Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 12 May 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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Tuesday 12 May 2026

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:34 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bills

Victoria Police Amendment (Police Reservists) Bill 2026

Introduction and first reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:35): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 in relation to police reservists, to consequentially amend the Firearms Act 1996 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:36): I ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:36): This bill amends the Victoria Police Act 2013 to reintroduce a power for the Chief Commissioner of Police to appoint police reservists and provide other necessary amendments to provide for a police reservists scheme.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

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

Introduction and first reading

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:36): I move:

> That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Building Act 1993 in relation to places of public entertainment, emergency orders, building notices, building orders, decennial insurance, flood-prone areas and minor matters, the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 in relation to adjudicators, authorised nominating authorities and reviews of that act, the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Act 2025 in relation to the statutory insurance scheme, minimum financial requirements and minor matters, the Building Legislation Amendment (Fairer Payments on Jobsites and Other Matters) Act 2025 in relation to minor matters, the Building and Plumbing Administration and Enforcement Act 2026 in relation to ministerial guidelines, flood-prone areas and minor matters, the Cladding Safety Victoria Repeal Act 2026 in relation to a minor matter, the Sale of Land Act 1962 in relation to off-the-plan contracts and section 32 statements, the Water Act 1989 in relation to flood plain management, the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Act 2012 in relation to exemptions and offsets and the fixed charge on residential land and the Land Tax Act 2005 in relation to the principal-place-of-residence exemption and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:38): I ask for a brief explanation on this huge bill, and I am wondering: is this a backflip on the minimum financial requirements?

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:38): The bill protects consumers and alleviates cost-of-living pressures through reforms such as introducing a decennial insurance product for apartment buildings, streamlining structure permits for festivals and events and delivering tax relief for Victorians.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Petitions

Rubicon solar farm

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 1509 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the proposed Rubicon Solar Project that is located in a high bushfire-risk zone, surrounded by dense forest with only one road in and out. The site lies close to two school camps that host children year-round, increasing the danger in the event of fire. The inclusion of lithium battery storage adds serious risk of explosion and contamination of local waterways.

This industrial-scale development would ruin the rural landscape, threaten wildlife and tourism, and cause significant stress and mental health impacts for residents who fear for their safety and the loss of their way of life.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly oppose and reject the Rubicon Solar Project, and to prevent large-scale industrial energy developments in bushfire-prone, environmentally sensitive, and rural residential areas.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Mildura train services

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) presented a petition bearing 2643 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the regional city of Mildura and the Mallee corridor have been without a public passenger train service to Melbourne for 32 years.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly commits to reinstating a public passenger train service to Melbourne in the form of a weekly passenger train shuttle service between Mildura and Maryborough, using the existing tracks, to connect with the current passenger train service between Maryborough and Melbourne.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Residential tenancies

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) presented a petition bearing 2160 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the opportunities for improving the efficiency and fairness of the Residential Tenancies List at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), to better support a healthy rental market for all Victorians. Many small rental providers face extended delays in resolving disputes related to rent arrears and inaccurate rental references. These can involve repeated reviews and adjournments in cases with multiple tenants on a lease, where co-tenants may not attend hearings, or where adjournments or payment plans are granted despite evidence of non-payment or misrepresentation. Such delays can lead to periods without rental income while providers continue to cover ongoing costs, potentially discouraging investment in rental properties and limiting the overall supply of affordable housing options.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly

1. Introduce expedited possession applications where rent arrears exceed one month's rent, with strict limits on adjournments when clear breach evidence exists.
2. Grant rental providers immediate possession rights upon expiry of a fixed-term lease if the tenant is in arrears, subject to essential procedural safeguards.

3. Amend legislation to limit repeated reviews in multi-tenant cases after adequate representation, and require visual identity verification for tribunal hearing participants (replacing phone-only confirmation without proof).
4. Mandate independent verification of rental references, with penalties for providing false information.
5. Review VCAT Residential Tenancies List processes to ensure timely and equitable dispute resolution.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Members

Acting Speakers

The SPEAKER (09:41): Under standing order 20, I have tabled my warrant amending the panel of members to preside as Acting Speakers. I have added Martin Cameron and discharged John Mullahy.

Documents

University of Divinity

Report 2025

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Defence Industry, Minister for Skills and TAFE) (09:41): I table, by leave, the University of Divinity report 2025.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 6

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (09:41): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 6 of 2026, volumes A and B, on the following acts, bills and subordinate legislation, together with their appendices. In volume A:

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026

Dangerous Goods Transport Bill 2026

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2026

Occupational Health and Safety Amendment (Dangerous Goods) Bill 2026

Outdoor Recreation Victoria Bill 2026

Roads, Road Safety and Ports Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

In volume B:

Safe Food Victoria Act 2026

State Taxation Further Amendment Act 2025

SR No. 94 – Serious Offenders Amendment Regulations 2025

SR No. 144 – Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Further Amendment Regulations 2025

SR No. 147 – Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) (Conduct on Public Transport) Regulations 2025.

Ordered to be published.

Annual Review 2024: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (09:43): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Annual Review 2024: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments*, together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Bendigo Kangan Institute – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Box Hill Institute – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Chisholm Institute – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order under s 17D granting a lease over Edinburgh Gardens

Deakin University – Report 2025

Federation University Australia – Report 2025

Gordon Institute of TAFE (The Gordon) – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Holmesglen Institute – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Inquiries Act 2014 – Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion – Interim report, together with a statement under s 37(1)(b) – Ordered to be published

Judicial Entitlements Act 2015 – Recommendation statement under s 34

La Trobe University – Report 2025

Melbourne Polytechnic – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Monash University – Report 2025

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

- Bass Coast – C176
- Boroondara – C413 Part 3
- Casey – C304
- Colac Otway – C125 Part 2
- Greater Bendigo – C275
- Greater Geelong – C488
- Manningham – C142
- Melton – C232
- Moorabool – C85
- South Gippsland – C133
- Victoria Planning Provisions – VC248
- Wangaratta – C95
- Wyndham – C266
- Yarra – C247

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University) – Report 2025

South West Institute of TAFE – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 – SR 39

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – SR 40

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 34, 35, 36, 37, 40

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Swinburne University – Report 2025

TAFE Gippsland – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

University of Melbourne – Report 2025

Victoria University – Report 2025

William Angliss Institute of TAFE – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt

Wodonga Institute of TAFE – Report 2025, together with the Minister's reported date of receipt.

Committees

Parliamentary committees

Membership

The SPEAKER (09:45): I have received the resignation of Richard Welch from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and Ingrid Stitt from the House Committee, both effective from 12 May 2026.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That Richard Riordan be a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Program

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Leader of the House, Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:45): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 13 May 2026:

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026.

In kicking off on those matters and the importance of them to the house and debating them as part of the government business program and concluding them by 5 pm on the 13th can I say, firstly, my first sitting day as Leader of the House being last week, I want to acknowledge my ongoing engagement for the time being with the member for Brighton. May it continue for many, many, many, many sitting days. I also say that we saw in the last sitting week the opportunity for the Treasurer to introduce the budget here in the Assembly and also get down to the business of providing support, particularly around the cost of living, to people in our community, to Victorians who are working hard. It outlined a very significant and ambitious agenda for Victoria, and we are very keen to make sure that the Parliament has the opportunity, through the business program, to discuss those matters in depth today. This also provides an opportunity, one would hope, for the Leader of the Opposition and for those opposite to make contributions to the government's budget and to outline perhaps what plans they have for Victorians – what plans they have around cost-of-living support, what plans they have to support jobs and investment in Victoria, what plans they have for making sure that people can go to work knowing that their jobs are secure and knowing that they are being supported by their government. Do they support 20 per cent off car registration, saving Victorians around $190 per vehicle? Do they support free public transport until the end of May and half-price public transport until

the end of the year for hardworking Victorians? We have already seen this in terms of free public transport commitments for all young people under 18 and for seniors on weekends.

Is there support for making sure that the Werribee Mercy Hospital continues to get the additional funding that has been secured by the member for Werribee? Is there continued support for Mernda hospital that we have seen secured by the member for Yan Yean and the expanded services at the Cranbourne and Craigieburn hospitals that have been secured by the member for Cranbourne and of course out there in Craigieburn by my colleague the Minister for Roads and Road Safety? We have also seen that South Melbourne Primary School and Melton and Rockbank Toolern Road primary schools have upgrade funding. These are really significant projects, with some $760 million for new and growing schools. We want to make sure on this business program there is an opportunity for our colleagues to speak to those matters and to outline to the house why it is critical this legislation passes the Parliament so that these funds can get moving to support communities right across our state.

Can I say also that there are some critical areas of funding up for debate on the government business program through this week, particularly around the $62 million for 200 police reservists. I was pleased to make announcements on those matters this morning with Deputy Commissioner Barrett at Victoria Police headquarters. We know there are a lot of very hardworking Victoria Police members who have retired but who want to come back and support their colleagues, and there is an opportunity through the support which we hope to have from those opposite on the business program to give voice to these reforms and investments. We need to see them pass the Parliament so that these investments can be secured and the additional resources sought by the Chief Commissioner of Police can play a role in getting more frontline police out in the community because of the support our police reservists are able to provide. We already have EOI of some 90 former officers that are keen to get started on 1 July, and the introduction, as I touched on earlier, of legislation on these matters would allow this to hit the road on 1 July, but we do need the money to flow. That means we need the business program approved so that we can get this legislation through. It includes $44 million for an additional 50 protective services officers, and we have already seen the significant work that they are doing in the community, both in terms of 2000 charges laid and 1000 arrests across shopping centres, through Operation Pulse across significant places like Northland, Highpoint and Fountain Gate. I am also pleased to see the $18 million for enhanced capabilities for technology for Victoria Police in the budget. These are significant other investments to keep the community safe. We want to make sure they are supported through the appropriation bills.

I look forward to hearing something further from those opposite. So far what we have heard is cuts to the public service: one in seven jobs to be gone in the public service – hardworking public servants who have kept people safe through the COVID pandemic, who contribute to our services in health and education, who contribute to our services on our roads and who look after us in our emergency services. But to lose one in seven through the cuts that have been outlined by those opposite – we look forward to them explaining a little bit more about not just what they want to take away from Victorians but what they want to do for Victorians, unlike the Allan Labor government.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:51): I rise to speak on the government business program. For a second week in a row we will not be opposing the government business program. That is twice in this term; do not expect any more before the end of the year. That is the fill. In terms of this government business program, this government business program deals with the two appropriation bills, which are, as the Leader of the House mentioned, important bills. They are important bills, and it is a very important opportunity for all members to speak on the government's budget and the short budget speech that the Leader of the House referred to earlier as well. We were all here last week for what turned out to be a much shorter speech than I think we expected. We were all sitting down waiting to hear about a 15-minute speech from a Treasurer who came in and delivered a speech in half the allocated time that she was provided. Of course she did, because there was not much to say. Other than a few announcements that had been made over previous days, there was not much else for them to crow about. And hasn't there been silence since?

By contrast, as the Leader of the House alluded to today, the Leader of the Opposition has an opportunity at about 11 o'clock, for everybody watching, to come and outline our vision and our economic plan. We have a 10-year economic plan, which the Leader of the House will speak to in great detail. I know that all members on this side of the house will obviously show our leader the courtesy of being in the chamber. We were all here for the budget speech, and what will be interesting to see is how courteous the other side of the chamber is. In previous years they have been very discourteous in their attendance – but why would they be anything else? That is true to their form. We are excited to hear our leader outline our economic vision because it is a stark contrast from what this government has provided. Other than a few media releases which have not had much substance, the Leader of the House spoke to the registration announcement. We of course, on the day it was announced, called for immediate payment. Rather than going onto the web and trying to find some form, which I am sure that half of Victorians will not ever be able to find – some hidden form – pay them the money. Why don't you just give them a bill that has the cut built into it so people pay less? Why not just give them the money? Why not just charge them less in their registration? Well, why would they, because this government is mean, sneaky and tricky.

We will be announcing and speaking to our economic plan through the leader shortly, and we are excited to hear about it, and I know Victorians are excited to hear about the stark difference. What you will notice with the leader's contribution is a degree of substance and a degree of thoughtfulness which will run in contrast to the 15-minute contribution of the Treasurer last week. What a let-down that was. It is no wonder that the Treasurer has gone AWOL since, because what has she got to sell? Not that she is a great salesperson, but what has she got to sell? You are going to be excited to be here in the chamber; you are going to be excited to hear the Leader of the Opposition's contribution.

I know that all members of this place are excited to speak about the economic differences between this side of the chamber and the government. I note the Leader of the House was speaking earlier to allowing an opportunity for members to speak on the budget. I note that every year the government cuts off the budget debate, and last year over 20 – I think it was nearly 30 – members of this chamber were not allowed an opportunity to speak on the government's own budget. Can you believe that? I mean, how embarrassed would you be about a budget if you do not even allow your own members to speak about it? So I take the Leader of the House at his word and hope that he has improved on his predecessor and that members of this place will all have the opportunity to speak on the budget, because they should. In our case, we can speak to the neglect and the lack of foresight in the government's budget. I do not know what the other members will speak about on that side of the chamber, but we will not be opposing the government business program.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Mernda train services

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:56): I am very pleased to report to the house how the Allan Labor government is boosting weekend train services on the Mernda line. Locals jumping on at Epping, South Morang, Middle Gorge and Hawkstowe stations will benefit from more trains running more often across the weekends. Wait times will be reduced to approximately 20 minutes, a significant improvement on the up to 40-minute waits passengers have previously faced on weekends. Residents in my electorate of Mill Park are delighted that very soon they will be able to get to where they need to go sooner. That means fewer cars on the roads, savings on fuel costs and more precious time at home. The Allan Labor government is also delivering free public transport until the end of May followed by half-price fares until the end of the year. This is meaningful and immediate cost-of-living relief for families and household budgets right across the state.

Kelynack Recreation Reserve, Mill Park

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:57): I am also pleased to highlight the Allan Labor government's $150,000 funding for the Kelynack reserve in Mill Park, home of the Rivergum Cricket Club and the second ground for the Mill Park footy club. I was delighted to recently contact Rivergum Cricket Club's president Con Spaliaras to share this great news and last week had the opportunity to drop by the clubrooms to meet with Con, secretary Chris Dunbar and vice-president Gabe Sorrentino to talk about how this grant can be used to improve the facility for their members. This is about local sport close to home.

New World Arts

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:58): As a child I spent a lot of time on weekends out at Laverton with my father, where he had a business and was a councillor. I got to see him deliver the Laverton pool, deliver the *Around Laverton* newspaper, deliver for the school and deliver for aged care and so many things. It was a pleasure to visit Laverton with my sister Sharyn over the weekend and to see the New World Arts exhibition, which showed so many wonderful things around Laverton and also dedicated some of the great things that my father did for the area. I particularly want to mention the mayor Diana Grima, who talked about the fond memories that she had of my father, which included Dad teaching her how to ride a bike and also buying her first bike and also being a mentor for her in terms of going into what is now local government. It is great to see that my dad has had that long-lasting impact. Congratulations to Bron and to Alan for keeping those memories alive of the great area of Laverton.

Australasian Union of Jewish Students

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:59): AUJS today will be having their visit to Parliament, and it has been probably for 10 years that I can remember that we have hosted them here at Parliament. It is such an important time at the moment, with the difficult time many of the Jewish students have experienced. I say to all members of Parliament, please pay courtesy to our Jewish students that are here today. They are doing a wonderful job. To David Loven, Jasper Sherman and Gemma Milner, thank you for organising this important event.

The Patch Primary School

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:59): Since I last gave a members statement so much has happened across the Monbulk district. I had the pleasure in March of handing out SRC badges at The Patch Primary School to Millie, Norah, Sage, Reggie, Joe, Emily, Benji and Henry. Congratulations to these student representatives, and here is to a great year ahead being the student voice for their peers.

Lilydale & District Historical Society

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:59): It was a sea of orange the other weekend at the Monbulk Living and Learning Centre for the *From the Lowlands to the Ranges* exhibition held by the Lilydale & District Historical Society. This collection of stories and images celebrating the story of Dutch migration to Australia and settlement in Monbulk, Silvan and surrounds saw hundreds turn out to reminisce and reconnect with others who share their heritage. What a great event it was.

Kalorama Chestnut Festival

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:00): At the annual Kalorama Chestnut Festival, the weather doing its best to keep the crowds away could not put a dampener on the celebrations of all things autumn and chestnuts. A fundraiser for Mount Dandenong Primary School, this festival brings together the community. It was wonderful to share a tent with the Philanthropic Collective, who raised funds to help those in need across the ridgeline.

Ferntree Gully News

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:00): *Ferntree Gully News* is celebrating its 100th edition with a photographic exhibition at the Hut Gallery in Ferntree Gully. Started 17 years ago by the indefatigable Anne Boyd, this local community non-profit bimonthly paper is still delivered directly to homes across the gully and is much loved for its positive and community focus. Here is to the next 100 editions to come.

Anzac Day

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:00): I would like to acknowledge the many wonderful services across the Dandenongs for Anzac Day. From the gully through to Gembrook, thousands of locals gathered at dawn and morning ceremonies.

Northeast Health Wangaratta

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:01): The PET scanner issues have not gone away at Northeast Health Wangaratta. Our communities are desperate for, firstly, acknowledgement from the Allan Labor government and, secondly, a timeframe for when it will get fixed. In November last year, nearly six months ago, I wrote to the Minister for Health. In her usual form, there was not even a response to my letter. The arrogance from her is unbelievable, hence probably one of the reasons why she has been moved on. Victoria's health services have been left for dead by the previous minister and the Allan Labor government. The PET scanner upgrade, needed so it is compliant, is well overdue and must be replaced asap. I urge the new minister in the other place to show the people of Wangaratta and surrounds the courtesy of a reply and a timeline that we can rely on.

Ovens Valley electorate events

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:01): A big shout-out to the Bright Rotary Club and Fenella O'Sullivan for another successful autumn festival, and of course next weekend La Fiera in Myrtleford is not to be missed. It will be a huge day of singing, dancing, red wine and Italian culture – what could possibly go wrong. I hope to see visitors and locals this weekend in Myrtleford.

Eldorado Memorial Hall

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:02): Congratulations to the Eldorado community on the 90th birthday of their hall. A time capsule went into the ground, and the celebration was a huge success. Our small communities know how to throw a party, and I congratulate the entire community of Eldorado for the whole weekend. Eldorado was the place of the dredge, as many people know. It was a wonderful weekend and a great celebration, and I congratulate that community.

Lawrence Russell

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:02): Vale, Laurie Russell ESM. It is with deep sadness that I share the passing of Lawrence 'Laurie' Russell ESM with the Parliament, born in July 1942 and passing away on 23 April this year. Family was his great contribution, but I am going to talk about a different contribution that he made, which is to the SES in Victoria: 40 years of continuous service and a unit controller for more than 32 years. Laurie was a founding member of the Werribee unit, which he went on to become the controller of. On the day that he finished his probation he became the deputy controller, such was his skill. Laurie went on to become the founding controller of Wyndham West and Point Cook in 2023. I can personally attest to the strategic way in which Laurie went about establishing the Point Cook SES and making sure it was fit for purpose. It was his contribution that made that happen. I am thankful to him for that, and I know the community is thankful as well. He was a member of the board of VICSES for 14 years from 2005. I want to acknowledge Carol, his late wife, because she made so much contribution to the SES without ever being a member herself. They also re-met at the Belgrave swimming pool, which was a lovely story shared on the day. Pride in his family was evident at the opening of the Point Cook SES, with his daughter Vicki and granddaughter Amy now the unit controller. Vale, Laurie Russell.

