MPI laughable, the 7 million Victorians do not think that $15 billion of their money going up in smoke is laughable. What I think probably was a little bit laughable about that contribution is I sometimes look at ministers on the other side and wonder how they got to that position. Then I hear a contribution like that from one of the backbench members and I understand exactly how they got to that position, because there was obviously not a lot of competition for it in that respect.

Dylan Wight: How many years have you been a minister for?

Danny O'BRIEN: Same number of years as you, old mate.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals! The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, I ask you to speak through the Chair, and I have already reminded members about imputations.

Danny O'BRIEN: I do need to reflect on some of the statements from the member for Tarneit. We are hearing that the government acted swiftly apparently. I reckon Nick McKenzie from the *Age* would be pretty interested in that response. He has continued to roll out year after year after year more issues with this Big Build, yet this government says it acted swiftly.

To the question of a royal commission, we saw in the papers today how Victorians want a royal commission: 75 per cent of them understand the issue here, and they absolutely would like to see a royal commission. We hear those opposite say we had the royal commission in 2015 and it did not find anything. When did the Big Build start, everybody? The Big Build started after 2015. This matter of public importance, the Watson report, the corruption that we have heard about in the last couple of weeks has occurred on the Big Build site under this Labor government. It is such a facetious argument to say we had a royal commission and it did not do any good. The crooks had not started doing their crook stuff at that point in time. That was the problem.

Then we hear we have got Operation Hawk. Does everybody remember Operation Hawk? Probably not everyone does remember Operation Hawk. I know the Premier did not remember Operation Hawk, because she was on her way to announce Operation Hawk a few months ago and had to be reminded that it had been going for 12 months already. I understand that people on that side had forgotten about Operation Hawk, but they are out there spouting that there have been 70 charges laid. I know a 15-year-old kid in my electorate that has had more than 70 charges laid on him alone. To suggest that 70 charges has somehow cleaned up the entire Big Build is just absurd for this government to be talking about, saying, you know, 'Job's done.'

The other thing that I need to pick the member for Tarneit up on – I am disappointed he is not here, but perhaps a future speaker could enlighten me – is he told the chamber just now that the government has announced an independent review.

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: What is that indeed, member for Brighton. What is this independent review? Has it just been announced by the member for Tarneit? Is this new policy that we are not aware of? Because we certainly have not seen an independent review. I did hear someone mention the Wilson review. That was done and dusted, and jeez, hasn't that cleaned the place up! That has made a huge difference already! It was so quick and dirty that the CFMEU did not even notice that it was happening. They went ahead and have continued to do exactly what they have been doing: funnelling taxpayers money to bikies and criminals and seeing every single Victorian have to pay the consequences of that. And it is not just the consequences of the lost money that has gone from our taxpayer dollars, it is the opportunity cost for every single one of us. I know particularly my rural and regional colleagues will say, 'There are so many things that we have been waiting for this government to spend money on in our electorates, particularly infrastructure, and they haven't happened.' Now we find that $15 billion minimum, according to Geoffrey Watson SC, has just disappeared.

I have been waiting for the government to fund the Sale College replacement, bringing it on to one campus and building a new school. We have got roads in an appalling condition. We have been waiting for the Western Highway project to get underway through the seat of Ripon and out to Lowan – all those areas. I know the member for Mildura, after some floods this week, has probably got a few roads that she needs fixing up. I know the member for Ovens Valley spent – how many years waiting for dialysis chairs at Cobram hospital?

Tim Bull: Still waiting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Still waiting for dialysis chairs. All of these are things that we are desperate for at the West Gippsland Hospital. I see the member for Narracan is here. I actually had the Minister for Health today say 'all the rural and regional hospitals that we've been funding', and when I said 'Where's the money for West Gippsland?' she turned around and showed me her back, not surprisingly, because they have made a commitment to it but it is still not there. Where is the money?

The government stands condemned on the opportunity cost that we have lost because of the corruption that it is overseeing. To have members opposite, like the member for Tarneit, say 'We've acted swiftly and cleaned it all up' is just absurd and appalling. The government wants to cover it up, the Liberals and Nationals want to clean it up. We have a very strong plan that has been announced over the last couple of weeks, and we are still working through it. That includes ensuring that we have a royal commission. As I said, people in Victoria are saying to us that we need a royal commission. We committed two years ago to establishing Construction Enforcement Victoria to actually have a watchdog on the job on those Big Build sites and other sites around the state and to ensure that the rules are being adhered to. Part of that is reinstating the code of practice for the building and construction sector, which was abolished by this government when they came to power in late 2014, to make sure that there is a code of practice, that the law is respected, that corruption does not occur and that taxpayers dollars are not wasted and to have Construction Enforcement Victoria to oversight that and to enforce that code. We attempted to introduce legislation this morning to deal with that. Surprise, surprise, the government opposed that legislation.

Speaking of which, yesterday we moved to give IBAC the follow-the-dollar powers, which are so critical, that it has been asking for years and that the Premier was advised in 2024 that IBAC needed. We again, through the member for Brighton yesterday, introduced legislation. What did the government do? They voted it down – voting with their feet. You can see exactly what their attitude to this stuff is. It is to oppose anything that will actually reveal what has been going on. As I said, going back to that, the government said, 'We acted swiftly.' Well, the Premier in 2024 wrote to IBAC knowing – she must have known or at least should have known – that IBAC did not have the powers to actually investigate this corruption when it comes to third parties. IBAC then wrote back to her and said it did not have the powers. What did the Premier do? Did she change IBAC's powers? Did she look at an alternative method as to a way the government could investigate these allegations of corruption? No, she did nothing.

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: She did not even say that. It was extraordinary that the Premier would come out a few weeks ago and release her original letter to IBAC and not think that perhaps people would ask, 'Then what happened?' The Premier can say she referred this, but she referred it to someone who could not do anything about it, and that is the fallacy of it. Now, as this Parliament tries to clean up the mess and to give IBAC those powers, the government is opposing it.

We have also committed to mandatory criminal background checks to keep bikies and criminals off our government worksites. We know from the 'Building bad' series and from the Geoffrey Watson report that we have seen criminal activity on worksites. Whether that is drug dealing, whether it is standover tactics or whether it is state-sponsored strippers, all of these things have been happening for years now on the Big Build, and the government has done nothing about it.

We have also committed, on top of Construction Enforcement Victoria, to a police taskforce in conjunction with the AFP and the ATO to seize assets and go after the money, to find the money. I think that is one of the things that Victorians are angry about. The corruption is one thing, but it is the scale of it and the $15 billion of taxpayers money that keeps being repeated to us.

We have also committed to new laws to target the crime bigwigs. We know time and time again it is the organised crime bosses who are not addressed properly, and that is why we will do that. That is a simple plan: enforce the law, find the money and stop the rorts. The Liberals and Nationals have got a plan. We are committed to addressing this, we are committed to cleaning up our state and we are committed to cleaning up the Big Build. The Labor government seem only committed to covering it up, because they oppose every step of the way, they minimise everything and they attack the messengers, people like Geoffrey Watson. They stand condemned for the gross waste of Victorian taxpayers dollars.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:42): It was a member of the opposition who allegedly shared a lobster meal at the now defunct Lobster Cave with Mr Madafferi, which is a name a lot of people seemed to have heard before, but I personally had not; maybe I was naive. I had not read his name in the paper and had to do quite a bit of research about that. That leads me to today's MPI. I would not like to echo some of the tinfoil hats, but some people need to do their own research with this. We should be a society that has zero tolerance for criminality. We certainly are a government that have zero tolerance for criminality, and I will talk about that soon. But we should also be inquisitive in this place, and we should interrogate things that we are told to see if they are factual. I believe that with this MPI the coalition probably need to define what they are asking for a little bit more clearly. The proposition is not clear, and it is not clear what it is based on. There are three separate issues that I want to interrogate and pull apart. One is the claim of $15 billion, another is enforcing the law and then following the money and stopping rorts. Let us just look at those separately. I am not offering my opinion here; I am going to offer what other people have said.

We have heard the allegation of $15 billion. I certainly have not seen any evidence to go along with that. I have heard a claim. These claims were in a report and were removed by an administrator because he was not satisfied that they were well founded. From the very beginning it is looking a bit shaky. These claims have also been questioned by other experts. For example, David Hayward, who is an emeritus professor in public policy with RMIT University, I believe, stated that he did not understand why Watson went down the 'exaggeration path'; that was in the *Guardian* on 17 February. He also said he did not see any reason to believe the criminality was as financially significant as the redacted Watson chapter suggests. He said overruns were largely due to increased materials and equipment costs and other issues with particular projects.

The economist Saul Eslake, who I think is a former Kennett adviser, said the engineering construction implicit price deflator – which, for the uneducated, is a measure of price growth used in the industry by the ABS – shows costs in Victoria went up by 36.8 per cent between December 2014 and September

2025. From the outset, not everyone believes this claim, and therefore the aim of following money in this MPI would be difficult without some kind of evidence that that claim is true. Again, if we are going to base an MPI on it, this claim should at least be able to stand one day of interrogation in the media if not at least two. I also want to know what the goal of this MPI is when it says 'enforcing the law', because as I see it here today, and no-one has yet convinced me otherwise, the only tool that can do that is actually already doing it. If the intention is to investigate and prosecute criminals and get them out of the industry, that is happening right now. If we are talking about royal commissions, a retrospective review like a royal commission does not have the powers to do that.

I guess what it comes down to is: do those opposite want to read a report or do they want to see people arrested? Do they want to see criminals put behind bars and prosecuted for their crimes? Do they want to read a review in three years or do they want action now? That is what it comes down to for me; it is fairly simple. We have already seen with the police 70-plus charges laid and 126 licences for construction builders cancelled. An independent review has been established, the Wilson review, and we are carrying out every recommendation. We have got a tougher labour hire watchdog, wider ranging powers and serious penalties as well. I think there is a school of thought within the group of people I have been asking about this – people who are lawyers and barristers – that when the opposition are referring to a royal commission they believe the existing institutions are failing and the police are not doing their job. Again, I am happy to have my mind changed on that, but I think the police are doing their job, and I certainly back the police and so does this government. Those bodies that are appropriate and empowered to investigate are Victoria Police, the federal police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. They can execute search warrants. They can charge offenders. They can prosecute criminal conduct. And the truth is that a royal commission cannot do that. If we are sitting here today and the proposition is that we should be cleaning up this industry right now, the only action then is to enforce the law via the police, prosecute criminals, and it does not seem to be what we are talking about today. That concerns me, because if criminal behaviour exists, which we have seen it does, the fastest path to accountability is via the police investigating and prosecution, not a multiyear inquiry. We know that royal commissions take years. What we need is action now, and we have seen that action, and it has been put on the record by various speakers before me.

There is also something that has been raised that I found quite interesting, which was the risk of politicising the justice process. What I would take that as is royal commissions and inquiries like that becoming political theatre. Critics would argue that criminal matters should be determined by courts, not public inquiries, and what can happen is these two things running together can prejudice future trials. Royal commissions hold very public hearings. Witnesses give evidence under oath, documents are released and media coverage is intense, and what that can do is influence jurors, and the accused may not receive a fair trial. Evidence can also be exposed before police use it. Royal commissions publish documents straightaway, I believe. They reveal investigative pathways. They can warn suspects and allow stories to be coordinated before police have the ability to do their job. I would also say that royal commissions can force people to give evidence even if it may incriminate them, however the law provides protections, and there are going to be issues there as well. It creates complex grounds for legal workarounds, and it means that prosecutors can sometimes not rely on detailed admissions made in those inquiries.

Those parallel processes between police investigations or federal police investigations and a royal commission or another inquiry running simultaneously can create a tension between that investigative transparency and criminal procedure fairness, and police may need in their investigations secrecy, controlled interviews and carefully sequenced evidence in their investigations. There is also the issue of trial by media. We never want to white-ant the police in their investigations through a trial by media, running the risk of things like reputational damage before guilt is even proven, putting pressure on prosecutors and also putting pressure on judges and courts as well. I think what we all should agree on in this house is that if crimes have been committed, the place to test that evidence is in a courtroom, it is not in a televised royal commission hearing. If we want action now, if crimes have been committed, the place to deal them is a court of law. The royal commission does not put anyone in jail. It does not

have the power to do that; police investigations do. As I previously said, we have seen those police investigations lay 70 charges. We have seen licences suspended. This government has made new laws giving police greater powers with things like firearm prohibition orders.

There is a lot of change happening to clean up this construction industry. The Labour Hire Authority has cancelled 126 company licences, which I think is substantial, but we see the legal side of it in the investigative process with VicPol. We also see some other aspects and initiatives that the government has taken and put in place. I would really hate to think that anyone opposite wanted to see this as an ongoing issue for three or four years without anything happening. I think what we are aiming for today with this MPI is to make sure criminals are put behind bars.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Brighton, I remind members that party-political material is not allowed in the chamber.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:52): I rise in support of the member for Caulfield's matter of public importance, an important matter of public importance, in fact the first substantive way this house has dealt with what Victorians know is the worst corruption scandal, the worst instance of corruption, this state has ever seen – a $15 billion corruption of taxpayers money. Victorians have looked on since allegations of a $15 billion corruption have occurred, and they have been watching as the government has been talking down the corruption and has been attacking those who want to blow the whistle to it. They have been watching, and what they have said, I think, is they want to know what has happened. They want to know what has occurred. Allegations have been put forward, and Victorians rightfully want to know what is occurring on these government sites. It is a very fair question.