Anzac Day

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:04): I want to thank the many students who laid wreaths on my behalf on Anzac Day at the services I could not get to: James Benton from Mansfield; Skye McLeod, who rode her horse to the service in Merrijig; Malakhi Taylor and Charlie Noble at Jamieson, assisted by Beau Berg, Mason Quilty and Rose Kapovic; Billie Birmingham at Alexandra; Xavier Jacobs at Flowerdale; Carl Brereton at the Kinglake dawn service; Irwin Huber, also at Kinglake; Mitchell Bevan in Marysville; Remi Hynes and Blake Lawrence at Kangaroo Ground; Nina Morgan in Hurstbridge; Evelyn Tully at Yarra Junction; Leshiah, known as Jada, from Worawa Aboriginal College, at the Healesville dawn service; and Vedra Liston-Lara and Aidan Deppeler from Badger Creek Primary School, also at Healesville.

Rubicon solar farm

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:04): This morning I tabled a petition with more than 1500 signatures opposing a proposed industrial-scale solar and battery farm in the Rubicon Valley. Residents are rightly concerned that the site is in a high-bushfire area. The site is surrounded by forest, with only one road in and one road out. There are two school camps and campsites nearby. The Longwood fire in January was dangerously close. Further, they are worried the development would damage the rural landscape, impact wildlife and tourism and place further stress on a community already concerned about the safety and loss of its way of life. I welcome reassurances from the minister that consultation will occur if a planning application is lodged, but that must be genuine consultation, not tokenistic.

Essendon North Primary School

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (10:05): I was delighted to head out to Essendon North Primary School on Friday with our outstanding Minister for Education, the Deputy Premier, where we have announced, as part of the Allan Labor government's budget, $24 million to rebuild this fantastic school. It is the single biggest investment in a primary school in the history of Essendon, and I think it pays tribute to the strong leadership shown by Kate Barletta, who is the principal for this great school. Essendon North is a wonderful school. A few years ago it celebrated its centenary, and it has been serving our community for well over 100 years. This will take the school into the 21st century.

Essendon electorate tram services

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (10:06): I was also delighted as, while I was there with the Deputy Premier, we wandered down to the Essendon North roundabout. Many a fender has been bent at this roundabout. People do not like it. But because of the new G-class trams we are getting rid of this roundabout. And what does 'G' stand for? Gold, baby, gold. G-class is going to be epic. It is not going to be a tram trundling along tracks; it is going to be like a surfboard in the sky. It is going to be amazing: 150 people; routes 57, 59 and 82. The member for Footscray is over there. She loves a bit of the gold action, and she is going to be getting it because of this government's investment – the single biggest investment in tram rolling stock in 50 years, proudly brought to you by the Allan Labor government. I have got to tell you, you get a free roundabout upgrade with it. It is epic. It is awesome. Dare I say, on the topic of gold, it is totally lit. That is how good it is. It is going to be amazing, and I cannot wait to get on board. Toot, toot, get on board.

Member conduct

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:07): I rise today to talk about the truth and the definition of 'truth'. Truth is the quality or state of being in accordance with the fact or what actually happened. Something is true when it accurately reflects reality. That is the definition of 'truth', and it is a shame that in this house the truth is not told. Our very own standing orders state that we cannot use the words 'liar' or 'lie' because it is 'unparliamentary'. What if calling out the lie is the truth? It is a fair question. If we are going to be honest in this chamber, then we should be able to use these words. We can use other words like 'mislead, misinform, misinformation, dishonest, inaccurate, fabricate or spin' which

are all replacing that word. Even this morning the Leader of the House got up and misled this Parliament about us getting rid of public servants, when the government itself has sacked thousands of public servants in accordance with what the Premier stated the other day. I cannot see why we cannot get up in this chamber and call out the truth. The fact of the matter is that this government lied to my community about the West Gippsland Hospital, and that is the truth.

Trish Crossin

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:08): On behalf of the Werribee electorate I would like to recognise the service to the nation and to our western suburbs by former Senator Trish Crossin AM. Trish had a humble start to life in Kensington, choosing to help others from an early age. She attended teachers college and went on to make the move to Arnhem Land with her husband. She took up a post as senior teacher at a bilingual school there, where she was well respected by the people she worked with. A true Labor champion and passionate unionist, she worked across the union movement in the Northern Territory. Like all of us in the labour movement, she was not afraid to get out into the community and confront the challenges she saw. Trish stood for a position as senator for the Northern Territory and was in that role from 1998 to 2013. Her career saw her stand up for social justice, from the rights of women to compensation for the stolen generations. I knew Trish in her later life, working as a passionate advocate for TAFE in Melbourne's west. Her work as chair of the Gordon on rolling out more TAFE opportunities in Wyndham was important to making sure young people in my electorate had options for further education beyond what was traditionally offered out in our area. She was also a passionate lead in that group in expanding the Gordon's footprint into the south-west rather than just having their heart in Geelong. While most of her life's work was in the Territory, she brought that same passion for social justice to the west. Trish passed away not long after celebrating her 70th birthday. My thoughts are with Mark, her son Paul and her daughters Amanda, Melinda and Kate. Vale, Trish Crossin.

Latrobe Valley Baseball Association

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:10): I rise today to talk about the Latrobe Valley Baseball Association, where I attended the inaugural women's league, which started on Saturday. A double-header was played between Churchill, Traralgon, Morwell and a combined side from Moe, Newborough and Sale. With the trigger being pulled in late 2025 to get this competition up and going with hopes to have a game at some stage during this year, the league were blown away with the response from existing clubs, and to have four full sides playing on Saturday was simply outstanding. Congratulations to Josh Graham, who leads this forward-thinking Latrobe Valley Baseball Association, and well done to all the ladies that showed up on the day to take part in this wonderful extension of the Latrobe Valley Baseball Association.

Crown Hotel Traralgon

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:11): Also, on Friday night I was lucky enough to be behind the bar at the Crown Hotel, pouring a few beers – responsibly of course – as part of the Australian Hotels Association and the Crown Hotel engaging with the community. Thank you very much to Brett Melbourne for hosting me down there. While I am talking about Brett, just a quick shout-out to Brett's daughter Jade Melbourne, who is playing basketball over in Seattle and who unfortunately lost another tooth in her last game.

International Nurses Day

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:11): Today is International Nurses Day, and I say a huge thankyou to our nurses – extraordinary people who provide love, care and dignity to those in need, often during their toughest times. Thank you for the sacrifices you make and for turning up each and every day and giving so much of yourself to care for others.

Mar Polis III Nona

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:12): I wish to congratulate His Beatitude Mar Polis III Nona on being elected as Patriarch of the worldwide Chaldean Catholic Church. Mar Polis is greatly respected for his work here and his courage and leadership through the worst times of persecution in Iraq. He is so loved by his community, exemplified by the words of the youth:

> We thank God and are forever grateful to have called you, our people in our churches, Archbishop, and now we are honoured to call you our Patriarch, leader of the Chaldean Church. May God always be by your side in this new journey and bless you with every grace as you lead his people.

It has been an honour to attend the celebrations, both last night with Minister Erdogan and the member for Greenvale and on Saturday night at Our Lady Guardian of Plants church in Campbellfield. We love being with the Chaldean community – such warmth, generosity, resilience and a deep commitment to faith, family and community. We also really enjoyed being at the St George's feast day festival and catching up with community regularly at the wonderful Upfield footy club. Basima raba to His Beatitude. We wish you all the best. It is wonderful to have both an Australian and a wise man in this role during these tumultuous times.

Prahran Market

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (10:13): Prahran Market is one of the true jewels of the Prahran community. Famous across Melbourne for generations, it has been so much more than just a place to shop; it has been a meeting place, a local landmark, a home for small businesses and a living expression of the character, diversity and energy of our community. It is something that as locals we should be immensely proud of and equally committed to preserving. It is a foundational part of our plan to revitalise Chapel Street precinct. From the fresh produce and the artisan cheeses to the butchers, the bakers, the florists and speciality retailers, Prahran Market embodies the spirit of local enterprise.

At a time when so many local businesses are under pressure. our priority should be to protect, promote and strengthen places like Prahran Market, not cast uncertainty over their future. The market is an irreplaceable and non-negotiable element of our community. Its value cannot be measured simply in land use or in development potential. It belongs to the community; it has for 162 years, and that is how it must remain. I want to place on record my unequivocal support for Prahran Market, its traders and its customers, my local constituents. Prahran Market is more than a plot of land. For locals it is an extension of our homes, and you cannot put a price on that.

Embroiderers Guild, Victoria

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:14): The Embroiderers Guild, Victoria, has come to Lalor. Late last week I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural embroidery group gathering at the Lalor Library. It was very well attended by seasoned embroiders as well as novices like me. Local resident Jasmine McFarlane was the organiser of this great initiative with teachers or guides Heather McDougall and Susan Simonet. Heather is also the Embroidery Guild, Victoria, promotions convenor. I am sure the group will really take off, as we have many creatives in our area. Heather introduced the program, remarking that there is a huge need for embroiderers in the north, as most of the organisation is in the south. It was exciting to see an idea like this becoming a reality after starting with a conversation at the famous Whittlesea Show. Heather also introduced an amazing piece of embroidery to show us of Julia Gillard, our first female Prime Minister, with the words of her famous speech, 'I will not be lectured about misogyny and sexism by this man.' It was a great hit. I did tell Heather that this would make a fortune at an ALP fundraiser, but she was not going to part with it. Congratulations to organisers, and a big thankyou to Susan for her patience in guiding me through my first cross-stitch.

Maroondah Hospital

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (10:16): I rise to speak about the disappearance of the Maroondah Hospital redevelopment from this year's state budget. It is gone. In 2018 the government promised a dedicated children's emergency department at Maroondah Hospital. Then in 2022 – I know; I was

there – it promised a billion-dollar ground-up redevelopment of the hospital, including renaming it the Queen Elizabeth II hospital. At the time construction was expected to begin in 2025 – that is last year – with more beds, a larger emergency department and upgraded health services for Melbourne's outer-east. It is now 2026. There is no construction, no updated timeline, no progress onsite and not a single dollar identified in the budget just delivered for the project – not a single dollar. The government says the rebuild has not been abandoned and that planning is still well underway. But after years of announcements, after the election commitments, the community deserves answers. What planning has actually been completed? How much taxpayer money has been spent so far? If the project is in fact alive, and I do not think it is, why has it vanished from the budget? How can a $1 billion project not even get a single line item? This is not just about politics. It is about health care close to home not just for families right across my constituency but for the residents of Heathmont, Bayswater, Croydon, Monbulk, Box Hill and Glen Waverley. Maroondah Hospital services one of the fastest growing regions in Victoria, and patients and healthcare workers are under pressure. They deserve answers.

International Nurses Day

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:17): I want to give a shout-out to our nurses on International Nurses Day and recognise their great contribution to our communities at times of need and times of challenges. When you front up to emergency departments or need that critical surgery, it is those nurses, it is doctors and it is our midwives that are there each and every day. It is why we are investing in Monash Medical Centre. We saw construction underway just over the recent days to see the seven storeys that will be delivered there, with maternity services upgraded, ICU and more theatre capacity. We delivered the Frankston hospital redevelopment, now Peninsula University Hospital. To see that transform health care in the Bayside, Kingston and Frankston areas is absolutely extraordinary. Dandenong Hospital will get $305 million as part of an expansion to their theatre capacity. A lot of bubbies in my community have been born at the Dandenong Hospital, and that is a really big uplift as well.

Mordialloc electorate level crossing removals

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:18): I want to give a big shout-out as well to all of our residents as level crossing works get underway. We have got Mordialloc station opening on 21 May. It has been a really hard slog getting around our community during those three-week disruptions, but our communities in Aspendale, Edithvale, Chelsea, Mordialloc and Aspendale Gardens have been so resilient during this time. Thank you for your patience as we get on with this work. I know it has been a hard slog, but we are almost there. On 21 May we will open it all up – the new Pine Crescent intersection from Station Street to the Nepean Highway. We are making our community safer and more accessible for the future because that is what Labor governments do.

Footscray electorate social services

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:19): Next week an important new service will open in Footscray. The Lighthouse Cafe, operated by the Salvation Army in partnership with this government and the City of Maribyrnong and supported by a wealth of local organisations, will provide a front door into a warm space where everyone is welcome. The cafe will not just provide a warm meal for people who want it and need it; it will be a place for connecting people who need help to the right services. We have exceptional services in Footscray; Footscray has always been a place that lifts people up. For decades the Salvos have run housing for elderly men at risk of homelessness in Footscray. Cohealth, with its origins on Paisley Street as the trade union clinic, has a homelessness multidisciplinary clinic where complex challenges are unscrambled, clothes can be washed and a shower can be had. The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre helps hundreds of people every week. Reaching Out in the Inner West offers food, Western Health operates Saltwater and Unison provides housing to the homeless. Last year I spoke to the Premier about a missing piece of the puzzle. We had many services, but we needed experienced social workers to build connection for vulnerable people into the services they

need with kindness. The Premier helped me with funding, and in last week's budget we secured more for the continuation of this service.

Gender equality

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham) (10:20): I rise to reflect on several events that have happened that demonstrate the government's ongoing commitment to the safety and empowerment of girls across Victoria. It was an absolute honour to attend the Women Deliver conference along with 6000 women from across the world here in Melbourne, joining global leaders to advocate for gender equality and the rights of women and girls. When we invest in women, we strengthen families, communities and entire societies. Since the conference's conclusion organisers have announced that the Melbourne conference provided US$190 million in new and renewed funding for gender equity initiatives around the world, such as for the prevention of family violence. I also joined many in our community and many from this place at a candlelit vigil for National Family Violence Remembrance Day, held here at Parliament, hosted by Safe Steps. I thank the staff and leadership at Safe Steps for putting on an amazing event. We heard powerful stories from survivors and family members who bravely shared their heartbreak, resilience and hope. I thank the many speakers who were so brave to get up and tell their stories. I am also pleased to have attended the launch of Safer Together, the first network of community leaders who are putting safe spaces in public places, and we launched the first one in the Docklands precinct.

Cranbourne Community Hospital

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:22): There is a lot going on in Cranbourne. This is fantastic news for our community hospital. Our community hospital opened in October last year. Already you can get dental, dialysis, ophthalmology and mental health services. This is an amazing facility. But wait, there is more exciting news: last week we announced in the budget there will be an urgent care clinic. Thinking about what happens when our community has a need to treat bumps, bruises and abrasions, we are going to be able to get that care really close to home right there in Cranbourne at our beautiful community hospital. I am very pleased that the member for Macedon is here, because I know she has been incredibly actively involved in watching this develop, but also the new Minister for Health came out to Cranbourne.

International Nurses Day

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:23): Of course an urgent care clinic or a community hospital does not operate without an amazing workforce. So today, on International Nurses Day, I am going to take the opportunity to thank the extraordinary nurses who live in my community and who serve my community. Our nursing workforce – nurses and midwives – are top-notch clinicians, and I am grateful every day for their service. Thank you to the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, thank you to our nursing and midwife professionals – we are very fortunate.

Cranbourne electorate community barbecue

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:23): On another matter, we have a community barbecue on 16 June down at the Casey Fields playground.

Boronia K–12 College

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:23): I was very excited that we were able to announce $499,000 – we will call it $500,000, we will round up – for the wonderful school community at Boronia K–12 College for a massive upgrade to their gym, including resurfacing, a fixing up of their floor, and a whole range of upgrades to amenities. A big thankyou to the principal at Boronia K–12 Paul Broecker and his entire school community for being wonderful advocates for a great local school. I cannot wait to see an architect appointed and this project rolled out, which may of course occur after my time here, but I am very proud to have advocated with the candidate for Bayswater Julie Buxton on this project.

Eastern suburbs train services

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:24): I am really excited that after years of advocacy the Belgrave line and other lines, including the Lilydale line, in the outer east, will be receiving an uplift in services. This is the biggest uplift in services we have seen for some time on the outer east lines, moving from 30- to 20-minute weekday evening services. This is going to mean a huge difference for locals, particularly given the rise of working from home and flexible working arrangements. This is going to make it easier for people to catch a train, get more people on the trains and off our roads, so a huge thankyou and acknowledgement to the Allan Labor government for making this significant commitment for my community.

Bayswater electorate roads

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:25): I am really excited as well about the funding announcement to deliver signal optimisation work on Burwood Highway and Ferntree Gully Road, a really busy road corridor, arguably the busiest in the Knox municipality. I was excited to announce that with Daniela De Martino and the candidate for Bayswater Julie Buxton.

Daylesford Primary School

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (10:25): What a treat it was to head out to Daylesford Primary School last Wednesday to meet with principal Ali McCann, assistant principal Trudi Blick and school council president Natalie Fagan to share some wonderful news. This year's budget delivers $6.7 million to Daylesford Primary, and this will enable the rebuild of block D. Block D is where the preps, grade 1s and grade 2s currently learn, so we will be delivering a brand new facility for those littlest students. This funding is all about delivering state-of-the-art learning environments that match the quality of teaching that is being delivered by our public school teachers right across the state.

Daylesford College

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (10:25): In other great news for Daylesford, along with Minister Settle, the member for Eureka, we have worked together to ensure that kids from Ballan are now zoned to Daylesford College. What this means is a strong future for that school, one that this government has invested more than $10 million in and indeed successive Labor governments have effectively rebuilt from the ground up, so great news for everyone at Daylesford. We are investing in what matters for Victorians, making sure that Victoria truly is the Education State. Again, I look forward to spending more time in Daylesford.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for making statements has concluded. Before we move on, I find myself having to remind the house about the use of unparliamentary language. The words 'lie', 'lying' and 'liar' are unparliamentary – from Speaker Smith 2011 and Speaker Edwards 2022.

James Newbury interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Without assistance, member for Brighton. The quicker we get through this, the better. There is a longstanding practice. For example, in 1967 the Deputy Speaker noted that the word 'liar' was unparliamentary. Any variation of the word 'lying' when used about members, such as 'telling lies', 'lied' or 'liar', is unparliamentary – from speakers Smith and Edwards as mentioned. The reason for this is because it is a matter of a breach of privilege to accuse a member of deliberately misleading the house, which a lie would be. If the house wishes for these rules to change, then the appropriate place would be the Standing Orders Committee, and that can be taken up there. Until then, the rules are the rules and will be appreciated should they be upheld.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (10:28): I am delighted to make a contribution on the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes, which is a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report which was tabled in March of 2026. At the outset can I just say what a great privilege and honour it was to serve as the chair of this most august committee for four years. I would say to any member: if you have not had the opportunity to serve on PAEC, do yourselves a favour, get on board; you are going to love it. I just loved every moment as the chair of PAEC. But I digress.

I want to bring the house's attention to chapter 8.6, investment in AI infrastructure, at pages 138 to 140. Why I think this is important is that if you go back to the mid-20th century, so much of Victoria's wealth and prosperity was predicated upon manufacturing. We were the manufacturing heartland. Why were we good at that? We had industrial-zoned land close to Melbourne, we had access to energy and water and we had the skills. What you saw in the course of the 20th century was the rise of manufacturing, and we were the manufacturing heartland. If you go back to the early 1990s, as the tariff walls came down many of those manufacturers went broke. But because of the foresight of successive governments, that land has been preserved and protected as industrial-zone land. Why that is important is that we are not having the silly arguments they are having in New South Wales as to 'Should you have industrial-zoned land for housing, or should you put it for an industrial purpose?' Those matters have been dealt with. Why this is important is that data centres need access to power, access to water, a technically qualified workforce and ideally to be close to the CBD. That is exactly what we have got. And because of the work of this government, we have been able to create that level of investment. There are 188 AI firms within the Hoddle grid. We have got a pipeline of $25 billion worth of investment.

The naysayers will say there is not much in the way of employment creation with data centres, and that is true – most data centres might have 200, 300 workers – but it is the capacity that they unleash. Data centres will be to the 21st century what the rail lines were to industrial England. Again, similar comparisons – you have a significant capital investment, you have a relatively low employment base, but what you do is you unleash capacity. What we are doing here in Victoria is we are bringing in that capital – we are crowding in that capital, and we have the opportunity.