I think Victorians also want to know how much it has cost them, and the Premier has consistently said it is not the number 15. The Premier has confirmed that corruption has occurred but said repeatedly it is not the number 15. So Victorians of course are asking, 'Well, what's the number? It's our money, Premier – what's the number?' The Premier says, 'We don't want to know. We don't want to know as a government what's happening. We know something's going wrong. We know that corruption is occurring. We don't want to know what, in detail, is happening, and we certainly don't want to know how much of your money it's cost.' Well, I think Victorians have said, 'Not good enough.' Though I would certainly caution against following public polling as a pastime, you can certainly see today three out of four Victorians say they want to see action on corruption.

Tim Richardson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, you may not have been in the chamber earlier when I warned members who were on the speaking list to be very, very careful.

James NEWBURY: They want to see action, and so do we. At the end of the day – and I make this point repeatedly – every dollar this government spends was first earned by a Victorian through their hard work and sweat. This government did not get this money through some imaginary money tree or earn it themselves. They certainly did not earn it themselves – they took it off Victorians. They took it away from Victorians, and we have seen $15 billion or more lost to corruption. Victorians just want accountability. That is why we have said we must have a royal commission, and that is what the Liberals and Nationals will do. We will chase down every single dollar and we will find every criminal. That is the proposition we are putting to the Victorian people. After the next election, because I see no world where this government acts on the greatest corruption scandal this state has ever seen, every Victorian can be assured we will hold a royal commission, we will chase down every dollar and we will find every criminal. Why? Because we will hold them to account. We will hold every criminal to account.

What we have seen over recent weeks is a shocking, shocking set of allegations, met only with an even more shocking response from a government. We have seen ministers attack experts for calling out what is occurring. We have seen a Premier hide behind a fig leaf of saying nothing other than 'I'm not going to say anything other than if there's an allegation to be put then put it to the police' to the point

that she shuts down journalists from talking. Then we discover that the Attorney-General did not put allegations that were put to her to the police, after advising the house that that is what had happened, which forced the Attorney-General to come into this place and give a personal explanation. It is astonishing. I have seen very few personal explanations, because they are rare. I certainly have never seen an Attorney be forced to give a personal explanation. It just goes to show, though, how the government is behaving on these issues.

Today we asked the Premier in question time about links to government contracts in companies owned by or linked with Mick Gatto. The minister responsible for much of the Big Build, the now Premier, simply did not answer the question and said, 'Refer it off to another agency. Refer it off to another authority.' Can you believe that questions about one of the most notorious names in modern Victorian history were put to a Premier – someone who, by the way, thinks the Premier is a good person; a mate it might seem, I do not know – and the Premier's response was, 'I don't want to know. I don't want to know. I'm not going to check. I'm not going to let people know.' Well, I suspect money is going into Mick Gatto's pocket, and I do not think that he is the only one. I think it is all going to become clear.

We have a plan to not only clean up corruption by way of a royal commission. We have announced a number of policies and moved two bills already this week to try and do so, including one to give the chief anti-corruption agency the power it needs, because the anti-corruption agency has been calling for stronger powers. The Premier released a letter recently as some kind of fig leaf of defence that she has acted – 'I wrote to IBAC.' She never told anybody that two weeks later IBAC wrote back and said it did not have the powers to do anything. Whoops, that was a mistake, wasn't it? I will tell you what, I bet her media office got a flogging for that one. No-one checked what the response was. The response was 'We need the powers.' I would say to every Victorian: yesterday every Labor member of Parliament voted against our bill to give IBAC the powers they need – every Labor member. Remember that, Victoria: every Labor member.

Today we moved a bill to try and clean up these worksites with a proper oversight body, as should be the case. And again every Labor member voted against it. We have announced other provisions to clean up worksites. We want to make sure criminals are off worksites. It seems like an obvious measure, one that clearly the government does not support.

Tim Richardson interjected.

James NEWBURY: The government members are saying we would not have any worksites if we got criminals off them. That may be the case under a Labor government. I take up the member's interjection. Under this government there would not be any Big Build sites if you removed criminals from them. I take them at their word.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: That is the point. We have a plan to clean up these sites, because Victorians deserve it. Victorians deserve a state that is clean of crime and corruption. That is why Jess Wilson and our team have a plan to clean this state up. I can assure every Victorian as you are looking on and seeing no action from this government, obfuscation from this government, dodging, ducking, weaving and deflection from this government, after November, if you elect a coalition government, you will see a state that is cleaned up with a government that wants to clean it up and will clean it up.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:02): Goodness me, what a performance that was. I know the member for Brighton was not here before 2018, but what absolute hyperventilating from a party that had the biggest PR scandal ever with 'lobster with a mobster' from the member for Bulleen. I mean, the irony of the red-faced performance by the member for Brighton with the frontbench performer who sat down at the now closed Lobster Cave with all the gangsters around the table taking their funds and their donations. The gall of the member for Brighton to stand here after the *Age* did a massive exposé that could have only been leaked by the Liberals themselves – the internal hit job on

the member for Bulleen. The gall of the member for Brighton to conclude that they have some sort of standard and integrity is absolutely astonishing.

Where were they when the Wilson review was going on? Where were these experts who come from the flock of the 'lobster with a mobster' crew? Where were they? Because those eight recommendations that were put in have been implemented. That independent review that they have been calling for, that was undertaken, that was swiftly announced by the Premier, that was delivered with full force and vigour and has seen reforms in our state. It has done a significant amount to clean up our construction industry, with federal oversight from an administrator as well. That is decisive action. That is not waiting three to five years for a royal commission to placate whatever political base they are going after.

The member for Brighton made a fair point. He said they look at polls from time to time and they are looking at polls at the moment. I had a look at the polls this morning, and I saw that when the member for Berwick was the Leader of the Opposition their polling was at 41. If opposition officers are looking now, because you know they are tuning in across at Spring Street, if they are looking in from their offices now, how does 27 look? How does that look right now, pleading with the One Nation far-right crew? How does it look to be placating the Leader of One Nation Pauline Hanson, who says herself she hates Melbourne and hates Victoria? That is right now the base that they are placating. If the member for Brighton goes near polling, they are literally in free fall. They are falling through the floor right now, and they do not know what they are anymore or what they stand for. This is just another attempt to grab the headline from either the *Herald Sun* or Sky after dark without any factual basis for what we see right here.

We have had reviews, we have had oversights, we have had federal royal commissions that cost tens of millions of dollars, maybe even more – into a nine-figure sum – that did not lay any charges and basically for two years ran around the countryside. We have already acted. We have already taken decisive action with the Wilson review and the additional strengthening requirements that we have been putting in place. That is what decisive action looks like. That is what standing up and showing leadership looks like. It is worth remembering the nuance in this discussion, because the entire cost that has been talked about and the lines that have been used by the opposition go straight to the heart of workers – the 144,000 CFMEU construction workers. The organisation is in administration, but they are still working in construction and on projects. So when you tarnish every construction worker, when you go after every person that works in construction, you are going directly after their outcomes, their wages and their conditions. That is irrefutable when you look at that and the actions by the opposition, because we know absolutely what they would do to working people time and time again. They had reviews when they came into government under Baillieu and Napthine. Remember they reviewed everything for three years, changed their leader, did nothing, had no big build and had no projects, and then they put some stickers on the ground out at Southern Cross station. You might remember that was their big build. They had sticker contracts at Southern Cross. All these amazing tourists got out. They walked to the edge of the platform, and they nearly found themselves in Tottenham, because the stickers said the airport was out that way. That was the level of big build and construction that was going on at the time.

Some of the things that have been exposed in the reports and the absolutely outrageous behaviour are something that we absolutely condemn in the strongest possible terms, and our Premier has done that directly. The notion that there has not been action does not stack up in fact, but do not let facts get in the way of a Liberal Party discussion. They never feature; facts do not matter. Facts do not worry anyone on that side of this place, because we have seen 70 criminal charges already laid by Victoria Police's Taskforce Hawk. So the demonising of Victoria Police members in saying that nothing has happened is once again punching down on the people in our emergency services and police. Those opposite have form. When it suits them, they will undermine a police commissioner. They will go after our police services –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The Leader of the Nationals is like a fish jumping on the hook itself without bait. In comes spinner. Here we go. The Leader of the Nationals is right here undermining police. There have been 70 charges laid, and there have been 126 construction licences cancelled as part of the Labour Hire Authority. I know that those opposite literally see Sky after dark and Paul Murray gives them their thinking and talking points – their thoughts for the day. They do not get up at 5 am. They literally do not get going until 8 or 8:30. They read the clips, and then they go, 'We've got our doorstops for the day.' That is literally how question time runs, because there is no systemisation, there is no thread of a tactic, there is not a pinch of salt of strategy or tactic in their performance at all. You see those talking points because you would know that the Wilson review happened. You might provide some commentary. You might put forward some notions of why the eight recommendations agreed in full and implemented that have led to these outcomes, that have strengthened the safety and protection of workers and outcomes, is an interesting point.

But there is an even more important point. We have got the member for Sandringham here, and it is almost like this was part of my speech – it was meant to happen. It is converging right here. The member for Sandringham is a massive fan of the former Premier and Treasurer of New South Wales, are you not, member for Sandringham – Dom Perrottet, who was the former New South Wales Treasurer and Premier? People might know that person. He has done a couple of events for the member for Sandringham over time, maybe one or two – a big fan, the member for Sandringham. Well, New South Wales cost escalations on construction projects – big build projects, because they did a few tunnels, they did a few major projects – were more than Victoria and more than the national average. So Victoria and New South Wales were under the construction escalation costs compared to the rest of the nation, which was around about 40 per cent. Victoria was around 38 per cent; New South Wales, 39. I am just wondering if the member for Sandringham is asking for Dom Perrottet and Gladys Berejiklian to be in a royal commission, some of the heroes of the Liberals. Wouldn't they be up and about if they had a Gladys or a Dom just walking around the chamber and the corridors here? Wouldn't that be nice? I know some of the former ghosts of the member for Gippsland South, the Leader of the Nationals, like Barnaby Joyce. I do not want to rake over anything at the moment. One Nation's leader might be running for prime minister. But just going there makes them a bit nervous, if Barnaby walks across the Murray. They are just a bit edgy, these Nationals – a bit edgy. You know they were talking a big game that they would take out everything and they would run into other seats. Now they have just come in a little bit with all their hubris, because One Nation's on a tear and taking them to pieces.

The member for Sandringham has got a drink of water. He has got the notes ready. I am just wondering if the member for Sandringham has the same contention that Dom Perrottet, his absolute hero – I think he would love to be like Dom in that frame – or Gladys Berejiklian, maybe a hero of the member for Kew, should be up in a royal commission. Are they saying the same things about those former Liberal Premiers in New South Wales? No, they are not, and there we go; we have belled the cat.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Come in, spinner, the Leader of the Nationals. Is he suggesting that –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am not expecting you to give me an elephant stamp for this, other than to note that I am being entirely consistent with the standing orders in not interjecting on the rubbish coming from the member for Mordialloc's mouth at the minute, and I would like you to note that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Your point of order is?

Brad Rowswell: I would simply like you to notice I am behaving myself.

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

Tim RICHARDSON: I think there is an element of truth in what he says there – rubbish – the inverse of what, actually, he says. He is a very big fan of Dom. But no-one is saying that there suddenly

needs to be a royal commission in New South Wales, who had worse cost escalations on construction projects than Victoria. It was said by Dom Perrottet at the time he was Treasurer that a part of doing business on the eastern seaboard was cost escalations and you have to barrel through, you have to charge through, and get these projects done. That is what was said by a hero Liberal Premier that has done nothing other than attend a fundraiser for the member for Sandringham and give him a pump-up.

When you look at that, you go, 'What is this really about?' and we have belled the cat here. We have actually figured out what this is really about. It is about populism and politics right there – a three- to five-year royal commission when charges are being laid and when the Labour Hire Authority has cancelled 126 construction company licences. We are not trying to get a political grab. We are acting while they are protecting their Liberal mates in other jurisdictions and calling for things that they will not call for anywhere else. Those are the absolute facts here. People have been charged. Contracts have been cancelled for labour hire. And that is leadership on behalf of this Premier.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (17:12): There are a couple of things to clear up from the member for Mordialloc's contribution. If the member for Mordialloc is suggesting that the former Liberal Premiers of New South Wales – Perrottet, Berejiklian and Baird – have anything at all in common with the former Premier of this state, Andrews, and the current Premier of this state, Allan, well, he is more deluded than perhaps his colleagues, by the look of their faces, give him credit for, frankly. There is absolutely no similarity between the achievements of those giants of political contribution in our country and the failure of leadership that we have seen in this state for almost 12 years, and thank goodness in November this year Victorians will have an opportunity to put an end to it once and for all and for the benefit of every single Victorian.