Tonight, when they go to bed in Silicon Valley, it will be about lunchtime here in Melbourne. There is this capacity to be able to have the workstreams and workflows flow from the United States of America to Australia. The other point to make in relation to the benefits of Victoria is that we are a temperate climate and our energy prices are lower than, say, New South Wales. With a data centre, you have got two choices – you can either use water for a coolant or use air. Water is 40 per cent more efficient than air as a coolant. If you look at, say, some of the big data centres, like CDC, they have got 900,000 litres of water in a closed loop to make sure that they only use that water once. The capacity that we have – the great potential that we have – is that we can start to service the Asia Pacific region. For the first time ever tokens are now positive, they are profitable, and there is an opportunity for us to be able to export tokens into the Asia Pacific region. Currently, when you use AI, it takes about 250 milliseconds for that request in Claude or ChatGPT to go to a data centre in America. We have got the capacity to service the Asia Pacific region, one of the fastest growing regions in the world, and to do it within 50 milliseconds. That is going to improve the user experience; that is going to increase the capacity.

The real opportunities for AI are in the ways in which we can harness and utilise AI to play to our competitive strengths, like food and fibre, like agriculture and like international education. These are the benefits and the great promise that it holds. But we have got to get it right, and we have got to make sure that we do not leave people behind. That is why we want to ensure that people have that capacity to be trained up and skilled up. We have got to get in front of this, because the reality is AI is

all around us. The notion that you can do what the EU has done in the past, which is to try to control it via regulation, just does not make sense. This thing is moving faster than parliaments can move. What have got to have a principles-based approach, we have got to make sure that we are investing in our talent, we have got to try and crowd in the capital and we have got to try and grow the economy. The reality is that the national accounts showed in December of last year that Victoria was leading the nation in terms of new private capital formation, and a key driver of that is the data centre investments. This is our moment. This is our time. We cannot hesitate. We cannot dither. If we halt or pause, we lose. Let us go forward with confidence.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:33): I rise today to make my contribution on the 2024–25 financial and performance outcomes from the PAEC, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Of course I cannot help but go to the section dealing with the relocation of public housing towers and their residents. Really, in a modern economy and in a modern state like Victoria is supposed to be, it is something that we should be priding ourselves on, the efficiency and the effectiveness with which we can house our own population. Some of the statistics coming out of that particular budget period are a real indictment on this government. We have heard in recent months, and certainly in the last week with the state budget coming out, that this government has spent an enormous amount of money. We are $200 billion in debt, and it seems to me in the public commentary the only thing this government can hang its hat on is building train stations. We heard just prior to this segment in the chamber members of Parliament talking about how they are getting more train services for their communities. Of course those of us in country Victoria would dispute that greatly, with my own electorate barely having a train operating at all for the last six months, and when they do they are crowded, cramped, minus food services, running late and replaced with buses often.

But back to housing: the simple facts are that this Victorian government talks the talk but fails to deliver on action when it comes to housing. The sad facts on our public housing numbers are that back before the Big Housing Build started, prior to 2020, we had around 88,000 public housing dwellings, and in that we had a range between one- and five-bedroom homes, and our public housing waiting list was 30,000 families. Today, at the time of this report, we have some 65,000 Victorian families either waiting for a home or in a home that is not suitable for their habitation. It might be that they need three bedrooms and they only have one or they are up a flight of stairs when they do not have accessibility through wheelchairs or other mobility devices. So that is a huge concern: we are failing the homeless and people getting into the most basic of housing. That also does not include the six-month backlog of families waiting to get onto that list. There are many thousands, potentially, of other families sitting, not yet even processed to the list.

Then the government came out with its promise to redevelop, between now and 2050, the 44 public housing towers. The report highlights that some 1063 families have been identified for pretty much immediate relocation, of which over a two-year period the government has only managed to relocate approximately half, at 625. The question we ask is: why is the government making these great claims for relocation but singlehandedly failing to progress the capacity of doing that? We heard last year in the Parliament that the government is so short of homes – as I said, in a five-year, multibillion-dollar bill they have only increased the housing stock by a mere few thousand, which has not touched the sides. But relocating public housing towers is like a big Tetris block movement game; you have got to have somewhere to move the families in order to relocate and to redevelop the sites, and that is a really obvious part of the planning process, which this report identifies the government has singularly failed to do. We learned last year in the Parliament that in order to try and speed up this process and to create the extra homes in the system this government went to the private market and offered landlords up to 10 per cent more than what the going rate in the community was for that accommodation. So we have a government that says it cares about homes and housing Victorians, but at the same time it is shrinking the supply of homes in a massive way, and then for the most vulnerable in the state it is actually

actively competing in the private market for the scarce amount of homes that are left. It is a huge concern. It has been highlighted in this PAEC report that we are just failing to deliver.

In the short time I have left, I would also point out that the government has continually allocated funds through this budgetary process for cooling of the public housing towers, which it has singly failed to do, considering that many of these towers will be in existence until at least 2050.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:38): You know of my interest in local government, and I will be speaking on the inquiry into fraud and corruption control in local government, a follow-up of two Auditor-General reports. I think this is maybe the fourth time you will remember that I have got up to speak on this particular report because of its importance to the community that I represent. I speak particularly in reference to Wyndham council, which was one of the subjects of this inquiry. As you would know, there have been two monitors appointed by the Minister for Local Government, Jim Gifford and Jo-Anne Mazzeo, both of whom have expertise in the local government area, Mr Gifford recently as a local government expert and acting as the commissioner on the Whittlesea commission of inquiry and Ms Mazzeo with extensive experience across councillor conduct meetings. The focus of the monitors to be appointed in Wyndham is on the service delivery, the culture, staff wellbeing, procedures and decision-making.

Part of the reason that we had the inquiry into fraud and corruption in local government, which was a follow-up of those two Auditor-General reports, was because, in my view, I have got some deep dissatisfaction with local government in the community that I represent. Both the local government areas are actually under monitors at the moment, which is very challenging; it is challenging for that trust in local government. This trust is not improved when local government does not hear as well what the state government is putting forward when it comes to monitors.

Moments after the monitors were appointed Wyndham City Council's website had a statement from the councillors, which was welcoming the minister's announcement appointing a monitor to the City of Wyndham. What they described was:

> … not an issue of Governance, it is a case of one Councillor putting their interests above those of the Council and Wyndham residents.

That might be true that one councillor has done so, and I encourage that mayor, appointed and voted on by those Wyndham councillors, to consider his position, and in my view he should resign. But having said that, the monitors were not appointed to Wyndham City Council because of, in their view, one bad apple. They were appointed because of significant issues related to the governance going on at the council and how they are managing the important ratepayers money in the community.

I will take us to case study 5.2 from the report, which is 'Wyndham city information and technology services project illustrates problems that arise in the absence of minimum standards for public reporting'. Why was this a problem? It was a problem because in 2018 Wyndham City Council invested $19 million in an IT project – very normal to do so. The project was meant to finish up in two years. Four years into the project, with an unknown quantity of money spent on it – my understanding is closer to $40 million was spent on it – they cancelled the project, and then they appointed a new IT provider to undertake those services. What we found out in those committee hearings is that when those contracts were cancelled, there was no real public reporting of it. There was no accountability around what finances – that is, ratepayers money – was being spent on these IT projects. It is not unusual, I dare say, that IT projects do run over cost. That is not an unusual thing. We hope that they do not. We should put in the systems and the processes to ensure that they do not, but sometimes they do. But it is unacceptable that the public cannot find out about that – that ratepayers cannot find out about that.

Repeatedly, when asked, Wyndham council was unable to provide this information to the public, to the ratepayers of Wyndham. They had the opportunity through multiple annual reports. They had their opportunity through multiple budget processes. They had the opportunity, like they did for a media statement online around the monitors, to put it into the public domain in so many ways, and yet they declined to do so. They declined to do so when asked by the parliamentary committee. So is the failing one bad apple? I would say no. There is a failing of culture, of governance. Wyndham council too often do things in private, outside the public eye. Too many decisions are made that way. I for one welcome the monitors at Wyndham City Council. It is important that they undertake their tasks. It is important also that members working within Wyndham City Council and others who have knowledge of the affairs there disclose those to the monitors. It is important to do so, so we can clean up this city council and get a better outcome for the communities in the south-west of Melbourne.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:43): I rise to talk on the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria. This committee report was done last year, and I am very pleased to stand and talk about it today as one of the members that was part of the Environment and Planning Committee. Our terms of reference were:

> That the Committee conducts an inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria including the methods of building them and the mix of housing forms and types and report no later than 15 December 2025.

And we did. In doing so and travelling around regional Victoria talking about housing, what was virtually straightaway brought up to us was the lack of housing being built in regional Victoria. I think any member in this chamber would be well and truly across the fact that the amount of housing that is being built right across Victoria, especially in regional Victoria, has fallen behind, with the amount of people that are looking for housing, and that supply is just not there. One of the other things that was of concern to us was the lack of trades in regional Victoria, so our builders, plumbers, electricians and plasterers and so forth that are needed to actually complete these houses for people, if they are building their first home or if we are building houses for any reason, for people to be able to rent.

The two major factors, the supply of the homes and also the fact that we do not have the trades to actually build them, were stark and consistent no matter where we went across the regions, and we did travel right around regional Victoria. We were in Colac, Warrnambool and Winchelsea. We were up in Horsham, Stawell, Ararat, Castlemaine, Ballarat, Pakenham, right down to East Gippsland, to Bairnsdale, Heyfield in the seat of Morwell, up in Morwell and in Longwarry North. No matter where we went, these were the two issues that were brought up constantly.

There were other issues. We talked to councils, because we need that ongoing release of land for these houses to be constructed, and some of the issues there were around hold-ups at a planning level, waiting for the government to come back and say that we could actually build on these sites. Also, in my local area in the Latrobe Valley, we have coal overlays, and the coal overlays were extremely unforgiving, as we were not able to unlock land down in the Latrobe Valley. So there was a great, wide spread of confusion and disappointment that councils are trying to get land up and to the stage of being developed, but they were hitting roadblocks every time they turned a corner.

When I talk about headworks into these developments, that is our water boards: we need to make sure they have water and sewerage. And our power corporations need to be able to put the electrical supply into these new developments; they were being stymied also. For the developer to actually get the works up and make it viable for them to be able to employ their people to make sure the land is available, there were roadblocks there as well. We need a smooth transition with trying to get the land developed, trying to get our houses built and trying to make sure that our tradespeople are there. Thrown in on top of that now is the cost of actually building projects, with of course all our materials going up as well.

So there needs to be a concerted effort from the government right across the board to actually make sure that we are doing the right thing by Victorians so we can build houses.

We came up with 12 findings, and we had 34 recommendations, which the government has taken on board. Regional housing is important, and people working in trades in regional Victoria are important also.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:48): I rise to speak on the inquiry into fraud and corruption in local government done by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I thank the previous speaker on this side, the member for Point Cook, for his contribution, and I do echo a lot of the sentiments that he had. In particular in this report I do want to go to findings 24, 56, 57 and 58. Finding 24 goes towards that transparency which the member for Point Cook spoke about. Findings 56, 57 and 58 go to the process of monitors in local government as well. I want to make it clear to the community that I think Cr Singh's decision to provide a reference is abhorrent and reaffirm Labor's commitment to removing these types of good character references – so-called good character – from our justice system altogether.

Like many of my colleagues on this side, I will not be meeting with Cr Singh in any capacity. Instead I will be working through my local ward councillors, in particular Peter Maynard. But I would like to challenge the assertion – and the member for Point Cook also picked up on this – that the appointment of a monitor to Wyndham City Council was in relation to a case of one bad apple. Many times in this house, and in fact many times outside of this house, I have spoken about concerns around governance at Wyndham City Council and its decisions, such as the Oracle decision, which is heavily referenced in this report and in some of the questions on notice provided by the council, and not only the transparency around reporting for the Oracle project. Recently Wyndham City Council brought out its draft budget, and in reading that budget I have some concerns about the way that it presents a lot of the state funding and federal funding in it too. I look forward to working with my ward councillors on clarifying that, because I have also raised in this house and outside of this house concerns around the way Wyndham City Council has spent state money, and the way that it has been acquitted for important local projects, particularly in community sport.

I also have concerns around recent discussions online around the allocation of residual funding for the Ison Road project from council going to other parts of the municipality, not even on the same side of the river. I have appreciated the positive engagement I have had with council officers on that but would like to make it very clear that if there are developer contributions collected for projects on the western side of the river and Werribee and Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes, they should be spent on projects in those same areas. In particular I would suggest finishing the gap in Ison Road left by developers at the intersection with Greens Road. I would like to encourage community members to engage with council officers as part of that draft budget process and ask those questions of them as we move to adopting that budget.

It is not just a case of one bad apple. There are many cases that have been documented, not only in this inquiry but also out in the community, of governance concerns at Wyndham City Council. I do welcome the appointment of not one but two monitors for Wyndham City Council in Jim Gifford and Jo-Anne Mazzeo. It is important that the monitors' work goes to the heart of those governance concerns. The terms of reference, which are available online for members of the public to read, not only go to some of those concerns around councillor conduct and councillor engagement with members of the public – we saw our previous mayor stood aside for that very issue – but also the appointment of the CEO and some of those internal governance processes when it comes to councillor behaviour and conduct. I would encourage members of the public to read through those terms of reference. I would especially encourage ward councillors, and those ward councillors who signed that

statement saying that it was just one bad apple, to reflect on this and work with the monitors at Wyndham City Council to restore confidence and good governance there.

I will continue to work in government, particularly with the Minister for Local Government, using those legislative mechanisms that we have, to restore the confidence and good governance at Wyndham City Council, because it is important. Wyndham City Council partners with the state government on so many different road projects that we have in the area, including our new bridge between Wyndham Vale and Tarneit, as well as the Ison Road project. They partner with us on the delivery of many services as well, so it is important that we restore that trust.

But to return to my original note to Cr Singh, you should really read the room, reflect on those calls by your fellow councillors and by community members and resign.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into Victoria's Upper House Electoral System

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (10:53): I rise to speak on the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into Victoria's upper house electoral system final report. Few issues go more directly to the health of our democracy than the way Victorians elect their representatives. This was a serious piece of committee work, informed by expert evidence, public submissions and a clear recognition that Victoria's current system is no longer serving voters as it should.

Whatever our political differences in this place, we should all be able to agree that voters should know where their vote is going and their preferences should reflect their choice, not a backroom deal stitched together by party operatives or preference negotiators. Indeed this report makes one thing crystal clear: Victoria's upper house voting system is the last of its kind in the nation, and it is the last for a reason. Group voting tickets have had their day. They let parties, operatives and preference whisperers decide where a voter's ballot goes after the voter has stopped writing. This is not a feature of a healthy democracy. Our committee's December 2025 report says plainly:

> Group voting tickets have led to votes being counted in ways that people do not know or understand and have undermined trust in the electoral system.

That is why they must go, and we have seen exactly how this works in practice. The committee's earlier review of the 2018 election found that Rodney Barton of Transport Matters won from just 2508 first-preference votes in Eastern Metro Region, while the Greens candidate there had 34,957 votes but did not get up. It recorded that Transport Matters won a seat from just 0.62 per cent of the statewide vote, while Derryn Hinch's Justice Party won three seats from 3.75 per cent.

Barton was elected after group voting ticket preference flows, including over 38,000 above-the-line votes from eight microparties and nearly 11,000 Labor surplus votes. If that reflects the free and informed expression of voter will, then words have lost their meaning. Experts like Antony Green told the committee that the kind of distortion Victoria produced is impossible in systems where voters control their own preferences. He said group voting tickets allow parties to game the system – that is the phrase, 'game the system'. And that is exactly why the committee's recommendation is so important. It says that we should take the first immediate step now, abolish group voting tickets, let voters direct preferences above the line and restore the basic democratic idea that your vote should go where you send it, not where a party machine or preference whisperer sends it behind your back. Across the years all sorts of parties have worked this system or benefited from it. We have had Transport Matters, Derryn Hinch's Justice Party, Animal Justice Party and in 2022 even the ballot paper curiosity of Sack Dan Andrews Restore Democracy, which directed votes to Labor. That all said, Labor and the left have been the primary beneficiaries in recent years of this preference-gaming.

While I am talking about the extensive gaming of the upper house system, we also see this gaming in the lower house with compulsory preferential voting. In Dunkley in 2019, for example, despite the AEC's boundary change, I was still able to win the primary vote but lost primarily due to preferences

that Derryn Hinch's Justice Party directed to Labor. They were effectively running on a platform of 'tough on crime', splitting the Liberal Party's vote and directing votes to the Labor Party, whose policies were less tough on these issues. Or look at Werribee recently: the Liberals won the primary vote, but Labor won due to preferences from the Greens, Victorian Socialists, Legalise Cannabis and some others. I saw people walking in in Werribee not wanting to vote for Labor but then picking up the how-to-vote cards for these minor parties, usually not knowing that by following these how-to-vote cards, their vote was going to Labor. Now we see Avi Yemini from Rebel News, who has set up the Free Palestine and Muslim Votes Matter parties with the aim to direct preferences to One Nation and more conservative parties. Some might mock this, but by doing so, he is making a point about the failures of this group voting system, a system which has been cynically used for years, particularly on the left, such as with the Sack Daniel Andrews party. He is making the point of how crazy the current system is and how easily it can be manipulated and that either such parties must be accepted if they meet the rules or, ideally, the system should be abolished.

Our laws indeed permit anyone to market one thing to voters and deliver another thing through the preference machinery, so the problem is the machinery. But we seem to see this Labor government now hesitating on making this reform. This time last year Labor might have suspected that group voting tickets might help the Greens get more seats in the upper house, replacing this plethora of small minor parties winning seats on the back of preference deals, which in turn helps Labor, given Greens normally aligning with Labor. But now it seems this government are afraid that such a change would help Pauline Hanson's One Nation party get more votes instead, and so we have seen them go cold. But democracy is not a party management exercise. It should be about democracy. It should be about this government getting rid of group voting tickets.

Bills

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed on motions of Sonya Kilkenny and Anthony Carbines:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (10:58): It is a great privilege to be here today to deliver the coalition's response to the 2026–27 budget. Perhaps I am old fashioned, but I believe the budget should lay out the framework through which a government intends to manage the state's finances in order to make life better for people, to make their lives easier and to help them get ahead. A budget is not an exposition on geopolitics, on Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East or the President of America. It is not an opportunity for platitudes, excuses or misdirection. It is an opportunity to reflect on the state of the state, to be accountable for when your actions have made things worse for people and to lay out a clear plan to make things better. Speaker, I regret to inform you that the budget delivered last week did none of these things. But to be honest, it is hard to call it a budget: it is a credit card statement for 11 years of Labor's failure. So I rise today on behalf of the Liberal and Nationals team to be honest with the Victorian people, to be up-front with them about the state of our economy and our finances, to explain why that is having an impact on their hip pocket and to lay out our 10-year economic plan to give Victorians hope for the future once again.

By almost every measure Victoria is the worst performing state in the Commonwealth. Our debt, which those opposite seem intent on leaving to our children and grandchildren, is growing to unprecedented levels. Our services are crumbling. Our teachers are marching on the streets. Our roads are falling apart. When the coalition left office in 2014–15, our finances were streets ahead of other states. Net debt was just $21.8 billion, less than 6 per cent of GSP. Net government debt is now a quarter of the economy. The interest bill was just $2.1 billion a year. It is now four times as much and heading to six times as much by the end of the decade. And when Labor run out of money, they come

after yours. They have quadrupled land tax bills, payroll tax has more than doubled and that is just the beginning. Since taking office Labor have introduced or increased 67 taxes. You have to give them points for creativity. There is the new emergency services tax, there is the payroll tax on GPs and schools, there is a tax on short-stay accommodation providers, there is a windfall gains tax, there is the vacant residential land tax and there are a dazzling array of COVID debt levies and service charges, and what have we got to show for all this?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members, this is Westminster tradition. Some of you may not be familiar with it. The budget speech and the budget reply speech are to be heard in silence. I ask you to respect that tradition.