The assertion the member for Mordialloc made that having the position we have formed to rid this state of crime and rid this state of corruption, especially on Big Build projects in this state, somehow means that we do not give a stuff about workers could not be further from the truth. A royal commission in this state, the establishment of Construction Enforcement Victoria and giving IBAC follow-the-money powers, in my view and in our view, would in fact protect the rights and the dignity of construction workers in this state. I am very exercised by this. The assertion that we do not give a stuff about workers could not be further from the truth. Our target is not those hardworking Victorians who are doing their very best to provide for themselves, to provide for their families, to pay their increasing school bills, to pay their power bills and to figure out how the hell they are going to deal with another mortgage increase because the federal Treasurer cannot get a grip on inflation. We actually want to support those people, and we do support those people. The best way to support those hardworking Victorian workers on those construction sites is to have a royal commission to get to the bottom of –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: Correct, Leader of the Nationals – to weed out the crooks, to rid our state of those crooks, to rid our state of crime, to rid our state of corruption and to run things in a way that they should be run. It should not be a 'getting a deck of cards and tossing it into the air and hoping it all lands in one place' circumstance. No, there should be order. This appeals to the conservative within me. There should be order, and there is not under this government. There has not been order in this state since the election of this government. If it was not so tragic and if it was not so serious, it would be absolutely and utterly laughable, but it is not. It is not laughable at all. $15 billion has been rorted – Victorian taxpayer dollars. Hardworking families have contributed with the highest taxes of any state in the nation. Victorian families, Victorians around the place, are experiencing the highest property taxes, the highest business taxes, the highest unemployment and the highest debt. This is serious stuff. We clearly need a change of government.

This is why earlier today I sought to introduce a bill to enable Construction Enforcement Victoria. This is why we need to establish a code of conduct on Victorian building sites, because when Labor were first elected almost 12 years ago, one of the first acts of that Labor government under the

leadership of the former Premier – when the current Premier was a cabinet minister sitting at the table, contributing to the decisions that were made and contributing to the decisions that have led to crime and corruption running rampant on Victorian Big Build sites at the hands of this government being funded by innocent, hardworking Victorian taxpayers – was to scrap the building industry code that was established by the former coalition government. It was one of their first acts. It was good enough – it is good enough, present tense – for the New South Wales Labor government to have a building construction code, so why not in Victoria? What are they afraid of? We will do the right thing by Victorians. We will do the right thing, not just by Victorian taxpayers, not just by those head contractors to give them the certainty that they desperately need but by the workers on those sites that deserve to be respected by their government and deserve to have the dignity of work implied in the actions of their government without being subjected to the criminality and the corruption that we have experienced and that we know has been taking place on Big Build sites since this government was elected. Every Victorian deserves so much more than what this government has offered.

This government is not interested in cleaning this up. It is not in their DNA at all. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, IBAC, the independent integrity watchdog, has been calling on this Labor government for more resources and for greater powers for some time. During the last parliamentary term, between 2018 and 2022, I had the privilege of serving with a number of other members present in the chamber as deputy chair of the Parliament's Integrity and Oversight Committee. In that role, we heard time and time again evidence from IBAC, who said to us, 'We don't have the powers that we need. We don't have the funding that we need, and we need more.' I heard them, and it is quite clear that the government did not. There was recently a call in a parliamentary committee report – not a partisan political report, a parliamentary committee report – produced by the Integrity and Oversight Committee, of which the member for Brunswick is the chair and the member for Mildura is a member. That parliamentary committee called for follow-the-money powers for IBAC. They called for it. IBAC called for it. Yesterday in this place we introduced a bill to give IBAC those very powers, and every member of this government, every member of the Labor government, voted against it. They would not even enable the debate to be had. Our democracy is stronger when ideas are discussed and ideas are debated. Deputy Speaker, you know that and I know that. We should know that, but quite clearly we do not, because at first pass, at the sniff of just introducing a bill to have a conversation, to have a debate to expand IBAC's power, something they have been calling for and a parliamentary committee has been calling for, the Labor government did not want to even consider the concept.

I have been asking myself a question. A question I have been asking myself is why, why, why does this government not want to progress with what is right? Why? Why does this government not want to progress with a royal commission, with giving IBAC the powers that it is calling for, with establishing Construction Enforcement Victoria and restoring integrity back onto the Big Build sites? And we have our answer. As the *Herald Sun* reported on Sunday 21 February:

> The state opposition has taken aim at $1.5m in "tainted money" poured into ALP coffers by the disgraced Victorian CFMEU last term, as it ramps up calls for a royal commission.

That is right: between 2018 and 2022 the Victorian branch of the CFMEU contributed close to $1.5 million to the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party. So I will tell you why they do not want a royal commission and they do not want to strengthen the powers of IBAC, because as soon as they give just a millimetre of acknowledgement to do what is right, what they actually do is open up a Pandora's box of problems for Premier Allan. That is exactly what they do. They are running a protection racket. They will continue running a protection racket, because it is all about them and not about Victorians.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:22): Listening to people discussing this matter of public importance, I think we really need to recognise that at the heart of what we are talking about is workers. Listening to what has been said today, I could not help but think about the different workers and family members from Big Build sites that I have met around my electorate – for example, the office manager

at a local school whose husband worked operating cranes in the Metro Tunnel and how proud she was that he was involved in building this infrastructure that is transforming our state. Just this Saturday at netball one of the netball mums was late. She was hustling to get the kids there because her husband had left early to go down and work in Mordialloc on the train there. She said, 'It's a long day but it's good money.' He is working hard and his whole family is wrapping around to keep life functioning and to support him to bring that money in for the family. And my brother-in-law, who has left and headed down to the south-west coast for a week or two to do fencing work on the Big Build, leaving behind his partner and their two kids, who have special needs, and all the extra work and difficulty that entails, and he is not doing it for fun; he is doing it because it brings in good money for the family, and that is money that they need with all the extra costs that they have. When the new elephant enclosure opened at Werribee Zoo, my whole extended family went down to see that, not to see the elephants but to see the enclosure, because my brother-in-law helped build the fence. He has done a good job. Onya, Wayne.

I think about the apprentice formworker that I met, helping to build a new bridge over the Plenty River at the Bridge Inn Road upgrade. In my office, in pride of place, is a photo from that same upgrade, the Bridge Inn Road upgrade. It is a photo of me with a group of female workers from that site – engineers, apprentices, concreters and traffic controllers. We joined together and had a good chat about their work there helping to transform the Mernda and Doreen communities. On behalf of them and of all my constituents, I am absolutely outraged that women would experience disrespect or any sort of harassment on worksites. Anybody who harms or disrespects a woman on a worksite should face the full force of the law, for the women onsite themselves and for women who may want jobs in construction in the future.

Because we are a government that protects workers rights, stands against corruption and has a strong focus on the wellbeing of women, we acted immediately when allegations surfaced. We established an independent review, the Wilson review, and carried out every recommendation. We gave police greater powers to deal with bikies and organised criminals. We made a tougher labour hire watchdog to break up any system that might be being used to benefit some at the expense of others. We will not accept that. We also made it easier for people to complain by setting up a complaints pathway and putting in support around whistleblowers. Our plan is working. We know it is working. Look at the outcomes: 70 criminal charges laid by Taskforce Hawk, 126 construction company licences cancelled – 126 dodgy operators gone from sites – and the construction complaints referral service being operational.

These projects that are part of the Big Build are so important for my community. Unlike when the Liberals were in government and invested zero dollars in infrastructure in Yan Yean, this government has invested so much. I spoke about the Bridge Inn Road upgrade, which is complete. Currently underway is Yan Yean Road stage 2, and there is only a stage 2 because we did stage 1. There was the Plenty Road upgrade previously. The Wallan ramps and the North East Link are underway. These are projects that are transforming my community. Going back to talking about workers, it is making life easier for all workers across my electorate to get around, to get to jobs and to school and to have better transport. These projects, as I said, are so important for my community, and the jobs on these projects and around the state are relied on by families in my community. They are good, honest workers providing for their families and building a better community for us all.

I am sorry, but I just get a sense that those opposite have a problem with blue-collar workers. They have a bias against blue-collar workers. We can see it in the way they are talking about them in this place, but we can also see the evidence in what they did when they were last in government. With the cuts that they made to TAFE and with the cuts that they made to the apprentice pathway, we saw massive reductions in people taking up trade apprenticeships, with a 30 to 40 per cent drop in building and construction, carpentry, bricklaying, concreting and wall and ceiling lining. The numbers are there for anyone who wants to go and see the massive drop in apprentices because of the changes they made when they were in government. They have got a problem with blue-collar workers earning good

money for their good families, and we are not just going to stand by and let them use anything they can to again attack these workers and again take away what has been built up over time for them. It is not something that we are willing to accept.

Going back to the women in the photograph in my office and all women that are on worksites around Victoria, we have got a special focus, as I said, on the wellbeing of women. Our government has invested $7.9 million to diversify the male-dominated construction industry – and I think that is really important – and developed and implemented Victoria's first women in construction strategy and four-year action plan. The plan identified barriers for women to being a part of the industry and advanced interventions to help them get into the construction industry, because it is fun and it is good work. Under Labor it is well paid, and those opposite do not like it. They do not believe blue-collar workers deserve a good wage. We also established Victoria's first building equality policy, mandating targets and gender equality for government-funded projects over $20 million.

It is important that we do this work. It needs to be a twin-track approach of bringing more women into the construction industry, but at the same time building in supports to make sure that there is safety and respect to women on the worksites as well. That is why, as part of the new complaints referral process, we have got the regulator monitoring trends to indicate any patterns of behaviour that depict gender discrimination.

If we are talking about discrimination in this place, can we talk about the discrimination of those opposite against good people earning good money for their good families? Trying to tar them with a brush that is totally illogical and unfair shows us who those opposite really are. As I said at the outset, at the heart of this matter of public importance are workers, and those on this side always stand with workers. We will not cop any excuses from those opposite to try to take away the rights and entitlements of workers, and that is something important for all Victorians.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (17:32): In response to the member for Caulfield's matter, I would like to focus on the first part, which is the government's failure to address corruption. I think the fact that there has been failure to address corruption is incontestable. For those who have not read the Watson report, I highly recommend it. It is not boring. Parts of it do actually read like a crime novel. I also think that the Watson report is in many ways quite measured. It accepts, for example, that the $15 billion is an estimate. People are bandying the figure around like it is a certainty, but there is no question that a fair amount of money has gone missing – a large amount of money has gone missing. The other point that Watson makes is that the union was no longer functioning as a union, that the executive was completely taken over by the Setka and Myles cliques. He was left, he says – this is Watson writing – at the end of his investigation:

> … with the empty feeling that the Setka-led Victorian branch of the CFMEU was no longer a trade union, it was a crime syndicate.

There has clearly been a failure to address corruption, but the Greens want some good to come from this failure. There is no reason why we have to turn this into a continuous and seemingly never-ending shouting match. It is very clear that the anti-corruption agencies in this state need to be strengthened, otherwise this problem would not have festered and worsened over more than a decade before it was exposed by Nine media and then by a series of investigations.

I want to just focus a little bit on some recommendations from the Integrity and Oversight Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – that is, IBAC's powers. The committee reported in December. It was tabled I think on the last day of Parliament last year. We know that IBAC's powers are highly relevant to this issue because the Premier referred this problem to IBAC, and she likely knew, or should have known even then, that IBAC cannot currently investigate anything other than public agencies. It cannot investigate anything other than that which it suspects is an indictable offence or bribery or misconduct in public office or perversion of the course of justice. Some of those things clearly have happened as part of this Big Build corruption scandal, but those are only bits of what happened. A lot of what is

alleged and a lot of what has occurred falls short of an indictable offence. It does not involve public officials because it is essentially an outsourced government project involving the funding of private companies, who in turn engage subcontractors and so on, to the point where it is out of the reach of IBAC.

It is also worth reflecting on the fact that IBAC, Victoria's anti-corruption commission, cannot make findings of corrupt conduct. It is not allowed, understandably, to make findings of criminal guilt, nor should it be able to. Its purpose is to expose corruption. Why can't it make findings of corrupt conduct? It is actually related to the fact that it cannot investigate anything other than an indictable offence. IBAC is greatly restricted not only in what it can investigate but in what it can do. I want to explain this a little bit. Corrupt conduct in the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 is required to be a criminal offence, and it is defined as causing dishonest performance of the duties of a public officer or body, a public officer breaching public trust, a public officer misusing information, or someone corruptly obtaining benefit from a public officer. All of that makes sense, and it is all restricted to the public sector. But it is the last eight words that are the catch. All of that is followed by the phrase 'being conduct that would constitute a relevant offence', which, as I described before, is an indictable offence or any of those other offences – pervert the course of justice, bribery or misconduct in public office. In other words, a great deal of maladministration, the misuse of public power or resources or threatening an employer that if they do not use this particular labour hire agency the site will be shut down is stuff that is not covered by that definition.

Simply removing those eight words, the requirement for corrupt conduct to be a relevant offence, was recommended in our inquiry by no less than IBAC itself; by their oversight agency, Integrity Oversight Victoria; by Accountability Round Table; by the Centre for Public Integrity; and by the Victorian Bar. The Law Institute of Victoria had another solution that had the same effect. Experts from around the country all recommended the removal of those eight words or something similar because they all recognised that Victoria's IBAC is so restricted that it cannot investigate a great deal of the corruption that has been alleged or that is likely to occur in the future or that has occurred elsewhere. As a result, it cannot even make a finding of corrupt conduct. That is why the committee, with four Labor members, one from the Liberals, one from the Nationals, me and one from Legalise Cannabis, unanimously recommended that the government remove the requirement that corruption constitute a relevant offence and that we include things like a serious disciplinary offence, misconduct worthy of termination or breach of public trust. Our bill, which was debated this afternoon in the other place, basically contains that. That is all it does; it simply removes those eight words. The New South Wales legislation does not require corruption to be an indictable offence. The federal National Anti-Corruption Commission does not require it to be an indictable offence. If New South Wales and the federal government can do it – and the NACC was created after about six months – then surely Victoria can do it. So the question for the government is: why do you not support this legislation? And the question for the Liberals is why did they support it in 2023 but are not supporting it this year? Has the scent of possible victory clouded their judgement? Who can say.

I want to explain a little bit more about why IBAC cannot make findings of corrupt conduct. It is simply because they cannot be seen to imply that someone is guilty of a relevant offence, which they are prevented from doing. As the current IBAC commissioner explained in a public hearing in September:

> … because of the way the Act says you cannot make any comment that includes that a person has committed or may have committed or is guilty of an offence. Because our corrupt conduct jurisdiction requires a relevant offence …

I put it to all the members of this place: think about where you will be in five years time. Some of us will be in opposition, some of us will not be in Parliament at all, but not all of us will be in government. There will be some new corruption scandal, and many of us will have wished that IBAC had the power to investigate it. I urge government and non-government members alike to really consider IBAC's powers and why a government might refer matters to it knowing that it is not capable of investigating

them. That explains also recommendation 24 of the IOC's report that the government amend the act to empower IBAC to make findings of corrupt conduct.

Others today have spoken about follow-the-dollar powers and the need to clarify the definitions of 'public officer' and 'public body'. All of these things are important. Funding of integrity agencies is the other side of the coin, and we heard yesterday or rather on Monday that the Ombudsman has half as many complaint officers as the New South Wales Ombudsman. They are all important, and I think we need to see corruption as worth tackling.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:42): I too rise to speak on the matter put forward by the member for Caulfield, and I have to say, 'Well, well, well.' I have been wondering when that rabble over there would bring this here into this place to have an MPI debate. I do have to say it is so important to have a look at the state of the house, because those opposite, aside from the member for Ovens Valley, are not in the chamber. I am going to give a big shout-out to all those Libs and Nats watching – come to the chamber, stick by your MPI, have something to say and back up your members. Be here. Show up. Show some passion. Where is the Leader of the Opposition if this is something she takes so seriously? Perhaps she is having a really good think about her failed housing policy and the failure of announcing a so-called fix to the housing crisis here in Australia. What a joke.

Those opposite want to talk a big game about our Big Build program, which is delivering projects, let me tell you – I am going to talk about them – that are absolutely vital for this state. And no-one benefits more than Melbourne's western suburbs. But at the very core of the issue that we are talking about today, like others have said, is a really inconvenient truth for those opposite. Deep, deep down – and I will say it to the camera because hopefully some of them will be watching their serious MPI that they have put forward before the house but did not turn up for – it is an inconvenient truth because deep down they hate working people. Let me tell you, the western suburbs are made up of busy people and working families. The workers are the backbone of this great state of ours. Those opposite absolutely hate that the Big Build projects provide workers and labourers with great wages and employment opportunities – employment that was not there under the four years of darkness when they were last in government. And I say darkness – we have talked about, here in this place, the contrast between the jobs created in the four years that those opposite were in government and here today. The numbers and the contrast and the difference are extraordinary – and it is extraordinary through things like our Big Build projects. The allegations they have made are just another opportunity for them today to come and attack workers' pay and conditions. Well, I note they have not turned up to attack and stand by their MPI – the chamber is completely empty – but let us not point out the member for Ovens Valley.

The Leader of the Opposition has tended to speak a lot about the Big Build projects lately, and I have to tell you a story. I always tell stories in the MPI. Well, let me tell you another story about the Leader of the Opposition. She thought she would find her way to Melbourne's western suburbs, and I just happened to be there this weekend just gone. It was great to see the member for Kew come all the way over and dip her toes into a place called Footscray, the gateway – get this, people – the gateway to Melbourne's west. She did not come that far, she came just far enough to get her toes wet. Now, this was at the mighty Lunar New Year festival that was being celebrated with our Vietnamese community. It was very, very well attended, and I have to say when I sat down to watch the Vietnamese singing and dancing and the culture and entertainment, I could not help but think, 'I wonder if the member for Kew knew what she drove past – if she drove, maybe she caught the train – on her way to Footscray.' Well, I did not have the opportunity to take a lot of time to speak with the member for Kew, because I would have pointed out some of the transformative projects – the Big Build projects – that have helped revolutionise and change Melbourne's west forever. In coming to Footscray, she would have probably driven past something – just a little wee thing – called the West Gate Tunnel. I say it is the West Gate Tunnel built for westies, but every now and then we have interlopers from the other side of town – like Kew for one of them – come across and join us in the western suburbs to see just what a great place it is to live.

Of course when the member for Kew came across, she might have seen something ultra big in the sky. There is something really exciting that has happened in Footscray. And what do you think that is? That is Footscray Hospital – $1.5 billion in a brand new hospital in the gateway to Melbourne's west. I cannot explain to you how incredible this hospital is. The western suburbs need more hospitals and, guess what, Labor is building them. A $1.5 billion state-of-the-art hospital. In fact the former Premier used to say that all the construction cranes in Victoria were in Footscray working on that hospital as we took it from nothing in the ground and built it and opened it a couple of weeks ago – absolutely extraordinary – but she might have missed that.

Another Big Build project she would have seen if she did not drive is Metro Tunnel. You can cross town now using Metro Tunnel. Metro Tunnel has revolutionised commuting on rail for westies. We are able to get where we need to go more often. There are more services running across town and in and around the city to the places that we want to go. I will also note that it is unfair of me to say that the Leader of the Opposition has only dipped her toes into Melbourne's west. She actually went a bit further quite recently, and I had a bit of a chuckle, because she was accompanied by the 'special envoy for the western suburbs.' I have to laugh because we all know that the area that Mrs Deeming represents is the western suburbs, so perhaps the member for Laverton is a special envoy for Labor in the western suburbs. How about we make that a bit of a reality?

I know it is a rare occasion for the Leader of the Opposition to head that far into Melbourne's west – the west is a big place – but I cannot help but wonder if the member for Kew realised the big, big projects that Labor has built; the big infrastructure projects that matter to the western suburbs that she would have had to drive past on her way to Werribee. The member for Kew would have driven past, no doubt, Werribee Mercy Hospital, where we are doubling the capacity of the ED there. We are a growing community. We need more beds, we need a bigger ED, and that is exactly what we are doing. I keep saying to tourists like the member for Kew who keep coming to Wyndham – she would have driven past Wyndham law courts – 'Go and visit Wyndham law courts, the biggest law courts outside of Melbourne's CBD, because they are absolutely amazing.' If she continued to look on the left, she would have seen the brand new cop shop – a super big one, one of the biggest cop shops outside of Melbourne's CBD – in Werribee, the Werribee police station that we built with the former member for Werribee. I have to say the member for Kew would have also driven past – I had to count these up, and someone will have to fact-check me because I have probably got it wrong – about four level crossings that have been removed under our government over the past almost 12 years. In fact the removal of the Hoppers Crossing level crossing when I was the member for Tarneit I think was one of the best things to ever happen to Wyndham, but I was a bit biased as the member for Tarneit back then. She would also have driven past, but may not have been able to see in the distance, another three level crossings that we had removed as well as another four that are underway. The Werribee line is going to be level crossing free in fact. It is absolutely extraordinary. These are Big Build infrastructure projects. These are the projects that are changing lives and that matter to people in the community.

When we are talking about construction workers, think of the number of construction workers that have worked on these projects – some of them big, some of them ultra big and some of them kind of small. I did not even get to talk about the 16 brand new schools that we have opened in Wyndham as part of the 100 brand new schools. The construction workers are the very backbone and the people that have built these places that will benefit future generations for years and years to come. To talk down workers here in this state is absolutely shameful. The fact that the Leader of the Opposition and her new so-called team – the 'united team' – are not here in the chamber to hear, discuss or debate the MPI put forward by the member for Caulfield is absolutely disgraceful.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:52): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution as my colleagues come in. I think that they did not want to listen to you was the problem, member for Laverton. I think that is where the problem was. I think we need to be clear about that. Can I say that Victorians need answers. They deserve answers. The corruption in this state has been absolutely rife for 12 years. Now we see in today's paper that 75 per cent of Victorians want a royal commission.

They want to clean up this corruption. I note the members for Laverton and Yan Yean did not mention corruption at all during their contributions of 10 minutes each. They did not. The backbenchers are too scared to. They look away. They do not want to mention it. They do not want to whisper it. They just do not want to know.

We know corruption has been occurring in all aspects of this grubby government. Everyone could see it, particularly the Premier. The Premier could see. She is the worst offender when it comes to being able to say, 'I knew there was a problem.' What did she do? She wrote a letter. Oh, well, she needs to come out and say that the letter she wrote got a response and that in that response IBAC said it did not have the powers to investigate her claim. But she wrote a letter, so she feels good about herself. If that is her defence, well, that is a disgrace. What happened after that? From then on she just looked away. She does not want to know anything about a royal commission and nor do the backbenchers. Imagine if every other MP in this place knew there was a crime occurring in their community, whether it be domestic violence or whatever it might be. Is it a defence if you turn around and say, 'Oh, I wrote a letter. I just wrote a letter.' 'Who did you write it to?' 'Oh, I don't know; I just wrote it to the RACV or something. I just wrote a letter. I didn't care.' They would have written back and said, 'This is not in our remit.' We hear the Attorney-General, the member for Carrum, has come out and said she knew there was corruption on the Big Build sites back in 2022 and claimed that she referred it to the responsible authorities and to Victoria Police. The Attorney-General has come out recently and said, 'Well, that was a pork pie. I misspoke; I misled Parliament.' You cannot make this stuff up. They knew about the corruption and did absolutely nothing about it.

When I spell out the word corruption, the capital 'C' is for the CFMEU – organised crime, thugs, standover merchants and beneficiaries of the corruption that has been going on. The 'o' is for the opportunity cost, as the Leader of the Nationals said in his contribution, of the $15 billion. What we could have done without that opportunity cost. That is $170 million in every one of the electorates of the 88 MPs that sit in the lower house. What we could do for our communities with $170 million each. The first 'r' is for rip-offs. We know that every Victorian has been short-changed and ripped off. The second 'r' is for rorts. This is the red shirts all over again. It is the red shirts on steroids. The 'u' stands for unethical. The 'p' is for prison. These people must go to prison. We need to track them down, find the money and send them to jail because that is what they deserve. We are talking $15 billion. The 't' stands for tabletop dancers. That is just a disgrace, with the strippers, but it is what has gone on in this Big Build. The 'i' stands for integrity, and we know that Labor has none of that. There is nothing to see here. The last 'o' is for OTT, over the top. The Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Attorney-General all knew, and they just turned their backs on it and hoped it would go away. Well, it is not going away. The 'n' at the end is for never again. Labor should never govern again, because we know they are rotten to the core. The corruption that has gone on in this state proves that. It is not only the corruption but the fact that you do not want to chase it down and find out who did it and where the money went.

A Wilson–O'Brien government will bring back integrity to Victoria. We will search for the $15 billion, and we will find it. We will find the Ford Raptors, the jet skis, the boats, the dodgy deals and the stolen cash, and we will make the crooks accountable. Should any money make its way back to the Labor Party fundraisers out of this $15 billion, Labor should be decommissioned, deregistered and banned from being a political party. That is what could be found when we do this royal commission, the royal commission that you are all too scared to do anything about.

When you lose $15 billion and when you allow someone to steal $15 billion, first of all, you need the will to want to find it. Well, there is no political will on the other side to even look for it. There is no thirst to find out where the money went. They do not care. In fact it is 'Shut up, turn your back and say nothing, because we do not want to know.' I mean, even the former Premier would not have gone down this path. He would at least have had a fake inquiry and said, 'No, there's nothing to see here. We've had an inquiry. Let's just move on.' But I think that ship has certainly sailed and the current Premier will not be able to do that.