Jess WILSON: For all the tax Labor is collecting you would think Victoria would be the envy of the nation, Victorians would be relaxed and comfortable and their daily lives supported by well-funded services and infrastructure. I am sorry to say that is far from the truth. Victorians are neither relaxed nor comfortable. They do not feel safe in their own homes, on their own streets or in their own communities. They are under serious cost-of-living pressure. Criminal offending is at an all-time high. It takes longer to get an ambulance today than it did 10 years ago. Teachers are striking on our streets, and graduate nurses cannot get jobs, because there is no funding for new roles in our hospitals. Construction of new homes is at a decade low. Elective surgery waitlists have blown out. Roads are littered with potholes and at least $15 billion has been lost to corruption on major projects.

Given this dire situation you would think those opposite would jump at the opportunity the budget affords them to get started on the fix. But I am sorry to tell you this is simply not the case. All this budget achieves is sealing the Premier's and Labor's legacy as the most fiscally reckless government in Victoria's history and in our country's history. It is a budget of higher debt, higher taxes, higher interest repayments, blowouts and delays. It lacks any plan to grow our economy or provide meaningful support to Victorians. It is full of excuses and no solutions. The budget contradicts Labor's spurious claims of a surplus. It actually confirms a cash deficit of $7.7 billion. I regret to tell you that this budget is based on highly dubious economic assumptions. For example, every figure in the budget is predicated on the assumption that spending growth will only be 2.5 per cent per annum after the first year. But over the past two years spending growth has averaged 7 per cent per annum. Does anybody seriously believe that this spendthrift government is capable of containing spending growth at 2.5 per cent? This budget is simply not worth the paper it is written on.

What else is in this budget, apart from the dodgy estimates and a $7.7 billion deficit, $199 billion in debt, $32 million in interest payments per day, a $720 million cut in spending on public order and safety, $150 million in cost overruns on capital projects and a backroom $1.1 billion lotto deal to inflate the fake surplus? This is a budget full of broken promises. The promise to fund a West Gippsland Hospital rebuild – broken. The promise for a Maroondah Hospital rebuild – broken. The promise for a Wonthaggi Hospital rebuild – broken. The rollout of funded three-year-old kinder – delayed, for the second time. Level crossing removals – they have kicked that can down the road, along with upgrades to Ambulance Victoria stations and capital upgrades to the CFA. And perhaps the most significant omission from these budget papers is any meaningful measures to actually pay back Labor's ballooning debt.

If Victoria has any hope of ever paying down our debt, then things must change. Debt matters, and it goes to why I am running for Premier. Labor is borrowing from our future to pay for today, and it is our children, like my son Patrick, who will be left to pick up the bill through higher taxes and poorer services. If we continue on Labor's trajectory, the only thing we can be certain of is that future generations of Victorians will have a worse quality of life than we do today. Last year Victorians experienced a 0.8 per cent fall in GSP per capita. That means they are poorer. They will have to work harder to pay more taxes to pay more interest and more debt. They will receive so much less in return. Their education system will be underfunded, their health services will be diminished, police numbers

will be down, so they will be less safe, and you can forget about investing for future infrastructure needs – and all this because Labor are incapable of doing the work needed to balance the budget and to pay back their debt. This is a fundamental breach of the social contract, the contract that we all sign up to when we come to this place: that we would do our best for Victorians now and for Victorians to come. We are leaving our children to pay back our spending today, and to me that is unforgivable.

But it is not just our children who will suffer because of Labor's debt and deficits. Victorians today are already being short-changed. Next year Victoria will spend more money paying its interest bill than it will on Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and all kindergarten services combined and still have a billion dollars left over in change. Just think about that for a minute. The line items in the budget for paramedics, police and kindergarten teachers are dwarfed by Labor's interest bill. These are the essential services we pay our taxes to receive, and instead those taxes are being diverted to pay interest on the debt Labor has no plans to pay back.

The spectacle of Labor's misdirection around the true state of Victoria's finances last week will be taught in future political classes as their case study in governments underestimating the intelligence of their voters. It is a case study of a government that thought it could take voters for mugs by spruiking a so-called surplus while its debt climbs towards $200 billion and while interest payments eclipse spending on essential services and a government that thought it could quietly extend a 40-year monopoly to an ASX-listed company without putting it out to tender, just to prop up its books. For too long Victorians have been told half-truths about the state of our finances. Every year the numbers change, the excuses change and the promises get bigger while the delivery gets worse.

I want to make a commitment today: you will not get this from a government I lead. A coalition government will be an honest government. We will be honest about our finances, about what things really cost. We will be honest about what is achievable. We will not put 'TBC' in multiple line items in our budget, especially not on the biggest infrastructure project this state has ever seen. We will not sugar-coat the state's financial position, because Victorians deserve honesty. They deserve to know that Labor's interest bill is now dwarfing spending on the essential services Victorians need. They deserve to know that Labor is lumping our children and grandchildren with higher taxes and poorer services and that unless we change the state's trajectory we will be leaving the next generation to pay our tab well after we have all gone from this place.

I say to Victorians: it does not have to be this way. At the heart of the Liberal and Nationals strategy is respect for taxpayers, because when governments lose respect for money, they lose respect for the people who earn it. When debt is controlled, interest costs are lower and more money can go to hospitals, schools, roads and frontline services instead of repayments, and when business has confidence to grow, jobs are created and opportunity expands. That is why we believe in disciplined budgets and lower taxes, not because they are ends in themselves but because they create the conditions for prosperity. A strong economy is not the destination; it is the foundation that allows every Victorian to get ahead.

That brings me to the coalition's 10-year economic plan – a plan to restore confidence, reduce debt and build a stronger economy. Our plan will start the process of turning this state around. It will take time. It will take hard work and commitment, but our plan will reduce debt and interest. Our plan will get our economy moving again, because without growing our economy we cannot make the lives of ordinary Victorians better. Victoria's per capita economic growth is the worst in the country. Without economic growth, we will not get out of this mess we are in. We need more business investment in Victoria and more jobs to grow our economy so we can start paying back the debt and investing in the things that matter. That is why a government I lead will deliver payroll tax relief to help business create jobs and grow our economy. In our first year of government we will increase the payroll tax threshold to $1.1 million and again to $1.2 million the following year. This change will bring us into line with New South Wales and deliver payroll tax relief to 23,000 businesses across our state. And in year 4 of a government I lead we will reduce the metropolitan payroll tax rate to 4.8 per cent, meaning every

single Melbourne business paying payroll tax will pay less. This tax reform will make it cheaper for businesses to create jobs. It will increase economic growth, which will make debt reduction easier.

I appreciate these are modest changes, but this commitment is important. It sends a powerful message that if Victorians do me the honour of electing me Premier on 28 November, Victoria will be back open for business. We will not devalue or take for granted the businesses that generate the revenue and pay the tax that allows us to invest in the things that matter to Victorians. We will once again celebrate the impact and the input of businesses of all sizes in our state. We will recognise the key role they make in making our state vibrant and livable once again.

We will also take some moderate and targeted action on land tax to curb the excessive impact of the government's recent hikes. We will start to reverse Labor's 2023 land tax changes by lifting the land tax threshold back to $300,000 – not in one go but calmly and methodically, by $50,000 every year for five years. This will mean more than 270,000 land tax payers will have lower land tax bills by up to $975 per year under a Liberal and Nationals government. The land tax burden hits many businesses hard, many of which are small businesses struggling with cost increases across the board. While I accept again this is a modest measure, it is also an important productivity measure which, like our payroll tax reductions, will help get our economy moving again. My team and I would love to do more and to do it sooner, but I have to be honest with Victorians: none of this will be easy. It will take time, but it is a clear signal about the priorities of a government I will lead: to reduce taxes, invest in and prioritise essential services and end the waste.

It is also time for an honest and frank conversation about the size of Victoria's public service. Under Labor, growth in the VPS has far exceeded population growth, and Victoria's total employee expenses are greater than Victoria's total taxation revenue. There needs to be a better way. Labor's answer is to sack workers, thousands of them, as the Premier so kindly reminded us over the weekend.

Members interjecting.

Jess WILSON: That is right, not hundreds but thousands, and of course the previous Treasurer set out to fire 4000 public servants. Our approach is different. We will implement a hiring freeze on back office public servants so we can guarantee the essential services Victorians rely on. That means hiring more police, more teachers and more nurses. As I said earlier, Labor have underestimated the intelligence of Victorian voters with their tired and desperate scare campaign. Victorians know we are not proposing to reduce frontline staff. In fact we have already committed to employing 3000 new police officers. But what we are proposing to do is rein in the growth in the public service to a sustainable level. This is not a measure we have landed on lightly. It will mean a lot of hard work to reform the way we do government and bring it into line for the 21st century, but it is a necessary step. The Victorian public service has grown by 60 per cent in 10 years, adding over 20,000 back office bureaucrats. Given our population over the same period has only increased by 19 per cent, this is quite simply unsustainable, and that massive increase has not delivered better outcomes for the Victorian people. These savings will be achieved through natural attrition, not lay-offs. To put it in perspective, we are talking about a reduction in the size of the total public sector by 2 per cent. Despite those opposite's desperate and deluded scare campaign, no-one is getting sacked. Existing staff have job security under a Liberal and Nationals government. I say to Victorians: anyone who tells you that a coalition government will lay off public servants is lying to you. The only person in this chamber who is laying off staff is the Premier, who by her own admission has laid off thousands of public servants – not hundreds but thousands. I say to those opposite: if you are looking for someone to blame for public sector job losses, go look in the mirror.

These are just a few measures that form part of our economic plan. They complement our other commitments to manage government spending more responsibly: our commitment to introduce a real-time budget expenditure tracker and a charter of budget honesty, because unlike Labor, we actually want voters to understand the true state of Victoria's books and to know how their money is being spent; our commitment to eliminate the $15 billion and counting of corruption payments that are baked

into spending on the government's capital spend program; our commitments to reduce stamp duty for first home buyers on homes less than $1 million to put home ownership back in reach for young people and to scrap the payroll tax on GPs and all schools; our commitment to remove the emergency services tax, a tax on every single family home, business and farm in the state; our commitment to remove the gas ban and reopen Victoria for gas exploration to ensure affordable energy supply for homes and businesses; our commitment to reform planning so that our builders can get back to work building the houses that people want to live in; our commitment to scrap Labor's divisive treaty, saving $1 billion; and of course our commitments on crime, which in addition to the human cost continues to leave a serious economic mark on Victoria.

Every day it seems we wake to news of yet another firebombing, an arson attack or an attack on a retail worker or, heaven forbid, an emergency services worker. Insurance premiums are skyrocketing, and staff are too scared to show up to work. Our hospitality sector is at breaking point, and retail businesses are closing due to theft and workplace violence. A coalition government will recruit 3000 more police and reopen the more than 40 police stations closed or operating under reduced hours. If you break bail, you will face jail, and if you do adult crime, you will do adult time. You cannot have a strong economy if Victorians are not safe. There will be no investment if the lawlessness is left unchecked, and tourists will stay away if we become the Detroit of the Asia-Pacific. We will end the crime crisis, full stop.

There will be more policies we will announce over the coming months, but I believe this 10-year economic plan sets out the detail of how we will begin to get Victoria back in shape. And I can provide one further commitment now on what Victoria's finances will look like under a Liberal–Nationals government: we will progressively reduce Labor's deficit once elected, with a view to returning to a cash surplus – a real surplus – by 2032. We will not pretend, like the government, we are in surplus now. We are not. Everyone knows Labor's legacy of debt and deficit will not be fixed quickly. It will take time. It will require disciplined and responsible decision-making. But my team and I have the energy and the ideas for the task ahead.

Before I conclude I want to say this to Victorians: I know you are frustrated. I know you are hurting. I know you are being asked to do more with less every single day. I know bills are going up and your pay packet is being stretched thinner every month. I will not insult you with one-off sweeteners that offer little more than temporary reprieve. What I will do is fix the structural economic problems that Labor have caused so we can bring down your cost of living permanently and meaningfully.

Our 10-year economic plan will deliver real, lasting cost-of-living relief. Our cost-of-living measures will save Victorian families $534 per year. Families who send their children to a non-government school will save up to $1500 per child. Young Victorians buying their first home could save up to $55,000 in stamp duty. Under our plan every Victorian household will save an average of $84 a year when we abolish the emergency services tax. For families who cannot get into a bulk-billed or urgent care clinic, our commitment to scrapping the GP tax will save a family with two kids who goes to the GP six times a year up to $360. Our land tax relief policy will deliver between $500 and $975 per year for people paying land tax on properties valued up to $300,000, many of whom will be small businesses or mum-and-dad property investors. Before those opposite roll their eyes, they should know that according to the ATO over 70 per cent of private rental providers only own a single investment property. These are not the property magnates of Labor caricatures. Our land tax relief will also put downward pressure on rents and ease the rental availability crisis. Payroll tax reductions will bring down the cost of doing business, saving a business with a payroll of $1.5 million over $30,000. That is $30,000 they can use toward growing their business, putting on new staff and making investments for the future.

Let me say this: these measures are just the beginning of how we are going to fix the budget to deliver lasting, meaningful cost-of-living relief to Victorians. Victoria needs this plan. Our budget needs to be repaired because we are spending more money than we earn. It is really that simple. Debt is now so large that it is crowding out everything else, from funding our roads, schools and hospitals, paying our

teachers, nurses and police and providing cost-of-living relief. You cannot build a strong future on a weak set of books. Repairing the budget is how we build the strong foundation for Victoria to have a brighter future. We cannot pretend the challenges will fix themselves. We cannot keep borrowing from the future to pay for the present. We cannot keep asking Victorians to carry the burden of Labor's debt. So let us take a different path. Our 10-year economic plan will restore confidence, reduce debt and build a stronger Victorian economy. This is a plan to give Victorians hope, to rebuild confidence and to secure Victoria's future. It is a plan for a fresh start.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (11:27): It is a great pleasure to be able to rise in this place and speak in support of the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026. From the very outset can I just say a huge thankyou to the Treasurer and to all of the ministers, who spent countless hours putting together this year's budget, which is another solid Labor budget which makes sure we continue to deliver the services that Victorians need and deliver on the real priorities that Victorian families and all Victorians right across our state need right now. So a huge thankyou to the ministers and to all of the team. Of course we know these bills also fund our Parliament – the necessary appropriations are made for Parliament. Before I go through my usual process with my contribution on the budget, I just want to say a huge thankyou – I am not offended at all that everyone is leaving up top; I clearly do not have the same cachet, but that is fine – to all the parliamentary staff and to everyone who makes the lives of the members in here possible in terms of outcomes professionally and supporting us in the work that we do, so a huge thankyou to the team, from the clerks all the way through. I am very grateful for all the support you provide me each day. If I do not get the opportunity before I wrap up in a few months, hopefully this one counts.

Can I just say it is a proud moment for me to be able to stand in this place as an elected representative and for the last time to be able to speak on a budget bill before I obviously wrap up my service at the end of the year. I am very proud that this is a budget which goes to backing in Victorians. In particular, we know at the moment we have got huge global conflicts – we have inflation rearing its head again – and these present challenges for governments right across our country, federal, state and local. I am really proud of the decisions that this government has made in this state budget. Obviously there is that range of $2.5 billion in supports, so there is the immediate relief in making public transport free.

We know that obviously those fuel prices have gone up substantially. Some months ago we saw unleaded petrol at about $1.50 a litre, and for a while there, before the federal Labor government made those excise decisions and decisions that other levels of government made, we were seeing prices of up to $2.30, $2.40, and diesel over $3 a litre. That was having severe impacts right through the supply chain, right to the end customer on so many fronts. The decisions made will not make all of the difference, but they will make a difference and they will go to easing some of that pressure on Victorians, easing some of that pressure on the end price and on inflation.

I am really proud that we have helped more people to get on a train, to get them off the roads, if that is what they choose to do, in making public transport free for April and May and half-price right until the end of the year, because we know this is going to have a significant tail with the conflict in Iran in terms of those fuel prices. I note the work the federal Labor government has done in securing fuel supplies and recent announcements the Allan Labor government has made to that end. But we know that this will have a long tail, so we are making sure we continue to support Victorians with half-price public transport to the end of the year. I know from the conversations I have had not just within my family, who live right across this state – and I am sure others have had similar experiences – but with, importantly, people who live in my local area that this has made a huge deal of difference. Whether it is hearing from them directly or whether it is hearing from them on social media, it has been without a doubt one of the more popular policies of recent times that this government has rolled out and could not have rolled out at a better time, and it is always a good signal that you have got something right. Again, I always acknowledge that nothing is perfect, but this was a good call and it is already flowing through, making differences to families' back pockets.

As well, importantly, we are providing rego rebates for tons of eligible Victorians. It is a 20 per cent rebate on their rego from last year, so it is not about next year's rego but giving that immediate relief from 1 June, being able to make that application to get that cost-of-living relief. That is $186 for people with one car and $372 for people with two. Another thing this budget continues to invest in and continues to fund from a fuel perspective is the Servo Saver feature. I used that recently when I went to fill up, and it is making a big difference. Again, it is a really popular measure. It will not fix everything but, to be fair, it is another smaller cost-of-living relief measure, by keeping the retailers honest, keeping the big multinationals honest and making sure people can get out there and find the best deal for themselves.

This budget is one that continues to invest in our children, the future of our state. That is through initiatives like $120 million which includes $28 million for the affordable school uniform program, $24 million for outside of school hours care for young Victorians with disability and $16 million to continue and expand the Glasses for Kids program. Another great thing that I am proud this budget is doing is that under-16s can continue to go to the zoo for free, which is a really important outing for families. As zoo members ourselves, I know my two sons will greatly appreciate it. George is a member, and I will have to get Thomas signed up in the very near future. We love Melbourne Zoo. We love Healesville; it is a lot closer. Werribee was a bit harder. George was not really keen on the hour safari trip.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: It was an hour safari ride, member for Point Cook. George did not have the patience.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: I agree with you; it is an amazing place, and the new elephant enclosure – I saw that first – is absolutely next level. It is world leading. When we talk about kids, we continue to invest in school breakfast programs. That is a point of difference with some of the decisions made by those opposite when they were in last government, albeit a fair while ago, and I hope some of those views have changed – I am in no doubt that for many they have. But in the work that we have done in expanding the school breakfast program – as a government we help to fund those things – we have a great level of support from not-for-profits, schools, all the wonderful mums, dads, aunties, uncles, grandmas, grandpas and family members who help out and make it all possible and of course the teachers. I know many teachers get involved in the program, and I want to thank them.

We are rolling out more Get Active Kids vouchers. The kinder kits, which are absolutely awesome, are a great way for people to get that early learning with some awesome books and bits and pieces of natural play and play elements that are age appropriate and something that I am really proud that this government continues to fund. We continue to roll out three- and four-year-old kindergarten. We were the first jurisdiction to roll out three- and four-year-old kindergarten, and we have seen this copied everywhere. Imitation is the best form of flattery, and we have seen this picked up by numerous state governments. It is something that is making a huge difference in the education of children, in talking to educators where my son goes to child care, and he will go into three-year-old kindergarten soon, which is really cool. He is going to start orientation soon. I have had it confirmed he is the most energetic in the class, which was of no surprise.

It is making a huge difference in the education of young people. We have seen the numbers overseas and how they stack up in terms of the understanding around the development of a child under four and their brain, and how it makes a huge difference. The fact this government has gone big and has invested in three- and four-year-old kindergarten, aside from the investment in primary and secondary and free TAFE, means a great start in life for our littlest Victorians.

I was really glad to see as well $15 million to boost allowances for kinship, foster and permanent carers. They are absolutely some of the best of us. This is some more funding to support the incredible

work that they do, particularly at an important time to strengthen food security. At this point I just want to give a quick shout-out to a couple of organisations – I am going to miss a few, but just a couple, given the time constraints. Knox Infolink, out my way – I know the member for Monbulk, in the chair at the moment, has had a lot of dealings with them – do great work in helping people in times of need and times of crisis. They sit under that CISVic, Community Information & Support Victoria, banner. They provide referral pathways, they provide food when needed and they also run the state's best breakfast program, in my view – they have run it now for near on five years. The manager out there Penny Robinson and the chair of their board Denise Budge are two great humans. They care so deeply. They have got more empathy than I could ever imagine having myself. To be fair, it is perfect that you are in the chair, Acting Speaker De Martino, because you are also someone who I look to when it comes to levels of empathy. But you have got to have that in those types of roles. So to the wonderful people at Infolink and to Outer East Foodshare, thank you for everything that you do.