We have a plan to clean up the mess, whereas Labor wants to cover up the mess. We will give IBAC stronger powers to follow the money and establish Construction Enforcement Victoria and a taskforce to stamp out organised crime on government worksites. We will recover stolen taxpayer money and introduce new laws for targeting criminal bosses. I mean, they are the sorts of things that we on this side of the house want to do, whereas the member for Mordialloc is happy just to turn his back and say, 'Let's just hope it all goes away.' Let us compare the pair. What will Labor do? First of all, they will deny there is a problem. We have heard that today in the MPI. Then they will stand side by side with their crooks and will wait for the dust to settle, and then they will do it all again. We saw that with the red shirt rorts years ago. Let the dust settle, pay the money back and then do it all again. We have seen COVID cover-ups. We have seen branch stacking. We have seen $600 million for the Commonwealth Games and a $1 billion contract that got ripped up. What we have seen is just disgraceful. But I am sure the Premier would have been looking back laughing when all those things were going on and saying, 'You ain't seen nothing yet. Wait till you see what we do with the Big Build.'

This is the greatest robbery in Victoria's history. Even Ronald Biggs, the great train robber, would pale into insignificance against the $15 billion, or maybe more, that has gone missing to allow bikies to get rich and crooks to prosper. Yesterday we introduced a bill to start this process, but Labor said, 'No, no, no, no, no, no.' They were all disinterested. Every Labor MP voted against it and looked away, and I look at those Labor MPs in the seats of Bass and Hastings and Ripon and Glen Waverley and Bayswater and Yan Yean. They will be sitting there thinking they could very well lose their seats over this because they did not stand up for their communities. Seventy-five per cent of their communities say they want a royal commission, and they did not stand up for their communities. We will find out in November whether that was a good decision or not a good decision. They were all too afraid to stand up.

We have got a plan to protect Victorian taxpayers money. We want to chase the money, and we want to stop the rot. Labor has no intention of stopping the corruption, just looking away, and as we said before, the opportunity cost is astounding – what we could do with that money. Everyone can remember the previous Premier, who said, 'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.' You would not hear this Premier saying that; I will just about guarantee that. This is a stain on this government, and a royal commission must be held to find out where the money went.

Bills

Electoral Amendment Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

John LISTER (Werribee) (18:01): In returning to the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025, I want to use this half of my time to reflect a little bit on the experience of the Werribee by-election and the Prahran by-election as being some of the most recent examples of elections in Victoria under the system that we have with the Victorian Electoral Commission. One of the comments that I had back during the by-election was discussion about some of the issues with authorisation of materials. I know that in the by-election review there is a little bit of commentary and some recommendations around the authorisation of materials and the way the VEC handled particularly third-party authorisations. This bill does not necessarily go into that space, but it does go into another interesting space when it comes to authorisations.

I remember reading recently that in Tasmania they had a lot of difficulty because their legislation said that they had to have authorisation on their materials of where their electoral materials were being printed. Unfortunately in Tasmania they did not have a printer that they could use, so it had to come from Victoria, across on the ships. It caused a little bit of a panic, and they had to do some last-minute changes to make sure that they were still complying with the law. But it is a little bit old-fashioned. It

comes from an era where we wanted to show where someone could go to hassle and say, 'Hey, who put this pamphlet out about this particular political issue?' We will remove that requirement to display the details of printers and publishers on that printed material particularly and provide greater clarity around the way electoral material should be authorised, particularly around paid advertisements; printed material, which we know about; and any material produced by or on behalf of entities who receive political donations under the act.

One of the other things that came out of the Werribee by-election, and a lot of other elections that we have had, is early voting. Early voting is an important part of our system. It means that people who are unable to be there on election day still get that opportunity to vote. We have been grappling with this idea of early voting since 1861, particularly around the idea of how to vote when you are going to be absent on election day. Early voting only really emerged in Victoria in 1985, so it is a relatively recent thing for us. Since then we have been working through what is a fair period to have early voting.

This bill will allow for a shorter early voting period by setting a default duration of 10 days, reducing that early voting period from the current duration of 12 days down to 10 days. One of the issues with the 12 days is if you have a weekend included, it can feel like two weeks in a campaign, and two weeks is quite a long time. From people who cast their ballot on that first day of early voting all the way to election day, a lot can happen in two weeks. They say a week is a long time in politics. Well, two weeks is an era.

Accessible voting is important, and some of the things that we saw in the by-election that worked particularly well were some of the changes to mobile voting, but particularly some of the low-sensory environment voting trials that were done as well. We need to make sure that we make voting as accessible as possible, but we also need to make sure that people can engage with the political campaigns to understand what it is those people are putting forward as the best options for their community. Putting forward policies, even in a by-election, is important, despite the fact that the gentleman who ran against me did not put forward any policies. Even with 12 days of early voting, I do not think that would have changed much for what people were thinking. It is important to have that early voting but to make sure that it is balanced.

The other thing that I am sure many of us have experienced when scrutineering is counting for the Legislative Council and making it really clear that does not have to start immediately after 6 pm. The priority is finding out what is happening here in the lower house, because that is the house of government, and we want to make sure that we have got a government as close to election night as possible. So it is just clarifying that counting must begin as soon as practicable. In conclusion, from those experiences from the by-election, I commend this bill to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (18:06): I would like to share some concerns about the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025, because it does miss the mark on urgently needed electoral reform in Victoria. Instead it cherrypicks from recommendations of the Electoral Review Expert Panel, Electoral Matters Committee and the Victorian Electoral Commission and clings to a system that unfairly favours the two major parties. What is left of the bill is some mostly uncontroversial recommendations from those bodies, but what really we would have liked to have seen in this bill is real reform to create an electoral system which advantages candidates of merit rather than those with money.

The original version of this bill included amendments to the operation of nominated entities. While we assume those amendments are on hold pending the determination of the High Court, I will note that there is no way to justify nominated entities. Nominated entities must be abolished because, like group voting tickets, their continued existence is a blight on democracy in Victoria. For those unfamiliar, the Electoral Act 2002 currently caps political donations that can be received by parties, candidates and MPs. Registered political parties can avoid this cap by appointing a nominated entity, which can transfer funds to the party without those transfers being treated as a gift and therefore without counting toward the donation cap. Before the donation cap reform of 2018 Labor, the Nationals and the Liberals stockpiled millions of dollars in these nominated entities. That money is

still sitting there, ready to be spent at the next election. The expert panel said it clearly: nominated entities should be abolished with transitional arrangements, and if the High Court does not abolish them by decree, our collective responsibility to democracy is that we do so in this Parliament. The now scrapped amendments to nominated entities were an attempt to put lipstick on a pig without stopping the major parties from gorging themselves in their troughs of old money. The amendments, by clarifying that the definition of 'gift' does not include electoral or political expenditure that benefits third parties, would have allowed nominated entities to spend unlimited amounts of money on election campaigns in support of their affiliated party or candidate. The amendments would have also permitted major parties to use half a million dollars of nominated entity slush funds every election cycle to pay campaign staff and organisers, rent campaign offices in marginal seats and run what are essentially campaign ads.

When we prop up a system in which accumulated wealth is a key determinant of electoral success, we let down Victorian voters and rip holes in the fragile fabric of our democracy. Our voters deserve electoral laws that advantage candidates who will go above and beyond to represent and to show up for their electorates, not just those with the deepest pockets. Under the current system an independent or small party candidate could have the best policies, the strongest community support, and with volunteers ready to donate their time – genuine grassroots backing – and they would still get massively outspent. That is not a fair contest. Victorians deserve an electoral system that represents them, not the interests of big corporations and the billionaire class.

The bill shies away from the real structural reform that our electoral system needs to shield our democracy from the sway of big money. We need reforms that make government accountable to communities, not to the big end of town. We need campaign spending caps, not just donation caps. Campaign spending is far easier to track with a much better mechanism to level the playing field and dilute the political influence bought with big corporate dollars. Anyone can give a suitcase full of cash and it is not declared, but campaign spending is hard to hide. New South Wales, Queensland, the ACT and many other countries all have electoral expenditure caps – why not Victoria? Victoria desperately needs laws to stop members and candidates from spending unlimited amounts of their own money to get themselves elected. We should be collectively shaking in our boots at the thought of One Nation and other far-right candidates spending millions of their own money to buy seats in this Parliament.

In the absence of spending caps, under standing orders I advise the house of amendments to this bill, and I ask that they now be circulated. It is a crime to handle stolen goods, and we think it should be a crime for political parties to handle dodgy donations. Victorians do not want our politicians pocketing cash from corrupt actors. Given what we now know, Victorians would be concerned to learn that Labor in Victoria pocketed more than $168,000 in 2022–23 and $400,000 in 2021–22. Our first amendment would make it a criminal offence to solicit, receive or spend a donation from any individual or organisation that has been subject to a finding of corrupt conduct by IBAC or a royal commission. Put simply, if IBAC or a royal commission has found that you have engaged in corrupt conduct, you should have no place funding Victorian political parties. Our amendment would also give the state the power to confiscate dodgy donations from political parties. Similar laws already exist in New South Wales; Victoria should be no different.

Our second amendment is to ban political donations from not just the fossil fuel industry but property developers, the construction industry, big banks and real estate agents. Labor and the Liberals are funded by dirty donations from companies whose corruption costs us billions and lays waste to our environment and climate. Between 1999 and 2019 the property and construction industry donated over $15 million to the federal Liberal Party and over $6.5 million to the ALP. Over the same period in Victoria the building industry and developers donated about $2.7 million to the Victorian division of the Liberal Party and $2.2 million to the Victorian branch of the ALP. Last decade the resource and energy industry disclosed over $136 million in political donations nationally. The gambling industry continues to pour money into the coffers of the two major parties, while big bank donors make record profits during a cost-of-living crisis.

The big parties are more accountable to the property industry and polluters than they are to everyday Victorians. Labor has pocketed developer donations with one hand and with the other given out billions in public money to corrupt private companies. Yet Labor refuses to give our anti-corruption watchdog the power it needs to investigate. Developers and the fossil fuel industry have bought their way into the corridors of power with their dodgy donations, and this has come at the expense of our climate, our communities and this government's integrity. If either of the major parties oppose our law to ban dodgy donations, it is obvious they are happy to continue to withdraw from the ATM of vice and corruption that has for far too long plagued politics in Victoria. Victorians deserve to know that their elected representatives answer to them, not to developers, not to coal and gas companies and not to corrupt players. I commend these amendments to the house.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:14): I actually think that Australia – and I know we are talking about Victoria – has the best electoral system in the world. I am going to put it out there. I think we have seen many others overseas and otherwise that do not have compulsory voting, and you can see some pretty polarised outcomes as a result, so I am just going to put that out there from the outset. I think we are in a lucky country, and I think, as a collective, it is a good decision-making process that has resulted in us having what I think is the strongest electoral system in the world. Is it perfect? No. Hence this is why we are providing amendments here and now, and we had another big review back in 2018. I was just thinking about the removal of the bunting, which used to be such a bugbear.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Wasn't it? You had to have volunteers who would sit up half the night. I used to feel sorry for them having to man that. It was a waste of plastic. But it just shows – I am probably leaning over to the extreme end of things, but nevertheless we have all been there – the importance of the review and making these changes and the difference they can make in the lives not only of the MPs themselves but of those who are electing us and those who support us, the many hundreds and thousands of volunteers, and we are very grateful to them as well.

I do want to pick up a point on the presumption that minor parties are necessarily members who are elected on merit and that major party MPs are not. There was an inference made by the member for Brunswick, which I thought was quite unfair, because I was thinking about many of the policies that we have right now – for instance, free transport for students under 18, free TAFE and virtual ED. We will have built 100 new schools, with 19 of them being delivered this year. The Solar Homes program has been enormously successful and lapped up by Victorians. 950 new medical interns have kicked off their careers, and that is backed in by our Labor government, and there is a 50 per cent increase in health workers. Through our legislated renewable energy targets we achieved, last year, 44.6 per cent energy generation through renewable energy. I am just presenting an example.

When you are talking about merit and you are talking about policy, I would like to give a little bit of credit to the Victorian people, because I felt like there was quite a distorted perception of how our electoral system works. I felt like it did not give enough credit to Victorians and their ability to assess the various policies and those matters delivered in this state, because there are those who talk about things and there are those who deliver. I certainly know with our government it is all about delivering. I think that whilst we are not suggesting that the system is perfect – hence this is why we have a number of amendments being made here today – to suggest the very distorted and warped reality that I felt the member for Brunswick was presenting was really invalidating Victorians and their ability to discern between the various campaigns and the various policies and infrastructure or otherwise that are delivered in this state. I just want to state that from the outset.

I also think that – and it should be respected – we are not seeking to cut across the High Court. I think, awaiting their decision, there is a pretty decent rationale for that, and I hope that that is taken in the spirit that it should be, because we are respecting that decision being made in due course. I also want to pay respect to the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), the Electoral Review Expert Panel and

the Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee, because we know that those various reports that have been prepared have helped inform the amendments that are being brought before the chamber today.