Of course we are continuing to invest in social housing – $860 million over five years into the Social Housing Growth Fund – and we have seen local examples delivered in the electorate of Bayswater. In Wantirna South there are brand new apartment buildings right opposite services, located where they need to be, opposite Westfield Knox, near a significant bus interchange, so people can get access to employment and amenity, and that is critical when we are delivering housing. This budget continues to invest in making sure we get more people into homes, which is something that we have done over the time that we have been in, whether it be the Andrews or Allan Labor government.

We continue to invest in renewable energy, working towards net zero emissions. Importantly as well, there is a really decent program that often does not get the shout-out it probably deserves – and I encourage anyone, for the seven people listening to this on Hansard, to get on and have a look at the Victorian energy upgrades program. It is an absolute banger. There are so many great things that are going to help people get off their reliance on some of the old tech, some of the stuff that is going to cost you an arm and a leg, and get you onto electricity, whether it be through your air conditioners, whether it be a whole range of monitoring systems – it is absolutely fantastic, and you would be surprised just how much of a rebate you will get and how much money will be able to go back into your pocket. To that end as well, make sure you get onto the Energy Compare website, another great initiative this government started and continues to obviously deliver on.

I am also really delighted to see that we have got some funding here to deliver more specialist paediatric appointments. Everyone is passionate about that – kids or not. But something that you are really passionate about when you have got young children is knowing how important those types of services are. I am really, really pleased to see that level of investment. We know that there is the operationalisation funding for the Angliss Hospital. That opens very soon. I would love to know an exact date. We are going to get it soon. I know, member for Monbulk, the Angliss is in your electorate. They have been a huge part of our community for well over 80 years now. The staff there are so well respected. It is a place that is a metro hospital but really still has that community regional hospital vibe. I am really proud of the investment we have made. After we obviously did some great work with the ICU beds, we are now rolling out more beds, more operating surgery suites, new central sterilisation services departments and more parking and great facilities. It is not just patients in the outer east who deserve that, but staff deserve it as well. This budget delivers on that and makes sure we can get going from day dot.

I want to also just acknowledge that this budget continues to wrap up the work on Bayswater South Primary School – some local investments. I am really proud that Labor budgets have delivered upgrades at Wantirna College and of course at Wattle View Primary School, where we have just upgraded their toilets as well. We have delivered major upgrades at Templeton Primary School. I touched on free kinder saving families up to $2600 per child per year. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which is huge for families who are doing it tough, is a really great program. Speaking to so many locals who have accessed it, it has made the world of difference for them, and in particular

the children who have then been able to access those things that their friends and their cohorts do, so nobody misses out.

Of course I touched on TAFE courses. There are still over 80 free TAFE courses. Again to the now probably five people listening – it drops off over time, I have learned: if you are looking for a trade, if you are looking for the jobs of tomorrow, go have a look at the free TAFE courses.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Thank you very much, member for Pascoe Vale; I really appreciate that, sir. And of course there is the Solar Homes program. I mentioned Victorian Energy Compare. We have got our seniors discount card. We have introduced the Victorian veterans card. And there might be one person in this chamber who is going, 'When's Boronia station coming up?' Well, now is that time. This budget finishes the rollout and delivery of the biggest investment into Boronia by any level of government in a generation. I have chosen that wording because I am not quite sure. A generation is about 30 or 40 years. Maybe before that there was something bigger. I am not sure. I reckon there was not, but I am running with it because I am more confident. This is not just about the station, it is about the precinct, but it is also about backing in the aspirational, hardworking community that is Boronia. That is right at the heart of my electorate. I love these people. It is a great place to live. It is a great place to raise a family. There is a lot of work happening now. After the government have put in their funding, we have now seen a lot of private funding, obviously taking that leap of faith, believing in that community and making a huge difference. It is bringing jobs, it is bringing more aspiration and it is making people feel safer in the community they live in as well. So I am really grateful that the Allan Labor government has delivered the brand new Boronia station, which we will open, I will say, very soon – in coming months.

There are things like the airport rail. We have delivered the Alchester Village intersection, the McMahons Road intersection and the signal optimisation at Burwood Highway and Ferntree Gully Road, which is a really important project that the member for Monbulk and I are keen on. On the North East Link, every time I drive in to work – I drive most places in the east and north-east, and I try to get to the city or across to the western suburbs – you cannot miss it. It is on for young and old out there. Thank you to everyone working on that project. It is going to save you up to 35 minutes getting across to the city in the western suburbs. It is going to save you up to 11 minutes getting into the city. More lanes, an express bus service – it is incredible.

This is really a great privilege. It has been a pleasure to be in government to talk about budgets that deliver for Victorians. It has been a pleasure in my nearly eight years to deliver for the constituents who live in my community. They are the best of us; they are great people. I thank the house for the opportunity to contribute, and I support the passage of these bills.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (11:42): Twelve long years we have had of this budget mismanagement, and it has accelerated in the last three or four, particularly under the leadership of the current Premier. We have seen 12 years now, though, of broken fiscal promises. The Leader of the Opposition just highlighted exactly one of the sand beds that this budget is built on: it makes heroic assumptions about the management of expenses and says it will keep the costs to 2.5 per cent when in the last two years costs have grown by 7.5 per cent. This is the sort of spin and publicity that we are getting from this government on the budget, a budget that is all about how we deliver services and infrastructure to the people of Victoria. That is what the budget is meant to be, and it seems to be lost on those opposite that if you are spending so much on interest and on debt, you cannot spend as much as you would like on those services. You cannot pay teachers, police, nurses and PSOs, you cannot fix our roads, you cannot build new hospitals – all of those things – if you have lost control of the finances.

There are those opposite who seem to think, as the previous speaker indicated, that it is all just coming together beautifully and we are just doing so much and nobody ever has to worry about how to pay for it all. That is the problem that we have had with Labor all along, and particularly this Labor

government, which has seen the share of debt rise as a percentage of gross state product from around 6 per cent in 2014 to now 24, 25 per cent. People of a certain vintage will remember the Cain–Kirner governments. People sometimes say to me, 'Is it as bad as it was then?' and I have to say it is worse. At the peak of the Cain–Kirner governments' financial mismanagement debt as a percentage of gross state product got to about 16 per cent, and now we are at 24, 25 per cent. That highlights just how bad it has got under this government – $200 billion of debt.

Debt in itself is not a problem. Debt is important. We use debt all the time to help build, to help invest, but it is when you lose control of it that the problem comes. With $200 billion of debt we are now heading for more than $1 million an hour in interest repayments. Just think how many teachers, nurses, police and PSOs that could employ, for example, or the work it could do in fixing our roads, which the government seems to think are still not really an issue. With the $1 million in interest an hour, the government has allocated this year allegedly $1.04 billion to road maintenance. We could double that in six weeks of interest payments – double the spending on roads in just six weeks – at $1 million an hour. That is the waste that we see from this government and the missed opportunity that occurs because the government has lost control of the finances.

We are spending more on interest – $8.9 billion this year, rising to $11.8 billion in the out years – than on the police budget, the Ambulance Victoria budget and all kindergarten spending combined, and we still have $1 billion left over. That is the problem that we have in this state. We are heading for $11.8 billion of interest spending out of a budget of about $100 billion, so more than 10 per cent of our budget is going on interest expenses. The government and the Treasurer stand up there and have the temerity to say, 'We're in surplus, and we've delivered a fiscally responsible budget.' That is simply not the case, and anyone with an inkling of fiscal knowledge would be able to tell the government that.

What does this mean for regional Victoria? It means a continuation of the neglect of and the avoidance of spending in regional Victoria that has come to characterise this government. We have asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer to go back to 2021–22 and to calculate the percentage of infrastructure spending in regional Victoria versus our population percentage. In the first years it was 13 per cent. In the last couple of years it has been 12 per cent of infrastructure spending going to regional Victoria against our population share of 25 per cent. That means regional Victoria is being ripped off. Regional Victoria is being dudded by this government. We are getting 12 per cent of spending on infrastructure versus our population share of 25 per cent. The Parliamentary Budget Officer is doing that work again, and I am sure based on what we have seen in this budget so far that that figure is not going to change. In fact it might even go down given the amount of spending. The only thing that might save the government is that on certain things, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, the government is still saying 'to be confirmed'. When I say certain things, I mean only the biggest infrastructure spend project in the history of the country, the Suburban Rail Loop. The government are still saying, 'We're not actually sure how much it's going to cost.' That might actually make the government's figures look a bit better if that is not factored in, but we know that regional Victoria is not getting its fair share.

I want to particularly pick up some of the spin that has been raised ahead of this budget by this government. Every single regional Victorian, when you talk to them, the first thing that they complain about is the state of the roads. We hear it time in and time out. We hear it not only in regional Victoria; we hear it in the suburbs, and we even hear it in the inner city. We have had the government come out with the latest of a series of media releases talking about a big road maintenance spending blitz and record investment, yet when you look at what the government are actually doing, they are doing less. For example, if you go to the performance measures in the budget papers, 'road area major patched' in outer metropolitan Melbourne two years ago was 35,000 square metres. This year it is 14,000 square metres. The 'road area major patched' in regional Victoria two years ago was 566,000 square metres. We are spending more. What do you think we are getting this year? 74,000 square metres of roads patched. The government are saying they are going to fill 200,000 potholes. How many potholes must there be if we are going to do less –

Jade Benham interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: There must be too many, member for Mildura. Even the minister herself said there are too many. That is one thing. The government like to say, 'We're doing less road area major patch because we are focusing more on road rehabilitation.' Let us have a look at that figure then.

Road rehabilitation and resurfacing in outer suburban Melbourne fell from 802,000 square metres to 496,000 square metres. And the road area resurfaced or rehabilitated in regional Victoria – the government says, 'We are spending 70 per cent of the road maintenance money in regional Victoria.' Actually, 76 per cent of the roads are in regional Victoria, but let us leave that aside for a moment. In 2022–23 the government was resurfacing 12 million square metres of road; this year, less than 3 million – a 75 per cent reduction. In that year the government's budget said $441 million on road maintenance. This year they are supposedly spending over a billion, and we are getting less.

Martin Cameron interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is a good question, member for Morwell: where is the money going? We have got a government that is allegedly spending more, and yet we are actually getting less when it comes to roads. That is the concern that we have on this side. I know when I talk to road builders they are not sure where the money is going, because it is simply not coming to them. Every single Victorian knows the truth: when you look at the roads, they are in an appalling state.

When I look at another area of my responsibility, the emergency services portfolio, this year's budget shows that Victorians will be slugged $6.8 billion over the forward estimates on the emergency services tax. If you continue the line of what was being levied under the former fire services property levy, that is double what Victorians previously were paying on the fire services levy. And as the Leader of the Opposition said, scrapping that tax on average will save Victorians $84 per year. We know that our fire services in particular and our emergency services need more investment. Are they getting it, though, under this $6.8 billion – no, they are not. We had the minister come out before the budget and say, 'We are spending $100 million on new fire trucks for the CFA.' One little thing they forgot to mention, member for Ovens Valley – they forgot to mention that is over 10 years. So we are seeing the spin. We are seeing double the amount levied on Victorians, but that money is not going to our emergency services workers and volunteers on the front line. That is why we will scrap the tax, go back to the fire services property levy, save Victorians money and ensure that the CFA, and Fire Rescue Victoria in particular, get the resources and the equipment that they need.

I want to turn briefly to my electorate of Gippsland South and express my disappointment again at the lack of funding for particularly Sale College. It is the number one issue in my electorate. To my great surprise, back in 2021 the then member for Monbulk, the Minister for Education, actually provided funding for a master plan, and that master plan has been completed. Land has been purchased for a new single-site Sale College campus, but now four years in a row since that was finalised we have got no money for it. It is not completed. That is the dividend of the bad economic management. We could fund that in a couple of days with the interest repayments that this government has signed us up to. So we missed out on that. We missed out on Foster fire station, which we have been campaigning for for years, and on Korumburra fire station. We did have some wins: at long last Mirboo North fire station, which I have been campaigning for since 2017, which the Premier visited in 2024 and which the Treasurer visited at the time, has finally been funded, although we still do not have an actual site for it, so when it will happen is anyone's guess. We did finally get a new boat for the Port Welshpool coastguard, and kamikaze corner in Leongatha has got some funding four years after the Nationals actually committed funding for design and planning for that corner, which is the intersection of the Bass Highway and Strzelecki Highway – everyone's worst intersection in South Gippsland. Finally we have got some money just for design and planning, and, like Sale College, we are still waiting on actual funding to get it fixed.

I also want to talk about broken promises. We have seen a number either in or impacting my electorate. The 2022–23 budget, the budget before the last election, provided $7 million for Yinnar Primary School, which at the time was in the electorate of Morwell but came into Gippsland South at that election. Four years later there has still been nothing spent; nothing has actually happened. Likewise, $11 million was committed to upgrades at the Leongatha Secondary College; four years later still nothing has been spent. Last election the then Premier promised to build a new West Gippsland Hospital and promised to redevelop Bass Coast hospital. In this budget, four years down the track, after no funding from previous budgets, we still have no funding. West Gippsland Hospital particularly impacts the south-west of my electorate. It is part of that catchment area. Instead we have got the government spending money on upgrading the existing hospital, throwing good money after bad when we know that we need to rebuild West Gippsland Hospital on a new site. It is all ready to go. The land is there. There are cows grazing on it at the moment, because once again in this year's budget it has been left alone by this government.

I turn, as I come to the end, to what the alternative is, and we have just heard in great detail the alternative from the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Treasurer. We have a plan to get the budget back in control, to get it back in the black, and to also send a signal to the business community that Victoria is ready to invest again when it comes to a Liberals and Nationals government. We have announced that we will progressively reincrease the thresholds for land tax. It is currently at $50,000. We will go up to $100,000 in our first budget. People raise this with me all the time. We will increase the payroll tax thresholds so that more small businesses are not penalised for trying to put staff on, for actually trying to employ Victorians. To pay for this and many others we will institute a hiring freeze, which the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates will save us $22 billion over 10 years. It is a hiring freeze. Anyone who has a job in the public service now will continue to have a job under us, unlike under Labor, who have sacked not hundreds but thousands of public servants. It is all right when they do it, but when we say there will be a freeze, they have something against that. There is so much waste. There is so much mismanagement. The Nationals and Liberals will get it back under control and make sure regional Victoria gets our fair share.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:57): What an extraordinary performance by the Leader of the Nationals, who is absolutely scared still about the One Nation surge in Farrer. You see that writ large in that speech, a wafflefest that nearly put the Leader of the Opposition's speech to shame. There was not much coherence in that speech, in what is a deplorable budget reply and response from the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Nationals. It is extraordinary to think that you could step into this place, having cut $11.1 billion out of your revenue bottom line, and say that you are going to sack one in seven of the Victorians that underpin how our state runs and functions. That is one in seven workers that will no longer have a job under a Liberal–National coalition government. That is the reality. That is austerity. You wonder where the values of such a proposition might come from. Well, it only goes to the heart and soul of the member for Kew herself and the Leader of the Opposition's speech. She said in her first speech:

> I have spent the majority of my career in the private sector. From consulting on tax policy at KPMG to leading the policy team at the Business Council of Australia …

Well, there we go. That is why there is an absence of any support whatsoever for working people in that budget reply, because it is about the big end of town, it is about multinationals and it is about cutting the jobs of ordinary Victorians who help to build and create the prosperity of our state.

I really do wonder, with the opposition leader's political hero being the former Treasurer of Australia Josh Frydenberg, how the member for Kew says, 'Victorians won't be silly enough to listen to things of the government,' but then makes a big point around debt and makes a big point around interest. But it was her political hero, her mentor, who has probably led to the austerity mindset that we see here today. Josh Frydenberg said more debt and deficit was the price of saving livelihoods. There was a health crisis at the time that was put forward. He went on to say that there was a great deal of

uncertainty and you cannot overlook the fact that in a health crisis you need to respond to the economic impact.

We saw that wonderful leader the former Treasurer of Australia Josh Frydenberg take debt up to a trillion dollars. We are talking here of gross state product of 24.9 per cent. We see it at 30 per cent federally, and we see Jim Chalmers and Anthony Albanese bringing down billions. When it comes to the realities of her political hero, debt was not a problem then. Debt was not a problem, because it was Liberals that were creating the debt, it was Liberals that were outsourcing services and it was Liberals being governed by consultants.

We saw here today a second-gear speech from the Shadow Treasurer and Leader of the Opposition. No-one behind her was revved up. The Nationals had a bit of a pulse, but no-one on that side looked inspired. I was looking; I was just trying to see a 'Hear, hear' and a 'Yeah, yeah' – there was nothing. This is the problem. The speechwriters can put out the key lines, but the feel and the energy just is not there; the purpose is not there. I think we know that they have overreached too early, the Liberal–Nationals, in this budget reply by hitting one in seven government workers in Victoria. The back office workers that they talk about as commodities to just send off, the people who support the police to get out on the beat, the nurses who are supported by the allied health workers and shiftworkers who make sure that they are not bogged down in administrative tasks and that they can do the jobs required, the education support staff, the business managers, the people each and every day who front up and support our schools to operate and run and the TAFE sector and the systems that go together – those people are supported in their frontline duty. When you say you will just not have any back office staff, you are saying to those Victorians, 'You don't matter,' and that the people in frontline services' jobs do not matter, because they will be drawn in and impacted substantially during that time.

This is a shadow reply speech – and the chats to business mates at the multinationals the other day – that would make Tony Abbott blush. It would make the former Prime Minister and the former Treasurer Joe Hockey blush given how brutal and impactful this budget will be. Those opposite had so many whingefests on their social media and media releases going out about what they might have missed in their budgets. The cash surplus that they talk about means they get nothing ever again – nothing for the next decade. Those that have put out media releases saying 'Woe is us' and 'The government hasn't done this in Liberal–National areas' – the whole of the state grinds to a halt under Jess Wilson, the Leader of the Opposition and member for Kew, because tell me a jurisdiction that has had heavy austerity cuts and thrived the next day. How can you ever lift the confidence of our sector and our communities when you send tens of thousands of people over the edge, when you cancel Big Build projects, when you cancel the infrastructure agenda, when you stop building hospitals, when you stop building roads and our public transport system and when you make it harder for Victorians to get around in their communities? How on earth can you think that you can lift confidence when everyone will be in utter despair and trauma from the impacts of those cuts?

We saw that under Kennett, we saw that under Abbott and we are going to see it, because under Jess you will get less each and every day. You will have less in your bank balance. You will have less infrastructure in your community. You will have less workers in your community. You will have less essential services each and every day. Victorians, as the member for Kew eloquently said, know. They are not silly enough to not work out where the truth is. We know when Liberals and Nationals are given a go they cut, and they cut deep and they cut hard. We saw that in record funding taken out of health at the federal and state levels. What did the member for Kew say? This is really important: it is business that creates jobs, not government. To the tens of thousands of people who have a job in government – our teachers, our nurses, our police, our firies – government does not create your job; it is not taxpayers. Effectively your job is not valued by the coalition.

I thought the member for Kew was saying that we are spinning a bit of a yarn here and, 'I'm sick of spin here.' I went to her tried and true network, where Liberal aspiring leaders and those of yesteryear go and have a chat, the Sky News after dark crew. You know that Peta Credlin show. You sit down, and you get a bit of 'How bad's the Labor government?' and the member for Kew goes, 'Pretty bad.'

That is the show, isn't it, backwards and forwards. Now they are a bit awkward because they get a few One Nation types on, and that is stirring the pot a little bit. Paul Murray gets Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell in the other place on there or Pauline Hanson and Barnaby Joyce. We see a bit of a change in tone.