What are the amendments seeking to achieve? They will insert detailed requirements for supplementary elections and re-elections and simplify and modernise authorisation requirements for election materials. For instance, I know my learned colleague from Werribee was speaking to this, we are in a different era, and there are not so many of the paper-based materials. They still exist. We are still producing DLs and otherwise, but a lot more is digitally generated these days. Henceforth we need to adapt to the modern environment. Tightening restrictions on the party names and logos that can be registered and providing more flexible powers for the commission to respond to emergencies affecting elections are very pragmatic changes – updating legislated timings and requirements for electoral processes and other minor and technical amendments to improve the overall operation of the Electoral Act 2002.

I think, fundamentally, when we are thinking about election processes, all the rules that come into play when we are standing at the booths are just so very important. I think as MPs we want the voting experience of the voters to be a respectful one. At least I will speak for myself and those on this side of the house. It is a delicate balance. On the one hand, you do have to be able to put forward as best you can what you are campaigning on, but at the same time respect that the voter experience could be sullied depending on how aggressive a candidate may or may not be. I think overall I will say that on the booths that I have been fortunate to stand on, most of the time the behaviours have been reasonable. I think I am lucky. But I have heard of some pretty horrific situations where people experience significant aggression. I do not think it lends itself to the overall voting experience or to respecting democracy when people behave in a manner that does not respect what it is like and the experience of the voter themselves. I do remember one chap coming and absolutely yelling and screaming, and they had to remove that person from the booth, but that was an isolated incident. Nevertheless, it did not help the experience, and it just stressed out everyone who was at the booth, not least the voters themselves – and there is no place for that.

The other thing that I was thinking about is that the member for Brunswick was suggesting that for some reason – maybe he was referring to his party, the Greens, or otherwise – they had the best policies, but nevertheless because of certain circumstances they were not able to become a major party. I am not sure what the trajectory of that argument particularly was, but again I would like to default to the premise that the Victorian people make their decisions based on a whole range of policies and infrastructure and other needs that they see. I just think care has to be taken, because if that applies to the Greens, it might also apply to One Nation as well. I mean, where does it stop? It is not only about one minor party; it is about any minor party. I just think that we have to look at the whole picture and not just narrow in on one perspective when it comes to analysing how the whole democratic system and the process of elections is operating.

Some of the other practical elements here will only enhance the voting experience. I am not talking about from an aesthetic or emotional point of view necessarily but just to ensure that the fundamentals of democracy are maintained and that we continue to ameliorate in a collective and collegiate way. I do also note the updating of requirements – I am just thinking about all the pragmatics, having also witnessed a number of counts myself – for the vote counting process for the Legislative Council, including providing that counting must begin as soon as practicable rather than immediately after 6 pm on election day, and may occur at a place determined by the VEC to enable the VEC to prioritise counting for the Legislative Assembly. I note of course that it is extremely important the upper house gets counted, and we are not trying to in any way diminish that, but nevertheless expediency, in terms of expediting as much as we can in a very civilised and appropriate way the lower house obviously is important when we are looking at determining government, and I think certainly the population of Victoria wants to see results delivered as soon as possible, and this is likely to help facilitate that process. I am highlighting this example to just show the many practical elements that are being

provided as part of this bill. I will close out on the premise that I still stand by the fact that we do have the best voting system in the world, and I feel very fortunate to be a Victorian and an Australian.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (18:24): I have got some comments to make about the Victorian Electoral Commission. While I respect the member for Albert Park, and she actually made some reasonable comments, I am afraid I do not share her views about the conduct of the commission or the quality of the system that they have created. The Victorian Electoral Commission's conduct – and they are a feature part of this bill – at the last election was abysmal. Let us get one thing absolutely clear – and this applies to every political party in this Parliament and those prospective parties trying to get into this Parliament – we all rely on the electoral commission to do their job and to do it fairly and independently. You could claim they might be bad to one party at this election, but beware, because in maybe one or two elections, they will be bad to you too if that precedent is set. What all of us expect in this chamber, and I suspect in the upper house as well, is an electoral commission that actually abides by the mandate it has been given to be fair, free and independent and to conduct elections that are not akin to Bolivia but akin to Australia.

The Victorian Electoral Commission's conduct under Warwick Gately at the last election was a disgrace. He was a disgrace, and his conduct was outrageous. His communications head Sue Lang's conduct was more than just a disgrace. These people should have been referred to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. The anti-corruption commission, if it had done its job, should have taken an own-motion inquiry and examined their conduct. How have we got to a circumstance in Victoria, Australia, where the Victorian Electoral Commission participates in commentary a week out from an election, as it did in 2022? Some opposite might say, 'Oh, gee, I'm glad it wasn't us.' But the precedent is set.

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: You might find it funny, member for whoever is up there – Glen Waverley – but when you start political puberty you can come back in here and throw barbs, right? The reality is that no-one and no political party should have to deal with an electoral commission that becomes partisan in the middle of a campaign – not Labor, Liberal, Nationals, Greens or anyone. None of us expect that, and none of us should have that.

So my comments on this bill are very straightforward. We do not oppose it. We have problems, and the member for Brighton has outlined our concerns succinctly and as you would expect. But when the electoral commission and those running it – and I note there is a new Electoral Commissioner – have no credibility to the extent that some in this chamber think, like me, that they should be wound up and scrapped and the job outsourced to the AEC, because at least they will do an independent job, then we have got a problem. We have a problem when there is a lack of any accountability. When the Electoral Matters Committee of this Parliament, chaired by a Labor member – I have no problem – quite rightly comes in and asks for a report from the electoral commission straight after the election, like the Electoral Matters Committee is entitled to do, and the Victorian Electoral Commission seek to hinder, obfuscate and behave in a way that is thoroughly uncooperative with the Electoral Matters Committee of this Parliament and sneak out like sewer rats straight after their hearing because they do not want to give further evidence, again we have got a right to be concerned, all of us in this chamber, because all of us in this chamber have an expectation that the Victorian Electoral Commission will just do its job.

They know four years out from the next election when the date is going to be. How did they run out of ballot papers? How did they run out of ballot papers in seats, funnily enough, which were marginal coalition seats on the coalition target list? Not to throw anything in, but they ran out of those ballot papers. How was it that the Victorian Electoral Commission, as we only found out through this bill, had been seconding people from the Victorian public service for years before the 2022 election? We have only found that out through the discussions and the negotiations on this bill. Who knew that? Who are they from the VPS? Are they people that we would consider to be politicised appointments in the VPS? Were they appointed by Sue Lang, who made comments a week before the last state

election? Were they appointed by Warwick Gately, who snuck out of his job because he did not want to face up to the abysmal conduct that he ran at that election as Electoral Commissioner? We do not know. Why should any political party and why should any of us have to put up with an electoral commission that behaves in that manner, seconding people from the VPS behind the backs of everyone else with no power? It was taken out, I note, by an amendment from the government with this proposal. However, the fact is that before it was put in it was done anyway. It had already been done. They had already been seconding staff. Again, I ask: who, and in what roles? Were they unionists? Were they union members?

Forgive me for asking these things, but I am entitled to as a member of this chamber, and I am entitled to as someone who expects that the Victorian Electoral Commission will behave in a fair, impartial and reasonable manner. They certainly did not. When they run out of ballot papers and they have had four years to prepare, when they put up billboards encouraging those who have been incarcerated to remember to re-enrol but they cannot get ballot papers for Victorians who turn up to a country polling booth because they have run out, or there are reports from our side that they have got workers advising elderly residents how to vote – this is Victoria. It is not Nicaragua, right? This is Victoria. I am sorry, but I am a little burnt by the conduct of the electoral commission in the form that we saw last time. No political party should put up with this kind of behaviour.

All of us expect better, and why wouldn't we? Why, I ask, as the member for Brighton did, do we still not have the full two-party preferred count in seven seats? This is the basis of the structure of our electoral count system: it is a two-party preferred, two-candidate preferred system. It is nine or 10 months until the next election and the work still has not been done in seven seats. Again I state they have one job to do: count the votes, be prepared, educate what is a formal vote and check the roll for its integrity.

The capacity of the commissioner to delegate his or her powers concerns me greatly because, as I have just said, we have now found out three years after the event that the previous commissioner had been seconding people from the Victorian public service. Who were they? Were they CPSU members? Were they people who were actively against the opposition at that time? I ask these questions, quite rightly seeking transparency from our electoral commission. Now we are seeing in this bill there is a request to delegate powers from the commissioner. Again I state anyone who is in that role has but one job: do it. Do your own job. Delegating powers to whom and under what conditions and under what circumstance – why on earth would that be relevant or necessary?

I am sorry. I have, as you can imagine, a huge interest in seeing that future political leaders in this state, from both sides, have an electoral commission that operates fairly, freely and impartially. I say this as an elected representative – not a Liberal one, but as an elected member of this Parliament. Every member should have full confidence that our electoral commission is fair, free and impartial and does its job as such and does not have people on polling booths managing those booths who are potentially politicised and have been seconded to them without the knowledge of anyone else and certainly against any legislation and does not have people who partake in party politics a week before an election and then write it off as, 'Oh sorry, I went a bit far.'

Again I say we are not Bolivia, we are not Nicaragua. We expect our elections to be fair, free and impartial. In the last one the conduct of the electoral commission was not. It was not, and I think it is fair and reasonable for me on this side in particular, of all the 88 members here, to come in here with a self-interest to say the last commissioner was a disgrace. I hope the new commissioner is a better one. I hope that after the next election, whatever occurs, when the Electoral Matters Committee asks for that commission to come in and provide some explanations on the conduct of it, they do not do it at 7:30 in the morning and sneak out like sewer rats.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (18:34): Struth, that was something. I hope you are getting support, member for Bulleen, because there is clearly –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: He called me the 'fat kid from *Hey Dad..!*' as he exited, so he is clearly feeling a bit. 'Fat kid from *Hey Dad..!*' is what he said. That used to be a Tim Smith sledge, but how did that marriage go?

Paul Edbrooke: That was a car crash.

Tim RICHARDSON: He put that in the fence, didn't he? That was the most unbecoming performance. I think I have had some good engagements with the member for Bulleen before, but even the anger of having a crack, not even knowing what I was going to say – to say that was unhinged is polite. That was one of the most disgraceful attacks on the Victorian Electoral Commission we have ever seen.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, obviously on relevance, attacking a member of Parliament is not relevant to the bill that is in front of us.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): There is no point of order. The member for Mordialloc was directly responding to a comment that the member for Bulleen made.

Brad Battin: On a further point of order, Acting Speaker, the comments were directly in relation to the conduct, not the actual outcome or what the member has said. The member might like to go and debate what the member had said and say he was wrong or incorrect, but this was a direct attack on his personal conduct, on how he handled himself in here. That has nothing to do with this debate. I am sorry, it should be simply to do with what is in the debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): There is no point of order. The member for Mordialloc was going immediately to the point of debate that the member for Bulleen had made in terms of his attack on the commissioner. If the member for Bulleen did not think that was part of the debate on the bill, then he should not have brought it up.

Tim RICHARDSON: There can be all kinds of trying to defend what was an absolutely out of bounds reflection on the Victorian Electoral Commission, the highest standard of authority in running safe, fair and transparent elections in Victoria. The member for Bulleen called a former commissioner and their staff, in his final words 'sewer rats'. That is an egregious attack on the independent authority of the organisation that runs elections in our state. It was not going to be a theme of much of my statement, but it needs to be. The context is really important because we have seen the degradation of statutory institutions internationally. We have seen this play out in the United States, where the integrity of commissions has been a theatre of debate. It has led to prosecutions by voting firms that have been defamed. But we cannot allow this. This is a really urgent thing – and I say this down the camera to Liberals in the opposition leader's office tonight – this is not the step to take. This is not the place to go. This is the worst thing you can do, the worst thing we can see that goes to the extremes that we are all worried about.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition and her team, that needs to never happen and be a feature of this place again, because to describe the Victorian Electoral Commission as sewer rats, to go after the commissioner – the member for Bulleen has probably not got the TV on, but there is a bit of context to this – and for those that were in this election contest, it was highly charged. This was at the time when – and I am just literally commentating the facts here – the former chief of staff to the Leader of the Opposition at the time, the member for Bulleen, was in a leaked article from those opposite, again cannibalising themselves, Liberals dropping on then Mitch Catlin and his integrity that led to that. It was not anything to do with the Labor Party; it was internal Liberal politics playing out on Mitch Catlin. That was how that came to be – the $100,000, as the *Guardian* reported at the time, and the Liberal donor billionaire.

The context is important for where that outburst came from, because it is an egregious attack. We have a former Leader of the Nationals who was a part of that contest. I do not know if the former leader,

the member for Murray Plains, is up next. I would be interested to know where the former Leader of the Nationals would see that go, because the description – and I say that again – of the VEC in that context is really, really poor. We have all got performance suggestions that we put forward. We would all suggest things that could be more efficient – the two DPP point that was put forward, the timing of elections, their efficiency. They have got work to do. They are not like the Australian Electoral Commission. We see that when we have federal elections. There is room to improve and that is what some of the bill tries to do.