I remember that famous quote, a very honest account by the shadow finance minister – and the member for Kew cannot walk away from this, because this was a rare moment of political honesty that was put forward. The member for Kew, when talking about the budget position, as shadow finance minister, said to Steve Price:

> That means we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

I believe the member for Kew. I believe the Leader of the Opposition that our health services are going to face cuts. I believe the member for Kew that schools are not going to be built or even fixed. You see, the member for Kew is trying to spin a yarn at the moment that it is only phantom, anonymous back office people – that is how we talk about Victorians these days: people that do not exist – that are going to lose their jobs. Yet only a year and a half ago the member for Kew had a moment of political clarity. Remember, the member for Kew does not trust one person on that front bench to be anywhere near the Treasury portfolio. The member for Brighton – no. The member for Sandringham – no. The member for Hawthorn could have done it – no. The economic narrative and everything in its decision-making is at the heart and soul of the values of the Leader of the Opposition. I reiterate: this was on 16 August 2024. If those opposition staff are wondering where the clips will be when we put them on off-page ads, it was 16 August 2024. Those opposite can say it was misquoted. It was a rare moment of political honesty. It means that we are going to make cuts to our health services, full stop, and schools are not going to be built or even fixed. That was always the heart and soul of the member for Kew, who thinks jobs are done by multinationals, not by government.

It shows, then, that when the times get tough, the Liberals and Nationals will be nowhere on the side of Victorians. This is why there is such a big choice, and this is why this budget reply and the Treasurer's speech stands in strong contrast to what we have right here. We have thousands of workers who, in 27 weeks time, on the edge of the caretaker period, know that they face an uncertain future. We have police, we have paramedics, we have teachers and we have nurses who are going to be pushed to the nth degree in pressures from cuts and not funding the support staff that put them out on the roads and in our communities, like never before. That is the question for the member for Kew today: what did the member for Kew mean when she said that she would cut health on 16 August 2024? What did the member for Kew mean when she said schools would not be built or even fixed? What did the member for Kew mean when she said governments are not responsible for jobs? Yet I look level crossing removal construction workers in the eye and I look tradies in the eye who rely on government confidence and investment for their job tomorrow. What does the member for Kew mean that governments do not create jobs? This is, right now, in the heart of it, the nastiest conservative approach to budgets of what would be a coalition One Nation–Liberal–Nationals government.

This is of great terror and concern for Victorians, because I say again there has not been a moment where heavy austerity has led to better outcomes. When you tear down the confidence by having thousands of people no longer in work, when you tear down revenue sources – which means funding vital services like our health and our schools and our police services. Remember, the majority of the budget goes to health and education – the overwhelming majority of the budget. When you cut that deep, when you pull that hard, then the heart and soul of the state, which we have built over the last 12 years, starts to dissipate. We saw the early hallmarks of that in 2014: education department regions were brought into big four regions. There was despair. TAFEs were closing. That is what they did in four years, and they did not have a motivated crew then to do it. The Treasurer at the time, the member for Rowville, could not talk about jobs in speeches. It was not even a frame or mention. They were so deep in focus of outsourcing government to consultants.

That is what we face here today, a real choice here, where $40 billion in cuts will burn a hole through the soul of Victorians that are built to be one of the more progressive, inclusive, loving and harmonious communities that we face. Every bit of our fabric and what we are as Victorians – leading confidently on the national stage and international stage, being the engine room of the nation's economy, being proud of who we are as Victorians and not tearing down what it means to be a Victorian. Those opposite pile on each and every time something goes bad in Victoria, like cheerleaders like we have never seen before. You saw it in the pandemic. You saw it time and time again when there were more health crises – there was more mustard from those opposite piling onto us like never before. When something goes bad in Victoria, it will be a Liberal–National opposition that are the ambulance chasers, hoping it goes worse. Here in government, we are about prosperity. We are about hope. We are about lifting up people, not tearing down the fabric of who we are. This is what this shadow reply opens up, and this is what the opposition leader and Shadow Treasurer will do.

This will be harsh, it will be dangerous and it will be callous. That is the response that we see from those opposite. You can do all kinds of walking-out-of-the-chamber reaction pieces. You can do all kinds of kitsch social media, but I say to the member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition: Victorians know your values. They know that when debt was up to a trillion under Josh Frydenberg, there was not a murmur of thought, because every bit of her first speech talks about him being the hero of all – the hero of all as the Treasurer who took debt up to $1 trillion. But Labor debt is bad, apparently, getting to the point of a cash surplus that means nothing will be built and nothing will be delivered for our communities going forward.

But worse than just staying still, like the Baillieu–Napthine disaster that was four years from 2010 to 2014, we have an ethos that is not liberal whatsoever but truly conservative and almost libertarian in some of this. This is an extraordinarily harsh economic reality. I do give the member for Kew credit that she has led with her values forward on austerity early on. At least Victorians can see it truly, rather than when Tony Abbott did it and stood up and said there would be no cuts to a range of different areas. At least the member for Kew has been honest that under Jess you get less, it gets harder and harder each day to be a Victorian and you have got a Liberal–National coalition more fearful of One Nation and their impacts on their primary vote than interested in doing the good things for Victorians going forward.

So this budget reply, this budget impact, will be substantial. Our team, the Labor team, have put forward a positive plan of how we will lower gross-state-product-to-debt over time. It is responsible, it is cautious and it is what other jurisdictions around the nation would do. We do not see the Crisafulli government going in with $40 billion in cuts. This is extreme level, on a per capita basis, that strips out where Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey found themselves. Under Jess, you get less. It will get harder in Victoria. No-one has ever grown a state through heavy austerity and cuts to the tune of $40 billion; no-one can front up with a straight face and say they can do it and still cut revenue to the tune of $11.1 billion.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:12): We had the budget delivered only a few days ago, and we were all ready, poised for what the headline of this budget was going to be. We kind of tried to workshop it: how would the government actually be framing up this budget? How would they try and save the train wreck of spending, waste and mismanagement that we have seen over a decade of this wasteful government? And what we got was no surprise. It was another headline of spin: 'easier, safer and more affordable'. Does anyone believe this government is delivering an easier, safer and more affordable Victoria?

We have heard the saying 'Life wasn't meant to be easy'. Well, it is certainly not easy under this government. We knew what to expect because the chief salesperson of this government, the Premier, went out in April to forward deliver what were going to be some of the sugar hits in this budget. See, the big sugar hit was going to be the extension of free public transport. So of course the Premier got out on *Sunrise* with Nat Barr. We all remember this interview. The Premier said, 'You know what, we're doing a wonderful job – we're going to extend free public transport.' And Nat Barr on *Sunrise*

said, 'Well, how are you going to pay for that, with $200 billion worth of debt?' The Premier just went on to say, 'Well, we're in surplus, an operating surplus.' Of course Nat Barr did not believe her, Victorians did not believe her and what we ended up with was a train wreck of an interview talking about free public transport – an absolute train wreck. So is there any wonder why we have got a hopeless budget which has a fake surplus? What this government has tried to do to validate the spin that we have heard is back it up by selling off a lotto deal, which is normally done as a 10-year deal, for 40 years.

This government is all about 'Come in, spinner'. They talk about the private sector and the Liberals. Well, you only have to look at big business and the Labor Party and how they operate – big business and the ASX-listed companies like lotto. They did a deal for over $1 billion for a 40-year lotto licence just to get a budget surplus. And let us go further: who was one of the donors to the Labor Party? It was lotto, with over $100,000. It is a bit suss, but again, what do we have with this government – nothing but a government that just wastes and mismanages and again is absolutely caught up in all of this stuff and delivering nothing. There is no fair deal when it comes to Victorians, who are absolutely bleeding at the moment with this government. But there are no surprises. It is a government that cannot manage money. We know Victorians are hearing many in industry say 'Anywhere but Victoria' because it is not conducive to investing. It is the highest taxing state in the nation.

We expected that this budget might line up some kind of tax relief, but there is none of that – no tax relief. Instead this government just takes the lemon and squeezes it further. It takes more money out of the property industry and at the same time wants to say it is delivering more homes. They have no idea about the economics of delivering more homes when they are the highest taxing state in the nation. Forty-three per cent of building a home is tax related, yet this government wants to continue to tax its way out of building more homes. We have seen that. There are no surprises in this budget: nothing for the building industry and nothing for construction. A target of 80,000 homes is down to about 60,000 homes now. Homes are not being built because there is no confidence in this state, and the numbers simply do not stack up, because this government has no idea about managing those numbers. The list goes on.

Why is it like that? It is very, very simple. We have got no confidence in Victoria, we have got no consequences for people that do the wrong thing and also we have a government that actually does not care about money. It is OPM, completely other people's money, and we see that in the way they have wasted money on not fixing the basics like potholes, not fixing the graffiti and also just not fixing the state the way it needs to be fixed. It is a government that continually is tied up in corruption – $15 billion worth of CFMEU corruption. This government cannot be putting on hard hats and cutting ribbons anymore when they are absolutely caught up in the corruption through the CFMEU. And what does the government do – nothing, absolutely nothing. It provides more in the way of the Suburban Rail Loop and more infrastructure that is going to have more union corruption on those builds and projects, and we saw that.

Here is a government that does not care about the little things. You can see it spending millions of dollars on machete bins and spending $600 million to lose the Commonwealth Games, and $200 million is going to Glasgow to host the Commonwealth Games. This is what this government does. It spends $13 million on machete bins and of course spends money on pot plants – thousands of dollars on pot plants, not to buy them but to hire them for the Suburban Rail Loop Authority. Forget the fact that we have got a big hole in the Suburban Rail Loop with billions of dollars uncosted, billions of dollars unfunded and a rail to nowhere, but also we need to pretty it up by hiring pot plants to ensure people can feel good at work. This is a government that does not care about other people's money. That is why we are struggling in Victoria, because they do not care about being able to deliver a budget and ensuring that Victorians get the basics that they need. Approaching $200 billion worth of debt means very simply that we cannot ensure that we have the police to keep our community safe, we do not have the nurses that we need, we do not have the teachers, we do not have the healthcare workers, all of which are vital to actually fixing things and the state.

Again, this government are so focused on us, the opposition, because they have run out of ideas themselves. They have run out of ideas, and now it is all about focusing on us because we have got a vision for a fresh start to fix the state: a fresh start to reduce the taxes, to reduce payroll tax, to reduce land tax and to reduce stamp duty – important taxation to send a signal that Victoria is open for business. Reducing payroll tax creates jobs, and creating jobs builds the opportunity to ensure that we get more business and more investment in this state and more people coming to Victoria – that the red carpet is rolled out again to investment.

We have seen that in all areas. We have seen that when it comes to tourism. We have seen that when it comes to major events. We once were the major events capital, and what have we seen in recent weeks? What we have seen is the MotoGP gone, the Aus Open golf gone, superbikes going – where does it stop for all these major events? South Australia is up and about and saying, 'Come here. We'll look after you.' Victoria is MIA, missing in action; that is what they are. You have got two premiers, both Labor premiers. Malinauskas is up and about, tackling and fighting for his state and kidnapping our events for South Australia at the expense of us losing them. That is not going to ensure that we have confidence. We need to ensure we have got the kinds of major events that we had. We do not have it in Victoria, because we do not have a vision, we do not have a plan and we do not have investment. All we have got are sugar hits, and things need to change. But again, we have a government that is focused on other things. They are not focused on doing their job. They are not focused on a plan. They are focused on us.

We see, again, a ridiculous amount of money, over $700,000, for a bureaucrat to be paid well above the odds, and this is a government that says, 'That's okay. We're just going to keep funding the back office. We're going to keep funding these bureaucrats at the expense of the front line.' The Liberal–Nationals will invest in the front line by freezing the back office, and that is what Victorians expect: freeze the back office and fund the front line. That is what we must do because we need the services. We need our hospitals. We need our paramedics. We need our police. Our plan is to recruit 3000 additional police to tackle the crime crisis and open the 40 police stations that are closed. What is the government doing? Nothing, and that is why we have a crime crisis. We have a housing crisis. We have a cost-of-living crisis. We have a healthcare crisis. This is a government that pats itself on the back. The government need to wake up to themselves, because this is not a good budget. There has not been a good budget for years. This is a budget that is meant to be, going into an election, telling Victorians, 'This is what we're going to do for your future.' The only thing this government is going to do for Victorians' future is sell them into record debt each and every minute.

I ask each Victorian to go and visit our debt clock, and you will see, every second of every minute of every day, debt being racked up by the wasteful Allan Labor government. They will not freeze this, because they are addicted to debt. They are addicted to waste. They are addicted to mismanagement. Every single major project in Victoria has blown out – every single one of them. We are up to about $50 billion of blowouts. The only thing that has not been costed as a blowout yet is the Suburban Rail Loop, because we are still in sales mode, because we are trying to encourage someone to throw some money in. This is an absolute joke of a budget because it does not get us out of the debt. It does not sell a vision. It does not sell investment. It does not grow the budget. It does not ensure confidence in this great state. We have got to return Victoria to where it once was, but we are not going to do it with a government that has got its head firmly buried in the sand and does not know how to manage money. We see it time and time again. It is the little things. It is spending thousands of dollars on pot plants. It is not fixing the potholes. It is not tackling the crime crisis. It is spending $13 million on machete bins. It is a government that does not care about money. It is an open cheque to nowhere. Yes, you have got to spend money to make money but not the way this Allan Labor government spends its money.

I did have a bit of a look, hoping that there would be something for Caulfield; unfortunately, there is nothing for my electorate of Caulfield. I do remember the days, back in 2010–14, when we did deliver a whole range of things for Caulfield when we were in government. I look at the wonderful Ormond station. I look at Balaclava station. I look at certainly some of the stuff that we did around Caulfield

Racecourse. I look at Elsternwick and some of the developments and changes around Elsternwick and Elsternwick Park. I look at that short period of time and say there were things that we could do with a budget that had nowhere near the waste and had nowhere near the taxation. It was a budget that certainly delivered confidence for people to invest. It did not have the crime. It did not have people hiding in their homes because of fear, which is what we have had with this government. When you look at our night-time economy at the moment, which was meant to be the last bastion of anything that was doing well in this state, it is now being firebombed. We have seen firebombings go from tobacco stores into restaurants and bars. We are the only state in Australia that has transferred its firebombing from tobacco stores into bars. The only businesses that are doing well in Victoria are illegal businesses, corrupt businesses and crime. If you are in the business of crime, you do well in Victoria, and that is because this government has taken its eye off the ball when it comes to crime. We do not have the consequences. We do not have 'Adult crime, adult time', and that is what we need to do.

The government only needs to look at other states to see what they have done and how they have tackled some of these issues and set a vision. Whether it be in New South Wales or whether it be in South Australia, you have got two Labor premiers that are fighting for their state. This Premier is completely focused on other things and is distracted. The Premier has been worried about her own job since she got the job, and this is a government that has no vision, no plan and no way to get us out of this debt, and that is why we desperately need that fresh start. We have got to lower the taxes. We have got to be real with Victorians in terms of the debt that is being incurred, and we have got to set out the plan for growth. We have got to ensure we have housing right across the state, we encourage investment and we encourage people to come here and build here. We have got to build back the tourism industry right across the state, including in regional Victoria. We have got to deliver more homes right across the state, not just in the developed areas, and we have got to ensure that everybody, no matter where they live and no matter where they come from, gets a fair share, because this government is all about rewarding its mates. Ironically, many of the Labor-held seats have got nothing for many years and got nothing out of this budget, and I think it is a wake-up call to many of the Labor-held seats that it is time for a change in those seats as well. We have got to change this state, we have got to change the government and we have got to deliver for all, and that is what a fresh start will do.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (12:27): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026 and to make some reflections on what we have seen today and to pick up on some of the comments that both the member for Bayswater and the member for Mordialloc made in their very impressive contributions. What we saw just a couple of hours ago in this place was what we have seen time and time again when those opposite come into the Parliament – that is of course them talking the great state of Victoria down. It is the same old playbook – those savage cuts, one in seven public service jobs axed, fear and division and a promise to strip $40 billion from the people of Victoria. What we know and understand, and what we have heard from the previous members on this side of the house, is of course that this is a responsible budget that goes to supporting people within local communities that need support, particularly at a time when they are significantly challenged by those global circumstances.

I think what was extraordinary to listen to in what was outlined this morning was the complete disregard of those circumstances – the notion that this state and indeed our country are immune to so many of those global pressures that have been spoken about at length in this chamber and that have been spoken about at length by the Premier and by members of the Commonwealth government. To completely disregard that in the last 2½ decades we have experienced a global financial crisis, a global pandemic, war in Ukraine and war in the Middle East and to somehow make the assumption that those circumstances have had no bearing and no impact on the people of this state is extraordinary.

What we see time and time again is a plan for cuts and a plan for fear and division, not in any circumstance taking into account the significant and important circumstances that we have found ourselves in. Making those contributions and making the efforts that we need to make as a government

to support the people of Victoria is something that is indeed maintained and very important. Had it not been for the significant and sustained investments that we have made for the past decade, there would have been no delivery of the Metro Tunnel last year, there would be no West Gate Tunnel, no Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital, no Footscray Hospital, hardly any – maybe a couple – level crossing removals, no free TAFE, no upgraded TAFEs and no upgrades to schools. Of course there are the announcements that have been made within the past month that go to free public transport through May and half-price for the rest of the year, and I can see the Minister for the Cost of Living at the table, who had the opportunity to join me for the announcement, with the Premier and other ministers as well. Of course the opportunity to provide a 20 per cent discount on car registration, saving up to $180 per car, is a significant, important, tangible and practical cost-of-living relief measure we have been able to deliver, which stands in stark contrast to a backend hiring freeze of the public service, which is effectively what we have got from those opposite.

I think, particularly in the past month, we have shown the values that drive this government and the values that drive those opposite in a really sharp and clear focus. We have set out a comprehensive and robust five-step fiscal strategy that goes to providing for those opportunities to invest in schools, to invest in roads, to invest in health. What we have seen just this morning is that sharp contrast that I think has been really clear for a significant period of time now. Now that all the cards are on the table, the choice for Victorians in November could not be more clear: do you want a government that invests in the people of this state and is responsive to the needs and challenges that are presented by both global circumstances that arise and domestic pressures, or do you want an outfit that is simply focused on backend hiring freezes with no vision and no investment in the infrastructure that we need to grow our state and to grow our economy? It really cannot be any clearer than that. Where I think those opposite continue to fail time and time again is in knowing and understanding local communities that need that support, that want the opportunity to live in their local communities, to be able to drive down pressures on housing affordability, to be able to drive down pressures on energy prices, to be able to invest in the infrastructure that I mentioned earlier – Metro, West Gate, the delivery of our level crossing removal program.

What we have been able to do for more than a decade now – and the member for Mordialloc touched on this in his contribution, as did the member for Bayswater – has been to provide for those opportunities. It stands in stark contrast to what we see from those opposite. Where I think we should be extremely concerned, and where I think the people of Victoria are very fearful and very concerned, is around those savage cuts that those opposite are now promising. This government have maintained our strong focus on service delivery. And let us not forget, for the best part of a decade there was an absolute vacuum from the coalition in Canberra when it came to supporting the people of this state – more than 25 per cent of the nation's population and less than 9 per cent of infrastructure spend. We now have a very different outfit. We now have the support of a government in Canberra that is responsive to the needs of Victorians, and we saw that just a couple of days ago. But we remain focused on making sure we are providing for those opportunities right across the board and on getting a sense and understanding of how local communities feel. When it comes to that 20 per cent discount on car regos, when it comes to half-price public transport for the rest of the year and free through the month of May, it is about knowing and understanding that people are experiencing significant pressure on the household budget.

The announcements that have been made by the Premier and respective ministers in those policy areas have been incredibly important. That builds upon all of that work that goes to providing for infrastructure, services and support for growing communities. There is an incredibly long list of those significant and important announcements that have been made through the budgetary process, whether that be those two announcements that I have well covered on PT and rego; the more than $1 billion investment in road maintenance; the significant uplift in food relief, supporting those who desperately need it; the more than $2.2 billion to support students with a disability, improving accessibility and additional specialist staff; more PSOs for more hours at our train stations; recruiting 200 police reservists; the additional nurse and midwifery positions; more free vision tests and Glasses for Kids;

affordable school uniforms; free TAFE, which I touched on; expanding free kinder; 55,000 Active Kids vouchers; an additional 4000 planned surgeries for children; or 45,000 children's specialist clinical appointments. And the list goes on in health, in education and in transport and roads investments as well.