But I feel extremely worried and uncomfortable with the suggestion that the member for Bulleen put forward, that there was anything nefarious around ballot paper provisions, that there was anything salacious around the reporting of various disclosures that were asked and then referred. To describe a former commissioner in that way warrants further assessment and clarification if that is the standing position of the Leader of the Opposition.

The Liberal Party tonight have a role to play. There was a sledge of the member for Glen Waverley. He is an elected member of Parliament representing his community in here, and the member for Glen Waverley would not be questioning the integrity of the election commissioner or the whole organisation and how we run our show here. I am not sure if the member for Berwick, who has been elected I think five or six times now and is up soon, stands by the comments of the member for Bulleen that the election commissioner was in that standard corrupt and should have been at IBAC, should have been self-referred, and that the organisation is run by sewer rats. That is the standard that we have got here for what was an outburst that led to personal sledges and reflections on whether I am carrying a bit more weight or not. 'Fat kid from *Hey Dad..!*' – I mean, goodness me, seriously. That tells you every bit of the areas where those opposite are: it is personal attacks, it is sledges. We are not talking about the commission here.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Mordialloc has had 8 of his 10 minutes to say whatever he wants to say about the member for Bulleen. Can you ask him to come back to actually talking about the bill?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): As I ruled on the previous point of order, everything that the member for Mordialloc has canvassed were matters that were raised by the member for Bulleen in debate, so the member for Mordialloc can continue.

Tim RICHARDSON: This is a really critical frame here. Once again I reiterate tonight that there must be a clarifying statement from the leader of the transition to government for the Leader of the Opposition. Right, so this person has a portfolio responsibility as a shadow minister for the transition to government and is a founding leadership father of those opposite. He has had two goes at it and been a leader. It is very important that the senior leadership of a party and former leaders protect our system of democracy. With where we are tonight, I ask that the Leader of the Opposition clarify whether this is Liberal Party views or policy, to so describe the Victorian Electoral Commission. It is every bit of danger and One Nation territory that we have seen nationally, particularly in Queensland, but it needs to be scrutinised. I needed to clarify that for the protection of our system and our Parliament and our democracy, and there is nothing more important than that.

One of these amendments, though, goes to enabling the commencement of the bill to be on a day or days to be proclaimed. I read this in my notes and I thought, hang on, have I missed something? It allows for the Nepean district by-election processes to proceed. I thought I must have missed that. Nepean by-election – what has happened there? We have got to have enabling provisions before a by-election. And how was that by-election caused such that we need to, in the legislation, have a cut-off moment? It was the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party who left because he saw the toxic environment and unsafe workplace and forced the by-election. Well, luckily in this legislation we have got a provision and a realisation that says we will not let the rules commence just until they sort out the election in Nepean that should not have happened if there was a safe and inclusive workplace for the former member for Nepean Sam Groth. We wish him well, because the only person that has has been

the member for Berwick. Remember he went down the Nepean Highway and read the storybooks? They were really close. They were a good team. That is when polling was really strong. There was not the One Nation factor. That is why we are having a by-election in this state, because of the treatment and the toxic environment that was unsafe. Six weeks into being deputy leader he nicks off – off he goes and we have got a by-election. I am glad provisions are in place to protect that.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (18:44): Acting Speaker Hamer, I rise to speak on this bill, but as you have already ruled from the chair, we can talk about whatever we like, as long as it was spoken about by a previous speaker. I might start off with the member for Mordialloc.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Careful, member for Murray Plains. I did not say that on the point of order. But continue on the bill. You can respond to points of the debate.

Peter WALSH: That is effectively what you said, Acting Speaker. The member for Mordialloc might actually want to get his facts right before he starts slagging off at the member for Bulleen. He is not head of transition to government. Get your facts right, mate. If you are going to slag off, get your facts right and actually have something to say effectively. The member for Bulleen's language in some ways was disingenuous, but his beef with the Victorian Electoral Commission is real, and it is shared by others as well.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Peter WALSH: The issues with the electoral commission. One job for the Electoral Commissioner is to have enough ballot papers at the booths. He did go on about the ballot papers, and it affected electorates where the Nationals had candidates running. Our people who were handing out cards then had people coming back out saying, 'We've got a card from you, but there are no ballot papers.' It is the most important job of the electoral commission and the Electoral Commissioner. When we have compulsory voting, when people have to go to a booth otherwise they pay a fine and they go there and there is no ballot paper – spare me. What job do they have to do?

Tim Richardson interjected.

Peter WALSH: No, I am not burying the lead. I am saying that the Electoral Commissioner failed in his job on a number of things at the last election and people have a right to criticise that. If you are saying the institutions of government, including the electoral commission, are sacrosanct and we should never criticise them, what about what Dan did? What about what the former Premier did to the institutions of this state? Have a look in the mirror, member for Mordialloc, and look at what was done by your government under the previous Premier and what is being done under the current Premier to the institutions of this state. There is $15 billion worth of corruption in this state under the supposed institutions of government that you are talking about. Where is the justification for that, member for Mordialloc? Are you condoning that? Are you condoning $15 billion worth of rorting in this particular state? Is the member for Mordialloc actually condoning $15 billion worth of rorting in this state into what has been done? You talk about –

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Acting Chair, I would ask that there be a bringing back to relevance in relation to the bill, because we all remember the office for living it up, the office for water under the previous Minister for Water, and the recommendations that were made there. So I would be careful what stones are thrown from those opposite.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): It has been a wideranging debate, but I ask the member on his feet to refer to the bill or to respond directly to points of debate that were previously raised. Where he was going, in my time in the Acting Speaker role, had not been points of debate raised.

Peter WALSH: I suppose what I would be interested in, in the points that have been raised, is a certain minister who has all the solutions to the law and order issues in this state in their bottom drawer. Let us bring out the bottom drawer and let us solve the law and order issues in this state, Minister. That

would be a very good thing to do before we go anywhere else, before you start throwing muck at other people.

With this particular bill I have a number of concerns. The member for Bulleen and other members have raised this issue around the delegation of powers. The Electoral Commissioner has one job: to run the Victorian Electoral Commission and run elections in this state. Why does the Electoral Commissioner need powers to delegate those authorities? He is drawing a salary to do a job, to run elections, to make sure there are enough ballot papers, to make sure they are fair and transparent, and there are concerns from a lot of people that they are not fair and transparent. One of the good things that the electoral commission does is go around the aged care facilities in all our electorates to actually make sure the people that are in those aged care facilities have an opportunity to vote. There are concerns being raised by the children of people in aged care facilities that maybe the electoral commission staff that go around doing that might try to persuade people to vote a certain way. That would be very wrong if that is particularly the case. Those are concerns that have been raised with me.

The other issue is around the decisions as to what the two-party preferred vote is going to be done on. Someone in Melbourne sits there and makes a decision that will have the 2PP on these particular two candidates without actually having any research as to what is happening in that particular electorate. On election night when the count is actually being done, the 2PP is throwing up an absolutely crazy result because the people in Melbourne are making that decision. When you talk to the people counting the votes, when you go along to the scrutineer, they say, 'Yeah, I know, I know, this is crazy, but those are the orders we got from Melbourne.' We are going to have the 2PP based on that, without any actual research about what might actually be happening on the ground in that particular electorate at that time.

There is the issue of secondment of staff. In my humble opinion the Victorian public service has been politicised by a long-term Labor government, and particularly by the former Premier. We have seen the politicisation of the public sector here in Victoria. Why should the electoral commission be seconding staff from the Victorian public service when no-one knows where their political allegiances lie? They are not employed as independent people with the Victorian Electoral Commission. They are employed by the Victorian government, a government that has gone out of its way to politicise the public sector in this state, to corrupt the public institutions in this state and to take away the powers from the Parliament. You have seen the balance between executive government and the Parliament and the judiciary change, I think, in my humble opinion, for the worse in this state. I think the core principles of the Westminster system have been eroded and corroded, particularly by the former Premier, and we want to make sure that does not continue to happen. Having these sorts of things happen in the Victorian Electoral Commission is just an extension of win-at-all-costs. The former Premier, in my humble opinion, was a person that believed in winning at all costs and that it does not matter what you do to other people or what you do to the institutions of government. The Westminster system is something that has been around for over 700 years. It is something that I feel very passionately about as a long-term member of this place. The institutions of our system, I think, are precious if you look around the world. But we have got to a stage – the member for Mordialloc raised this issue in a different context – where people do not have respect for their institutions now because they have been politicised so much. The people that should be protecting it are no longer protecting it because they are more interested in keeping their job or keeping favour with those in power.

There are a lot of things in this bill that I think are not correct. There are a lot of things in the way the VEC has been functioning and doing its job which are inappropriate. I will not use the language that the member for Bulleen has used, because I do not think that this is the place for that intemperate language. But I understand the frustration that the member for Bulleen has because he lived through it as the Leader of the Opposition. As the Leader of the National Party, I was there most of the time, and I understand his frustration as that happened. We need to get back to the people of Victoria having respect for the institutions of government and the institution of the Victorian Electoral Commission. That happens by open and transparent review. The parliamentary Electoral Matters Committee did

their review and had trouble, as I understand it, getting real information from the Victorian Electoral Commission and having them give evidence that was worthwhile about the things that went wrong at the last election. Some of the recommendations out of that report are not being picked up in this legislation, and I would have thought the government could have actually shown some real leadership, taken all the recommendations out of the Victorian parliamentary Electoral Matters Committee and made some meaningful difference so that people have confidence in the future about the Victorian Electoral Commission. I share the member for Bulleen's view: perhaps the Australian Electoral Commission should take it over.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (18:54): I rise to speak on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2025. The Electoral Act 2002 is one of the foundational pillars of democracy in our state. It underpins the way in which Victorians choose their representatives, how votes are cast and counted and how political parties and candidates engage in the contest of ideas. It is therefore necessary that we ensure that this act remains up to date and reflects the modern demands that both voters and candidates have. This bill ensures that key parts of the act are fit for purpose. It clarifies requirements for the conduct of state elections so they can continue to be delivered in an efficient, transparent and organised manner.

Importantly, this bill is informed by the considered work undertaken since the last major reform of the act in 2018. That includes reports of the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC), the Electoral Review Expert Panel and the Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee following the 2022 state election. These reviews identified both operational pressures and opportunities for reform. Modern elections are larger, more complex and more logistically demanding than ever before. Early voting has expanded significantly, postal voting volumes have grown, ballot papers are longer and compliance and disclosure obligations are more detailed. These are the challenges that we have to be conscious of when debating this bill.

This bill modernises our elections through targeted amendments across the act. It inserts detailed requirements for supplementary elections and re-elections, simplifies and modernises authorisation requirements for electoral material, tightens restrictions on party names and logos, provides more flexible powers for the commission to respond to emergencies, updates legislator timings and makes a series of minor and technical amendments to improve the overall operation of the act.

A significant component of the bill relates to political finance in part 12 of the act. The integrity and sustainability of our funding model depends on clear rules and effective enforcement. At present the VEC is unable to recover certain overpayments of public funding from former registered political parties once they are deregistered or from former independent members after they leave Parliament. This creates an unacceptable gap. The bill addresses this by inserting an additional step into the deregistration process, requiring parties to disclose relevant information and repay overpayments before deregistration takes effect. It also requires former independent members to submit a final return and repay any overpayments within 30 days of ceasing to be a member. Offences and penalties are extended to support compliance. At the same time safeguards ensure the register of political parties remains accurate and up to date. This is a sensible change that ensures that taxpayer funds are fully accounted for when it comes to the public funding of candidates and parties.

The bill also amends the early voting period to commence on the Wednesday 10 days before election day, creating a default 10-day period. The current early voting period, often closer to two weeks, places substantial demands on staffing, venue hire and security. This reform maintains ample opportunity for those unable to vote on election day, while reducing unnecessary resource pressures. As somebody who represents a large number of casual and shift workers who have irregular work patterns, I believe that ensuring that we have a variety of times and days before polling day for people to vote is incredibly important. No matter how your schedule looks, you should have some time where a polling place is open for you to vote early or on election day.