It is a really comprehensive piece of work. I want to acknowledge all of those respective ministers and in particular the Treasurer, who has provided a strong and stable hand through the budgetary process to be able to provide for the delivery of all those programs and so much more and has been able to do that at a time when we know and understand that the pressures that I touched on earlier are pressures that this state is somehow not immune to. We are part of a global supply chain, part of what is a fast-moving and rapid economy in a globalised world and part of a community that experiences those challenges each and every day, and I am not sure when those opposite decided we would not be a part of that; we would not have any of those pressures placed upon us, and we would not therefore be responsive to the challenges but also the opportunities that we have through the budget process to be able to provide more support for Victorians.

I just want to take the final 4½ minutes to acknowledge and thank the amazing team at Kismet Park Primary School in my electorate, who received more than $11 million to upgrade and modernise that amazing school. I have worked with Kismet for many years now. They are some of the best people you will find, and to be able to give Sam Carlton, the principal, the call to say that we are investing more than $11 million to upgrade and modernise Kismet was an amazing thing. I want to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge them, and I am really excited for the building project that will come as a result of that investment. Also, while I am on local shout-outs, I want to thank the amazing team at Sunbury Neighbourhood House – again, an outstanding team. They have a terrific board led by Hope, the house manager. More than $50,000 has been provided to support the neighbourhood house – a really important contribution. And to take that into the broader commitments, we have $25 million for the TAFE, which was provided in a previous budget, and significant upgrades both at Diggers Rest and Gladstone Park. That of course builds upon that record of more than $100 million of capital investment in our local schools.

All of those contributions and the contributions that have been made right across the state stand in stark contrast to the measly sort of contribution that we saw this morning, which goes to a back-end hiring freeze at a time when the population is increasing and pressures on services remain. We just heard – I will go back to it again – a fairly measly contribution that I think lacked any sort of hope, any sort of vision or any sort of recognition of those challenges that we face as a state and as a country.

I do not think the choice now could be any clearer in terms of the people of Victoria in November having an opportunity to make an important decision that goes to the future of our state. Do you want an outfit that is focused on the challenges that we face today and the opportunity for future investment when it comes to education, health and transport, and a team that is invested in you? Or do you want a side that is keen to stoke fear and continue to inflict some of those really damaging cuts that we have seen from previous coalition governments, both in this state and across the country? The choice could not be any clearer. We are focused on making sure we are providing opportunities for the people of our great state, through both the budgetary process and a whole range of other programs and initiatives that have been outlined. We continue to focus on the five-step fiscal strategy, which I have spoken about in this house before.

I want to take the final minute to thank every single person, particularly from the Treasurer's office and the Department of Treasury and Finance, who has played a significant and important role in making for a budget that supports the challenges that I have mentioned in the last 15 minutes but also looks towards the future as we continue to invest in health, jobs and education and continue to support the people of Victoria in being their best. In the end what we are judged by is our support of people who need that support, our providing of opportunities and our providing for a strong and robust Victoria. Again, that stands in extremely stark contrast to the paltry opposition that we have got over

on that side – a team that are not focused on Victorians and that are focused on themselves. With those comments, I commend these bills to the house.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:42): I rise to make my contribution to the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 – a very bad budget for Victorians. To begin, I think it is useful to compare and contrast the budget position to that of four years ago. Months before the 2022 state election former Treasurer Tim Pallas said in his budget speech:

> Speaker, let's jump ahead to the end of the forward estimates period.
>
> The year is 2026.
>
> The Commonwealth Games is on, with excited tourists on our streets and a buzz throughout the state.

That was four years ago, and those words have not aged well at all, because the Commonwealth Games are not on in Victoria, there are no excited tourists on our streets and there is no buzz throughout our state because Labor scrapped the Commonwealth Games after their hollow election promise. Instead Victorian taxpayers were forced to spend nearly $600 million on a Commonwealth Games that never eventuated and were forced to pay another $380 million in compensation to the Commonwealth Games Federation, used to directly fund the games in Glasgow this year. In total Victorians spent – or wasted – almost a billion dollars to be the major games sponsor for Glasgow.

The Commonwealth Games fiasco is emblematic of how this government treats Victorian taxpayers' hard-earned money. Labor does not care about how much money it wastes or the debt it keeps racking up. Worst of all, this government no longer cares about being honest with Victorians. This tired, 12-year-old Labor government regime will do or say anything to cling to power while allowing corruption to fester, looking the other way. When Daniel Andrews cancelled the Commonwealth Games he justified his decision by saying they:

> … will not take money out of hospitals and schools to host an event that is three times the cost estimated …

If that were true, where is the money promised by Labor to rebuild the Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood? Labor pledged that to my community. Where is the money for the West Gippsland Hospital or the Wonthaggi Hospital redevelopments? In this budget not a single dollar has been allocated to rebuilding any of these neglected hospitals under Labor.

At the 2018 election Labor promised a new emergency department for children at Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood, and then at the 2022 election Labor promised $1 billion to rebuild Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood. Two election promises and eight years later, not a single cent of capital funding has been allocated, not a single brick has been laid at Maroondah Hospital. Patients, nurses and our hardworking healthcare workers are forced to endure conditions well beyond their use-by date. That is the sad story of Labor. It promises big but fails to deliver every time, and Victorians are the ones left paying the price.

The reason why there is no money left to upgrade hospitals, to keep police stations open or to fix dangerous, pot-holed roads is because of the disastrous debt bomb that Labor has created. Before the last election, in 2022–23 net debt was $115 billion. Four years later it is now $165.3 billion. Net debt has increased by a staggering $50.3 billion in just four years. What is worse, over the forward estimates debt is skyrocketing by another $34 billion, to $199.3 billion. Not only does Victoria have the highest debt in the country, but Victoria's debt is bigger than Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland combined. According to Labor's spin, this is a good result because the rate at which debt is growing has slowed. You cannot believe this stuff. Only Labor have the contempt and the audacity to spin a budget drowning in an additional $34 billion of debt over the forwards as a positive. Debt is increasing to 24.9 per cent of gross state product in the next financial year under this budget. A quarter of Victoria's economy is debt under Labor. To put this into perspective, net debt represents roughly $71,000 for every Victorian household, and what these numbers demonstrate is that Labor's so-called fiscal strategy is nothing but a complete failure, another broken promise. Under Labor's budget, debt is soaring to $200 billion, and this budget shows no plan to pay down this debt, leaving

it for our children and our grandchildren to pay. It is a disgraceful legacy of Premier Jacinta Allan and Labor.

The higher the debt, the higher the interest bill becomes. As a result of this Labor government losing Victoria's triple-A credit rating, our interest rates are higher and interest only keeps going up. Under this budget, the interest bill on Labor's debt will jump to $11.8 billion in 2030. That would fund about half of Victoria's education budget. It would fund better pay for teachers given that, under Labor, Victorian teachers are the lowest paid in the country. The interest bill just to repay Labor's debt will cost taxpayers $32 million a day. Just think how many dangerous Yarra Ranges roads we could fix with $32 million a day or how many times we could rebuild the Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood. These interest repayments represent a huge opportunity cost for Victorians. Billions and billions of dollars is wasted just paying interest on debt, not even paying down the principal, rather than funding essential services and workers like more nurses, more teachers or more police to overcome the frightening rise in organised crime and violence on Victorian streets under Labor.

At the end of the day, who gets to pick up this bill for debt? It is Victorian families. Under this budget, Labor's tax revenue will increase to a staggering $50 billion, with the tax take increasing 5.1 per cent every year under Labor. Labor's financial mismanagement means they tax Victorians more – taxing Victorians $50 billion more in a cost-of-living crisis. To put that into perspective, this equates to around $6600 in tax per Victorian. Labor is addicted to tax – 67 new or increased taxes under this Labor government.

Taxation revenue is barely enough to cover the single biggest budget expense, Labor's wages bill. Despite the Labor government's pledge to cut the public service, they still have managed to blow out public sector wages to $45 billion by the end of the forward estimates. In December last year the Premier and Treasurer said that cutting a thousand public service jobs would save their budget $4 billion over the forward estimates, yet the Treasurer has now been forced to concede there is no decrease in employee expenses despite implementing recommendations of the Silver review, because Labor is completely incapable of saving Victorians money and protecting frontline services and frontline workers. And that is after Premier Jacinta Allan confirmed to news reporters just last week that Labor has cut thousands of public sector workers. Only Labor is cutting public sector jobs. Labor is cutting public service jobs and is failing to deliver its own fiscal strategy.

While Labor MPs over there will try and say that our economy is growing, the budget papers show that our economic growth is set to decline. In 2024–25 economic growth basically flatlined at 1.1 per cent, and the government says that growth will increase marginally to 1.75 per cent this year but then decrease again to 1.5 per cent next year. Economic growth in Victoria under Labor has come almost to a complete standstill, and it is why we absolutely must restore confidence in the Victorian economy once again. After November this year we have the chance to do just that.

We know that Victorian families are doing it tough and desperately need cost-of-living relief. Victorians do not want to be taxed more and then offered handouts that do not last. As Liberals we fundamentally believe that Victorians should be given more choice and freedom over how they spend their own money, and for too long under Labor's big government agenda Victorians have had more of their money taken away and wasted. Victorians have suffered, with $15 billion of their hard-earned money funnelled to bikie gangs and corrupt CFMEU officials on Labor's rotten Big Build and wasted. Victorians are desperate for change and deserve a financially responsible government that will secure Victoria's economic future. As the alternative government, we will respect and value Victorian taxpayers.

Our Liberals and Nationals comprehensive 10-year economic plan will secure Victoria's economic future. Our plan will make structural reforms to the budget to get spending under control, guarantee essential frontline services and put more of Victorians' hard-earned money back into their pockets for them to invest and spend on their own families and futures. Labor has created serious economic challenges, so it will not be easy. But with a fresh start and our comprehensive 10-year economic plan

we will repair the budget to deliver a cash surplus by 2032, to guarantee the essential services and frontline workers Victoria needs and to lower taxes to help ease the cost of living.

Liberals believe you should keep more of your own money, so we will lower taxes. We will lower land tax and payroll tax and we will scrap the emergency services and volunteers tax. Under this budget, Victorians will be forced to pay $7.7 billion in land taxes. This is a tax on families, owners and renters forced to pay Labor's hikes in land tax. We will reverse Labor's 2023 land tax hikes by raising the land tax threshold from $50,000, gradually increasing the threshold to $300,000 over the next five years, making housing more affordable and saving up to $975 in tax per year for thousands of Victorians. We will also reduce payroll tax, which is a tax on jobs. The higher the payroll tax, the less people businesses can afford to hire. That is why we will back business and increase the payroll tax threshold to $1.2 million, consistent with New South Wales, making Victoria far more competitive. This measure will provide real tax relief to around 23,000 Victorian businesses, making it more affordable for businesses to create new jobs and help our economy grow. We will also scrap Labor's new emergency services and volunteers tax on every Victorian household, including for renters, on every business, including manufacturers, and on every farm. Labor plans to rake in $1.6 billion next year with the ESV tax, yet we have not seen any money quarantined for our SES units or our CFA brigades, with emergency services still having to attend fires in 30-year-old trucks.

Under our 10-year economic plan we will prioritise essential services and frontline workers, with a hiring freeze on the back office. This hiring freeze is simple. No-one will be sacked, and there will be no redundancies. That is a fact. Those Labor MPs will seek to engage in the politics of deception, but our essential services guarantee is crystal clear. Our plan will secure the critical frontline workforce for health, education, police and law enforcement. In fact we will grow our emergency services to help keep communities safe, by recruiting 3000 more police. That will allow us to reopen the police stations shut by Labor, including Mooroolbark police station, which is shut for more than four days a week under Labor.

The Auditor-General and the Silver review both identified significant concerns about public sector bureaucracy cost blowouts that have put the sustainability of Victoria's economy at risk. Our plan will reduce the back office costs so that we can protect frontline services at risk under Labor. If people retire or choose to work elsewhere, we will wish them well but we will not replace that role for a period, instead putting money back into essential services and frontline workers, like more police, nurses, paramedics, teachers, firefighters, correctional officers and so on. It is a real point of difference to Premier Allan and Labor, who have admitted over the last year they have cut thousands of public service jobs, and we know that critical frontline services, like nurses, police and teachers, are under pressure because of workforce shortages that must be fixed, and that is what we will do.

In terms of my community in the Evelyn electorate, whether Mooroolbark, Lilydale, Montrose, Mount Evelyn, Coldstream or the Yarra Valley, there is absolutely nothing in this budget but more taxes. Labor has abandoned us. Taxes are up, yet the Mooroolbark and Croydon police stations are closed more than half the week. Police numbers are stretched, and our teachers are still the lowest paid in the country. Labor has spent big on schools in Labor electorates, but again there is not a cent for schools in the Evelyn electorate, with Birmingham Primary School in Mount Evelyn, Wandin North Primary and Seville Primary all in desperate need of new buildings and adequate shelters in place but all ignored again. And the Allan Labor government still refuses to fix the dangerous Maroondah Highway and Killara Road intersection in Coldstream and has not allocated any money to Warburton Highway in Seville East or to fix the dangerous and congested single-lane bottleneck of Mooroolbark and Hull roads in Mooroolbark. Labor will claim to have made a record investment to fix our roads, but the evidence is in the potholes. And there is still no money for more buses in Mooroolbark and Lilydale for school students to get to school on time. Victoria needs a fresh start with responsible and disciplined economic management that will restore confidence, lower taxes and protect the essential services that Victorians expect and deserve.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (12:57): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026, and I think I have only got 2 minutes. These bills are fundamentally about delivering the services that Victorians rely upon every single day, and they provide the authority of government to invest in our hospitals, schools, roads, transport, cost-of-living support and of course frontline services across our state. While there is always political debate around budgets – there will always be differences around the priorities and around the way money is allocated in the budget – at the end of the day these bills come down to the fairly simple question of what kind of state we want Victoria to be, and we have seen the complete contrast here today in the Leader of the Opposition's reply to the budget. Do we want a budget that continues investing in growing communities, like mine out at Melton, and building the infrastructure and supporting our families through difficult economic times, or do we want a Victoria that goes backwards through cuts, delays and neglect? That is what those opposite will deliver, and they have clearly spelt that out today in regard to their $40 billion in cuts and also cutting many, many jobs out of the public sector.

When I look at this budget and when I look specifically at what it means to my electorate in Melton, I see a government recognising the reality facing the fast-growing outer suburban areas and outer suburban communities like mine in Melton and right across the western suburbs. I see the government understands that places like Melton are not an afterthought. It is really about working with those growth corridors and providing for them, and they are not an optional extra. They are communities full of working people who deserve the same access to opportunities as others but also the infrastructure and services that everyone else in this state would expect.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:01 pm.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 1 April.

Announcements

Photography in chamber

The SPEAKER (14:01): Before we commence question time, I advise the house that I have given approval for a photographer to take photos from the public gallery and the Hansard box during question time today. The photographs will be used by the Parliament for community engagement purposes. I hope you put your lipstick on.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Public lottery licence

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. In a statement to the ASX required by law to be accurate, the Lottery Corporation advised that its 40-year licence extension arose from 'exclusive, bilateral negotiations' with the government. Conversely, the Premier says the deal went through a 'full and open process' and 'tender process'. Why didn't the Premier tell the truth?

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, if it assists the house, I would like to make available a document of $163,000 in donations from the Lottery Corporation to the Liberal Party.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulleen is warned. I remind members again that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly, and it will be treated as such.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): Of course I did address this matter last week in this place and reiterated that –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: No, I was asked very clearly a question about this time a week ago, when I addressed this matter very clearly.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, if it assists the Premier, on relevance, the question goes to matters after the Premier spoke about it in this chamber.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I indicated to the house, there have been appropriate processes that have followed these commercial arrangements, as I have outlined to the house and as has also been consistent with arrangements in other jurisdictions.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Will the Premier make public the advice she referred to when claiming that:

> … based on advice, through Treasury processes and within the requirements of the existing contract –

this deal –

> … went through a tender process.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): I refer the Leader of the Opposition to her substantive question, where all appropriate declarations have been made to the market.

Ministers statements: budget 2026–27

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): Our Labor government is a government that backs the services that working people and families need, and they need them now more than ever. We are a government that is focused on making life easier, safer and more affordable, and in our budget delivered in this place last week we are delivering real help with cost of living. What does that mean? It means, when times are tough, looking where you can to put a bit more money back into the household budget. We are doing this through investing in schools so every child can get the opportunity to have a great government education close to where they live. We are doing this by investing in hospitals and in more health workers so families can get the care when they need it, and of course we are backing and investing in our Victoria Police, the biggest policing force in the nation, and also those frontline services they deliver. You also do this by investing in the people who do the work, those who staff the wards, support the children and particularly too care for kids with a disability. These are real people delivering real services that Victorians rely on. These are the services that we continue to invest in and protect. These are the services and the people that those opposite would cut given the opportunity. While we are focused on delivering real cost-of-living help, we have those opposite that would rip $40 billion from the services that families rely on.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity for the Premier to attack the opposition or lie – just simply lie; just lie, lie, lie.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will not use unparliamentary language. The Premier to come back without attacking the opposition.

Jacinta ALLAN: The member for Brighton knows – and maybe the number is higher than $40 billion – you cannot cut this amount of money without cutting into the front line. You cannot cut one in seven public service jobs and pretend that families and real people will not feel this.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is defying your ruling.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business and the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Brighton and Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: We have made a choice. When times are tough, we are going to back working people and invest in the services they rely on.

Public lottery licence

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. How many times has the Premier, her office or government department met with the Lottery Corporation, who have donated $177,000 to the Labor Party, in the last 12 months?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Yan Yean! Member for Broadmeadows! The member for Broadmeadows can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Broadmeadows withdrew from chamber.

Anthony Carbines: On a point of order, Speaker, to assist the house, I make available the AEC's Lottery Corporation donations to the Liberal Party – $163,000.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): In regard to meetings that I have held and ministers of my government have held, all of those are declared in the appropriate ways, as required by a change that I made as Premier to the disclosure of ministerial diaries.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, the question was a very specific question. The question was how many times. The Premier has failed to answer that very specific question. I would ask you to encourage her to do so.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The Premier has responded accordingly.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:10): How many times has the Premier, her office or government department met with the Lottery Corporation's registered lobbyist Chris Owner, a former chief of staff to a former Labor gambling minister and the current member for Williamstown, in the last 12 months?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): I refer the member for Sandringham to my previous answer, which is: I have, as Premier, required all meetings for all ministers in my government to now be disclosed. To my recollection – and I will check my own personal record – I have not had one of those meetings, but I will happily come back and provide further information if there is more to provide when it comes to my declarations.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport, Minister for Women and Girls) (14:11): The Allan Labor government knows that investing in critical infrastructure is all about boosting productivity and setting strong economic foundations for future generations. Investing in critical transport infrastructure quite literally allows us to keep Victorians moving, keeping them connected to jobs, to education and to the major events that make Victoria the envy of the world. The Productivity Commission estimates that congestion in Australian cities costs the economy at least $24 billion every year, and with a growing population this will only get worse, unless of course governments invest in the critical infrastructure that unlocks more capacity and more services. This is the motivation behind projects like the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel, North East Link, the Sunshine superhub and every single one of the 88 level crossings that we have removed so far. It is an investment in future generations, an investment in the future livability of our state and an investment in our state's economic growth for a long time to come. But most importantly it is an investment in Victorians themselves, both today and tomorrow. The opposition have promised $40 billion in cuts and a plan that means they cannot and will not invest in critical infrastructure for a decade or more.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are an opportunity for the minister to countenance her policy proposals, not to attack the opposition. I would ask you to ask her to desist from doing so.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, Speaker, the former Manager of Opposition Business is out of order. The minister is being relevant in her ministers statement.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker: correct parliamentary titles.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the member for Evelyn's point of order. The minister to continue without attacking the opposition. It is okay to compare policies.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: By way of comparing and contrasting our respective approaches, $40 billion of proposed cuts means a cut to the capacity and the services that this important and critical infrastructure unlocks. It is a guarantee for gridlock – Liberal-branded gridlock – so Jess can promise intergenerational traffic jams.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister, I remind you to use correct titles in the chamber.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Apologies, Speaker. Intergenerational traffic jams – but Labor will keep Victorians connected to the opportunities and prosperity they deserve.