To improve voter information and reduce confusion, the bill tightens restrictions on party names and logos. Reports following the 2022 election indicated that some voters may have been confused by

names that were overly similar to those of established parties or that suggested affiliations which did not exist. The bill extends prohibitions to cover abbreviations and acronyms, prevents registration of names or logos suggesting the holding of parliamentary office and restricts names likely to mislead by implying a relationship with an existing party. These sensible exemptions for words like 'democratic', collective nouns and certain geographic terms ensure that the scheme remains workable, while protecting voters from confusion. All of these changes and much, much more make for a sensible bill. I commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Doncaster park-and-ride facility

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (1559) My issue is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and I ask her to write to the City of Manningham and advise the City of Manningham why she did not take up their suggestions in relation to improving the Doncaster park-and-ride. The Bulleen park-and-ride has been built, and it is open. It has got 370 spaces. The Doncaster park-and-ride is being rebuilt currently for $25 million. It will have 435 spaces, but it replaces an existing park-and-ride facility that had 428 spaces. The state government is spending $25 million, closing local roads, permanently impacting people's ability to get in and out of their driveways, reducing streets from two lane to one lane and making local people drive not 20 metres back out onto Doncaster Road but a large loop of nearly half a kilometre to get out of their driveways – all of this to put in place a park-and-ride which will add seven extra spaces. When Minister Shing and local upper house MP Shaun Leane were seen by the City of Manningham, they were advised directly that this is not value for money. If you were going to do something at this site, I am advised that the council said it needs to be much larger, because there is going to be much greater demand.

Bulleen park-and-ride, which I use every day and indeed will use tonight when I conclude my adjournment, is full by 7:30 in the morning because it is too small. Doncaster park-and-ride, at 435 spaces, will also be full by 7:30 am and thus useless, and what we will see is local people having their streets flooded by cars all over again, which is what the park-and-ride was meant to eliminate. Well, it is not going to eliminate it, because it is not big enough. If the government was going to spend $25 million, as the City of Manningham had lobbied for, with no commercial facilities on the site – for instance, any kind of coffee cart or commercial facilities – with nothing to value-add to the site, then the government should have done more to it if spending that amount of money. The council advised them to do it. I am asking the minister tonight to explain her government's actions to the Manningham City Council as to why they did not adopt the council's point of view and proposal to do more on this site rather than spend $25 million of taxpayers money to add an extra net seven car spaces.

Maryborough Soccer Club

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (19:02): (1560) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport. The action I seek is that the minister acknowledges the need for the Central Goldfields Shire Council to finally deliver the Maryborough Soccer Club a permanent, fit-for-purpose home at Jubilee Oval. The Maryborough Soccer Club has been part of our community since the early 1980s. For more than four decades generations of players have pulled on their boots, representing Maryborough with pride. Yet in all that time they have never once been given the dignity of a permanent home. Instead they have been shuffled from venue to venue, always welcomed but never settled, always contributing but never granted the certainty that they deserve.

For the past 10 years the senior teams have played at Jubilee Oval. That is a decade of commitment, a decade of showing up, a decade of building a strong, inclusive, thriving club culture and still no

security of tenure, no long-term plan, no clarity about the future. Since at least 2017 the club has worked patiently with the Central Goldfields Shire Council to secure a suitable long-term facility. They have done everything asked of them, but despite their best efforts the council has dragged its heels. Year after year the club has been left waiting and our community has been left frustrated.

Meanwhile the club has exploded in size. In just three years they have grown from 30 players to around 140, an extraordinary 300 per cent increase. Junior participation alone has skyrocketed from 15 children to more than 100. This is one of the fastest growing clubs in the entire shire, yet they remain without a permanent base. The Maryborough Soccer Club needs certainty. They need a home that they can invest in, grow into and proudly call their own, a home that reflects their contribution to our community and their enormous potential for the future. I would welcome the minister's support for this incredible club and for the Central Goldfields shire to finally give the Maryborough Soccer Club the permanent home that they deserve at Jubilee Oval.

Buchan Rodeo

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:04): (1561) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place. I ask the minister to apply some common sense. The action I am seeking is for some common sense to be applied to the liquor licence conditions for the Buchan Rodeo. This is an event that has been running for around 60 years. It is on every Easter. It is a fantastic family day out. Anyone who has been there will acknowledge that.

John Pesutto interjected.

Tim BULL: It has never had any major dramas, member for Hawthorn, whatsoever. Yet the rules keep changing as to the crowd control requirements, and they get tougher and tougher every year. Last year the committee was told to hire 11 crowd controllers. I was there, and it was total overkill. They were just tripping over themselves. It was ridiculous. That heavy security presence kills off the family-friendly atmosphere that the day is renowned for. This year is worse. Liquor Control Victoria has used a formula and told the committee it needs 26 guards. After pushing back it has been negotiated down to 16, but it is still absolutely ridiculous. It is a volunteer committee, they cannot afford it and it is simply unnecessary. I will tell you why this is ridiculous. Just down the road at the Canni Creek races – I happened to be there again a fortnight ago; it is a matter of kilometres down the road – they had over 1600 people there. There were hundreds of kids present, like at the rodeo. They were serving alcohol, like at the rodeo – all done very responsibly. How many crowd controllers were required there? Two. They never had any issues – same area, same sort of crowd, alcohol served, family-friendly for kids.

Community events are already doing it tough. The cost of living has pushed attendances down at a lot of these events, but costs keep going up. Last year it cost the Buchan Rodeo committee about $100,000 to put it on. They were only able to return $6000 to the community charities. It is like the government wants these volunteer committees just to give up. They cannot handle the cost of having that many crowd controllers. They do not need that many crowd controllers. Minister, change the formula, fix this broken system and make sure we get some common sense applied so that the rodeo can continue for many years to come, because with this sort of overreaction and overbureaucratic response they are going to push it into oblivion. We need to look after these community events. Please, Minister, apply some common sense.

Cranbourne electorate public transport

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (19:07): (1562) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is an update on the rollout of the youth Mykis in my electorate of Cranbourne. Whether you go to a school in Cranbourne east, south, west or central and whether you live in Botanic Ridge, Devon Meadows, Clyde or Clyde North, if you are under 18, you are entitled to free public transport. We know the talk of the town is our turn-up-and-go public transport, and the options to get into the city, to go to a movie and to catch up with friends are all

available. Melbourne Metro is the way to get there, and the youth Myki is your ticket to ride. I look forward to the minister's response.

Croydon electorate bus services

David HODGETT (Croydon) (19:08): (1563) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to review the bus service routes departing near Yarra Road Primary School in Croydon North and assess their service coverage and route suitability and accessibility to surrounding secondary schools. A recent discussion with the principal of Yarra Road Primary School identified an issue of concern by families of the school community when selecting a secondary school. They identified a lack of bus services available for students to access Melba College and Mooroolbark College when departing near Yarra Road Primary School. What would normally be a 10-minute drive by car can take upwards of 45 minutes or even over an hour for some periods of the day, meaning in some scenarios it would be faster for students to actually walk. Historically families sent students to Norwood Secondary College, which was easily accessible via bus services. However, recent school zoning changes mean this is no longer an option. Rising cost-of-living pressures are forcing many families to work longer hours, making it increasingly important that children can attend secondary school independently via public transport. Again, the action I am seeking is for the minister to review the bus service routes departing near Yarra Road Primary School in Croydon North and assess their service coverage and route suitability and accessibility to surrounding secondary schools.

Bellarine electorate early childhood education and care

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:09): (1564) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children in the other place. The Bellarine is certainly still growing, and demographics are changing, where we have got more families coming into the area. With that comes an increased demand for childcare and kindergarten places. Local families have been contacting me, calling for more early learning centre places, ensuring that their children can access that high-quality early education close to home. At the end of last year, though, we did announce a very exciting step – an early learning childcare centre in St Leonards, and it will be next to the St Leonards Primary School, and this centre certainly is there to meet that demand that I have talked about, and it is going to make a difference. But the action that I seek now is that the minister visit the Bellarine and see firsthand the incredible early learning childcare centre in St Leonards and also have a discussion around the needs of our growing community.

Hawthorn electorate road safety

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (19:10): (1565) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to inspect the stretch of Warrigal Road between Canterbury Road and Riversdale Road, particularly near Russell Street reserve and Rose Avenue, and to investigate what measures, including a signalised pedestrian crossing, might improve safety and accessibility for my local community. I raise this matter on behalf of a local resident who has contacted my office with genuine concerns about this section of Warrigal Road. As the minister may know, Warrigal Road descends steeply from Canterbury Road towards Russell Street reserve. Vehicles frequently gain speed along this downhill stretch. There are currently no signalised pedestrian crossings between Canterbury Road and Riversdale Road, despite the presence of significant pedestrian traffic. Residents regularly attempt to cross near Russell Street reserve and Rose Avenue due to the linear park connection between South Surrey Park and Russell Street reserve. Congregants at the Melbourne Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church are particularly affected. During religious services and community events, families with prams and young children are crossing what is in practice a fast-moving arterial road. This is also a public transport issue. Bus services operate along Union Road, yet residents on the eastern side of Warrigal Road face a lengthy detour to reach existing signalised crossings; for many families, that effectively discourages public transport use. This part of Boroondara and Whitehorse is a community that values walkability and safe

neighbourhood access. Improved crossing infrastructure would not only enhance safety outcomes but also strengthen access to nearby amenities such as local shops and cafes. I therefore ask the minister to visit this location, engage with the Department of Transport and Planning and consider whether a signalised pedestrian crossing or other traffic calming measures are warranted as part of any future assessment and funding process. I look forward to the minister's response.

Blackburn time capsule

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (19:12): (1566) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Back in 2001 there was a time capsule that was placed as part of the local centenary-of-Federation celebrations in the nature strip alongside South Parade in Blackburn just adjacent to the Blackburn station. On the plaque on top of the time capsule it states that it will have an excavation date of 17 March 2026. A resident has contacted my office, saying they had asked council to excavate this time capsule, but it appears that the land is not actually owned by council; it is in a part of the nature strip that is owned by the state under the rail franchise agreement. So the action that I am seeking is for the minister to work with her department and all relevant agencies to ensure that the time capsule can be removed in a timely manner to fit the deadline.

Sunshine train station

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:13): (1567) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is that the Sunshine regional link crossovers are retained as part of the Sunshine station redevelopment. Right now, the design of this project is a perfect example of how big-city infrastructure decisions keep failing regional Victorians. Billions of dollars are being spent on redeveloping Sunshine as a major transport hub and yet somehow the design manages to make the network less practical for many regional passengers and freight operators. So let us start with passengers: trains on the Albury and Shepparton line already run straight through Sunshine, but under the current design there is no platform for those trains to stop, so passengers from north-east Victoria will be forced to travel all the way into Southern Cross station and then turn around and come back out again just to reach Sunshine. Think about that for a moment: they are literally travelling straight past the station that they need to get off at and having to back-pedal. It is bad design, we can all agree. So for many regional people this is not just about airport travel either; it is about regional communities being forced to travel to Melbourne for specialist medical appointments, treatment, education and government services. Under this design, patients, carers and families will be forced into longer, more complicated journeys for no good reason other than it was a bad plan in the first place. Instead of building a transport network that connects the state, this project risks building another barrier for regional Victorians.

It does not stop there. The proposal to remove the Sunshine regional link crossovers raises serious concerns for rail freight as well. Those crossovers are a critical connection for freight moving between regional Victoria and the Port of Melbourne. If they are removed, freight operators will be pushed onto the already congested Geelong and Werribee corridor, where passenger trains have priority, so rail freight operators will be forced to travel an additional 47 kilometres, adding time, fuel and crewing costs. When rail becomes more expensive and slower, the freight does not disappear; it goes onto trucks. That means more heavy vehicles on our roads, more pressure on road maintenance and more safety risks as well as more emissions. At a time when we should be strengthening rail freight, this design risks pushing the system backwards.

What is most frustrating is that these are not complicated problems. The trains already pass through Sunshine. The infrastructure is being built, yet somehow the design manages to lock regional Victorians out of the very hub they already travel through. It is the kind of planning that makes people in regional communities shake their heads in despair and say, 'Did anyone in Melbourne actually think this would work for the rest of the state?' Right now it feels like regional passengers are expected to just be grateful for infrastructure they are forced to travel straight past. It is not good enough. I seek a

simple solution: that the Sunshine regional link crossovers be part of the redevelopment and ensure this project does not lock regional Victorians out.

Casey Hospital

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:16): (1568) My adjournment matter that I wish to raise is for the Minister for Health Infrastructure and concerns the upgrades at Casey Hospital. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on the progress of the works to expand the emergency department at Casey Hospital, which services my constituents in Narre Warren South. My community really is looking forward to the completion of the expanded emergency department at Casey Hospital, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Responses

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (19:17): A number of members have raised various matters for various ministers tonight, and I think the Minister for Public and Active Transport will be a particularly busy woman after tonight. The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure concerning Doncaster park-and-ride. The member for Ripon raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport concerning the Central Goldfields Shire Council and the Maryborough Soccer Club. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place regarding the liquor licence for the Buchan Rodeo. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport seeking an update on the rollout of the youth Myki in the Cranbourne electorate. The member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport requesting a review of bus service routes in the Croydon electorate.

The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Children in the other place regarding early learning places in the Bellarine electorate. The member for Hawthorn raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding safety and accessibility on Warrigal Road. The member for Box Hill raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport regarding a time capsule underneath South Parade in Blackburn. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport regarding the Sunshine rail redevelopment. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure regarding the Casey Hospital emergency department expansion. All of those requests will be distributed to relevant ministers for their response.

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

House adjourned 7:19 pm.