Health services

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:14): My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Prior to the 2022 election, the government promised a major redevelopment of the Wonthaggi Hospital, a new Maroondah Hospital and a new West Gippsland Hospital on a greenfield site. Why has the government broken this promise?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (14:15): From the outset can I reject the premise of the question in saying we have broken that promise, because in fact we have not. Indeed, as the budget papers show, there is an enormous amount of work that is going on into the planning of Warragul hospital, and I have sat down with the member for Narracan –

Members interjecting.

Melissa HORNE: Maybe they are interested in –

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, Minister.

Melissa HORNE: As I was saying, I have sat down with the member for Narracan to explain the detailed planning that is going on, particularly into the Warragul hospital, because this is a complicated site.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is a broken promise. The West Gippsland Hospital was committed to starting in 2024, and it has still not started to this day.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

Wayne Farnham: Is it a broken promise? On relevance, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: That is not the correct way to raise a point of order.

Melissa HORNE: As I was saying, I reject the premise of the question outright. This is not a broken promise. There are works proceeding, indeed with detailed planning and design. But also we acknowledge that the existing Warragul hospital needs an upgrade, which is why we have allocated $65 million in this year's budget for those hospital upgrades.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:16): When will construction of the new West Gippsland Hospital be completed?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (14:16): I thank the member for his question, and I appreciate that he is a passionate advocate for his community. Nevertheless, detailed design and planning are underway, and meanwhile we are also investing in ensuring that the existing hospital has fit-for-purpose infrastructure.

Ministers statements: cost of living

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Cost of Living, Minister for Renters, Minister for Men and Boys) (14:17): I have met families doing everything right – working hard, managing their budget – but still falling behind. For too many Victorians that pressure has already become a crisis, and that is why this budget puts real help in front of real people. We are delivering free public transport, half-price fares and 20 per cent off your car rego.

We are also investing in the people who help families in a financial crisis. I am talking about the $2.3 million to expand Bring Your Bills day – real experts, face to face with no jargon or judgement, helping people with debt, fines, mortgage stress and legal problems all in one place. One event in Hampton Park in the electorate of my friend the member for Narre Warren South helped Victorians tackle $3 million worth of debt and savings in a single day. We are hiring 17 more financial counsellors, bringing the total to 130 workers across this state, because when a family do not know how to negotiate with their bank or understand their legal rights, they need a person, not a pamphlet.

The Leader of the Opposition said that she would never get in the way of cost-of-living relief, but when we delivered free public transport for kids, the Leader of the Opposition opposed it. When we cut 20 per cent off rego, they opposed it.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I just think the Victorian people deserve better. They expect better from us, and they do not expect the newly appointed minister to lie.

The SPEAKER: Member for Sandringham, if you are going to raise a point of order, I suggest you read the standing orders and work out how to do it correctly. There is no point of order.

Paul EDBROOKE: I think the Victorian public do deserve better than that. On Friday, to a ballroom full of top-end-of-town business figures, the opposition leader announced cuts to the very frontline workers we are hiring. We are hiring more; they are cutting thousands. This is not a cost-of-living plan, this is abandonment. On this side we back families. We back the workers who help them, and we always will under this Labor government.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I know the minister is fairly new, but he does need to be accurate with what he says.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Kensington Primary School

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:20): My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, five years ago Kensington Primary School in my electorate received funding for much-needed upgrades, but only half the project was completed due to cost overruns from the school building authority. Now the school has been waiting five years for the government to finish the project they started. To be clear, the school is not asking for anything new. They are not asking for a swimming pool or for gold plating. They just want the government to finish the project that the VSBA already said was necessary, such as installing a lift so kids with disabilities can actually get to their classrooms upstairs, insulation and soundproofing in classrooms so kids can actually learn and fixing leaks and rotting window frames. Minister, I have drawn this issue to the government's attention many, many times, yet again in the state budget there was zero funding for the upgrades that KPS need. Why?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:21): Can I thank the member for Melbourne for her question. Since Labor

came to office we have invested $200 million in schools in the Melbourne electorate. The member for Melbourne just mentioned disability inclusion. This Premier started her day on budget day with families and students in the City of Melbourne, talking with them about our $2.2 billion in disability inclusion. On this side we are about action because we know action cuts through more than rhetoric ever will. That is why we are investing in making sure every student does not miss out, with world-class schools in every corner and best practice in every classroom.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:22): Last November I asked the minister directly in Parliament if he would visit Kensington Primary to see for himself the works that are needed. He said he would. The school council wrote to the minister in November and again in January and again in April to follow up and book a time, but they have received no response. It is six months later, yet the Labor minister has not done the KPS community the courtesy of responding and has not visited. When will the minister respond to the invitation from our Kensington community and visit KPS?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:23): I assure the member for Melbourne that I will be out there as soon as possible, but I am trying to find a date with the Labor candidate Davydd Griffiths, who is so busy doorknocking and after the federal election and taking the seat off Adam Bandt he is so confident I cannot find a time in his diary.

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I thought that schools were supposed to be funded based on need, not based on what is good for the Labor Party and their political imperatives.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: agriculture sector

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka – Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture) (14:24): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government continues to support Victorian families and our regional communities. I know what farming demands of people. I know what the late nights in the paddock look like. I know what it is to look up at the sky and pray that it is going to rain, because I have lived that connection, I have lived on the land, and I want farmers across Victoria to know this: that I will listen first, I will act practically and I will always make sure that their voice is heard in this government.

I know that our farmers are under real pressure right now from prolonged drought, rising costs and now Donald Trump's economic war pushing up fuel prices at the worst possible time. When farmers cannot be certain fuel will be there, they cannot plan, and when they cannot plan, families across the state feel it at the check-out, on the shelf and on the table, and that is why this government, our government, has secured 10 million litres of diesel – a strategic fuel reserve solely for Victoria's agricultural sector. Victorian farmers produce more than $22 billion in agricultural output. They are the backbone of our food supply, and they deserve a government that has their back when the world gets tough. This reserve means that farmers can plan their winter season with confidence. It protects food security. It keeps grocery prices down. Victoria joins Western Australia and South Australia as the only states in the country with a confirmed fuel reserve. Backing farmers means backing regional communities, workers, small businesses and their families. Those opposite claim to represent regional Victoria, but look at their record: closed schools, closed hospitals – *(Time expired)*

The SPEAKER: I remind ministers who are on their feet for ministers statements to keep an eye on the clock.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Resurfacing and rehabilitation of our roads has fallen 75 per cent in four years. Why are we paying more but getting less of our roads fixed?

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Community Sport) (14:26): I thank the member for his question and his ongoing interest in this topic. I disagree with the premise of the question that we are spending more and getting less. We are spending differently. Instead of patching, we are rehabilitating and resurfacing, and that is being backed in by this year's budget with an additional more than $1 billion. We have got the sustained highest investment in history –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. These figures come from the minister's own budget.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order. The Minister for Roads and Road Safety has concluded her answer.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:27): On a supplementary question, road patching is forecast to fall from 556,000 square metres two years ago to just 76,000 square metres. How is the government planning to fill 200,000 potholes when its own budget targets show an 87 per cent fall in road patching?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Nationals and the Premier will cease interjecting across the table. The minister on her feet deserves some respect. You have asked the question; wait for the answer.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for First Peoples, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Community Sport) (14:28): I thank the member for the question. The figure of 200,000 potholes from this year's budget reflects the modelling that has been done by the department based on –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Ros SPENCE: You had your question.

The SPEAKER: Minister, through the Chair. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: education system

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Medical Research) (14:29): There is one thing we know: that education in Victoria is thriving under Labor. We have the best NAPLAN results in the country, topping a record 18 of 20 measures. When we came to office, we were half that – 11 out of 20. We have risen up the ranks under this Labor government. But what really hits home on this side of the chamber is the way we are supporting students with additional needs. As I mentioned earlier, our Premier started her budget day with families and with parents talking about and discussing our $2.2 billion plan to help kids that need extra help – to help those kids with special needs and disabilities – to make sure that in the Education State everyone has a pathway no matter who they are, no matter their postcode and no matter their parents' bank balance. But that is not all. Under our government, more new schools are being built than anywhere else in this state and there is more cost-of-living support than anywhere else in the nation. That speaks to our Labor government's and Premier Allan's values. These results are no accident. They are investing in local schools and they are investing in local families and students.

We do know that there is one great risk to education in this state, and it is straight out of the Liberal Party playbook.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition. That is exactly where the minister was going. The schools are the lowest funded in the country.

Anthony Carbines: On the point of order, the Deputy Premier is entitled to compare and contrast policies, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Premier to resume his ministers statement, being mindful of not attacking the opposition.

Ben CARROLL: I was not attacking the opposition. All I was doing was comparing and contrasting. Just like Carlton, when the pressure gets too much, all they know how to do is cut. That is why on this side of the chamber more schools are being built and we are growing the national teacher ratio at twice the national average. Only our side of the chamber gets the joke, but we are making sure we will do everything to ensure that every person in this state gets to fulfil their obligations. This Premier spends budget day with children with disabilities; the alternative spends budget day and budget week with big Liberal Party donors.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:32): (1628) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier ensure that the Halcyon Walk HousingFirst site of 152 social houses at 15 Centre Road, Brighton East, is safe for residents in the local community? Following shocking and repeated incidents of violence at the site, my community is living in fear. A female resident reported being verbally abused by a neighbour, with the abuse including repeated incidents of antisemitism. Another elderly man has reported being assaulted by a neighbour who was allegedly under the influence of drugs at the time of the attack. The assault has had a significant impact on his sense of safety and wellbeing. Understandably, he is now fearful of leaving his apartment and is experiencing ongoing anxiety about further attacks by the assailant, who is still living at the site. Further, another elderly resident reported a similar disturbance where a different neighbour was assaulted and left unconscious. Many residents are so scared they refuse to leave their apartments. Requests to government ministers are ignored and not acted upon. It is time to make our community safe.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:33): (1629) I am very proud of the investments that this Labor government makes into building better schools in the electorate of Bayswater, and of course that also applies to the ongoing work at Bayswater South Primary School. So my question is to the Minister for Education: when will works wrap up on the major upgrade at that wonderful local school? Works have been underway for a number of months now, and I want to say a huge thankyou to the principal Bret Mottrom and to all the leadership team and staff out there and all the great students and school community who advocated long and hard for this to come to fruition in the form of an election commitment in 2022. Of course it is now at the delivery phase. It is a major upgrade of nearly every single classroom space at that great local school, and we are looking forward to seeing it open and looking forward to hearing the minister's response.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:34): (1630) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Can the minister confirm whether the recently announced V/Line services are genuinely new or simply carriages stripped from existing trains and cobbled together as a pre-election promise? Regional Victorians deserve the truth. A work experience student in my office, Max Weeks, had to be driven 2½ hours from Benalla to Melbourne because there were no train seats available for him. Charlotte, another Benalla local, was left stranded in Seymour for several hours because she could not get on one of the replacement buses. It gets worse. An elderly constituent living with chronic pain had to cancel her pain specialist treatments because she could no longer reserve a priority seat, and another one had to cancel his wife's neurologist appointment – she lives with MS – because no guaranteed seats were available. If this rolling stock is available, the government is simply choosing not to deploy it. Can the minister explain why regional Victorians are being left stranded at stations and paying hundreds of dollars more?

The SPEAKER: Before I call the next member, member for Euroa, you asked the minister to confirm and then to explain. Both are actions. Can you rephrase your question to make it a question?

Annabelle CLEELAND: Will the minister explain whether the recently announced V/Line services are genuinely new or simply being stripped from other services?

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:35): (1631) My question is for the Minister for Health. This budget delivers a massive boost to postnatal and maternity health services right across Melbourne's western suburbs, with $240 million invested in this budget. As the minister may know, well and truly over 100 babies are born in my community, just in Wyndham, every single week. This funding will ensure that our hospitals in Melbourne's west have the capacity to meet the demand for postnatal care right across our suburbs. It includes a new, refurbished maternity ward at Sunshine Hospital. There are nine new special care nursery cots and 1500 extra sonography appointments each and every single year at the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital. We know this is in stark contrast to those opposite, who cut $1 billion from health when they were last in government and will likely rip out more as part of their $40 billion in promised cuts. My question for the minister is: how much will this much-needed funding boost and improve postnatal services for my electorate of Laverton?

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:36): (1632) Victorian public schools are the lowest funded in Australia, and the 2026–27 state budget has again left school communities in my electorate undervalued and underfunded. Even the education union stated that Victorians have every right to ask themselves, 'On what grounds can the state government claim Victoria is the Education State?' Not only are our teachers the lowest paid in the country, there was not a single dollar for any new building or facility upgrade for schools in my electorate. That is despite the Minister for Education stating here in Parliament that government would invest in every school in every postcode. Labor has broken this promise and abandoned school students, teachers and families in my community. My question to the Minister for Education is: why does the 2026–27 state budget not invest any funding for buildings and upgrades at any school, in any postcode, in the Evelyn electorate? Schools like Wandin North Primary, Birmingham Primary, Mount Evelyn Primary and Seville Primary do not have adequate shelters in place. They are just some examples of schools that suffer patch jobs instead of funding for new, modern classrooms.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:37): (1633) My question is to the Minister for the State Electricity Commission. Last night I attended a meeting for a street electrification program that was auspiced by the Friends of the Earth and organised by a resident who pulled the people from her street together to talk about how they could electrify their homes and save money and the environment. My question is: what can the SEC do to support such initiatives and help Victorians to save money and the environment?

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:38): (1634) My constituency question is for the Premier. Why has the government scrapped the redevelopment of Maroondah Hospital? In 2018 the government promised a dedicated children's emergency department at Maroondah. Then in 2022 the government promised a $1 billion ground-up redevelopment of the hospital, including renaming it the Queen Elizabeth II hospital. At the time, construction was expected to begin in 2025. It is now 2026. There has been no progress, no updated timeline, and the entire project was omitted from the 2026–27 budget papers. Any budget is a reflection of the government's priorities. Let us be perfectly clear: Labor has scrapped the Maroondah Hospital rebuild. This is not a delay. It is a decision to walk away from a major election commitment made to the people of Melbourne's eastern suburbs. Labor is strategically

sacrificing its seats in the east, and parents, families and healthcare workers across Ringwood, Bayswater, Box Hill, Monbulk and Glen Waverley deserve to know why.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:39): (1635) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport and concerns change room upgrades at Berwick Springs Recreation Reserve, as announced in the state budget. Minister, how will these change room improvements benefit women and girls in my electorate of Narre Warren South? I was pleased to hear in the recent budget that there is funding available to deliver new female-friendly change rooms at Berwick Springs Recreation Reserve. The reserve is home to many much-loved local sports clubs, including the Berwick Churches Soccer Club, who expanded from Grices Road to this ground recently. This upgrade will help remove barriers and improve participation for women and girls to play the sports they love while providing more clubs and community groups access to the facilities. More and more women and girls are participating in sport, and it is crucial our facilities keep pace. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:40): (1636) My constituency question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Before the last election former Premier Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan, who was then the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, announced that the Highett and Wickham Road level crossings in my community would be removed by 2029, when the Frankston line was supposed to be level crossing free. Since then, frustration has increased in my community due to the lack of fair-dinkum consultation by this government and the fear that yet another Labor infrastructure delay would be in place. Well, our community's fears have been realised with the release of last week's Victorian budget, which quietly announced that the completion date had been pushed back three more years to 2032. Highett residents are now rightly asking why Labor has ignored Highett residents yet again. I ask on their behalf: with yet another broken promise, why does the Allan Labor government continue to delay and ignore critical infrastructure projects in the Highett community?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:41): (1637) My question is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. My question is: in light of the fantastic announcement that we will begin work on a second campus for Preston High on the old Preston Technical School site on Cramer Street, what changes, if any, will be made to the plans for the adjacent housing development off Jessie Street? We were thrilled to host the Minister for Education, along with the member for Northcote, to announce the location of the proposed new second campus for Preston High. It is in a great location, but it does change the context of the housing development that we are undertaking on the adjacent blocks. Obviously that new housing is also very welcome, but we may need to look at opportunities for Darebin council to acquire some of the land to properly connect the school, the oval and the playground. Indeed we may even need to be a little more generous with building heights on the Jessie Street side in order to preserve open space, mature trees and safe pedestrian access, particularly for school students and the new residents. Any information the minister could provide about these considerations would be greatly appreciated.

Annabelle Cleeland: Speaker, I have an extensive point of order with overdue questions, and that includes questions 3276, 3275, 3273, 3274, 3013, 3272, 3199, 3225, 3267, 3159, 3158, 3278, 3266, 3279, 3195, 3280, 3099, 3197, 1567 – very overdue – 3277, 3155, 3271, 3281, 3270, 3096, 3160, 3269, 3268, 3222 and 3221, including natural disaster recovery. All of these questions are really important to my community, and I ask the ministers to do their jobs.

The SPEAKER: Give your list to the clerks, member for Euroa. I remind members raising points of order about unanswered questions to stick with the questions.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, I too have a point of order on questions that are overdue and unanswered, dating back 11 months actually. Questions overdue by the Treasurer are questions on notice 2421, 3237, 3238, 3239, 3240, 3241, 3242 and 3256. Questions that are overdue by the Minister for Skills and TAFE are questions on notice 3140, 3141 and 3142. Questions on notice that are overdue by the Minister for Finance are questions on notice 3243 and 3245. A constituency question that is overdue by the Minister for Public and Active Transport is constituency question 1512, and a question overdue by the Minister for Education is question on notice 3210. I have raised points of order on these many times. I would appreciate responses for my constituents. I will pass these to the clerks.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, I have overdue questions as well: 3128, 3129, 3130, 3131, 3132 – then finally we skip a few – 3135, 3153, 3154, 3172, 3214 and 3254, many of which are seriously overdue. I would appreciate your assistance in getting ministers to crack on.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, I have two overdue questions I would appreciate you following up with the relevant ministers: question 1598 to the Minister for Health and question 1591 to the Premier. Particularly in relation to the question that is overdue to the Minister for Health, I would like it if you could follow up whether will be passed on to the new Minister for Health. It would be appreciated.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions and adjournment matters

The SPEAKER (14:46): I would like to rule in response to a point of order raised by the Manager of Opposition Business on 2 April. The point of order asked me to offer some latitude in considering the admissibility of constituency questions and adjournment debate matters. The member noted that when questions and matters are ruled out the community misses out on important information about government administration. I understand the member's concerns, and I am always reluctant to rule out questions and matters. I will focus here on constituency questions because by and large adjournment matters have not been as problematic in recent times. I ask that members reflect on the criteria for constituency questions, particularly the requirements that a question must relate to constituency matters, must be a single question, must be capable of being responded to meaningfully in writing, should begin by specifying the minister and asking the question, with context to come afterwards, and must not seek an action. It is this last point that is most often the reason questions are ruled out. When members use phrasings such as 'Can the minister advise' or 'I ask the minister to provide me with information', they are requesting an action from the minister. In turn, I will intervene more actively at the time the member is asking the question where I detect issues to give members a chance to rephrase the question in accordance with the rules. This should result in fewer questions being ruled inadmissible and address the Manager of Opposition Business's concern. I will ask the Deputy Speaker and the Acting Speakers to take the same approach.

Bills

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (14:47): I will resume from where I left off just before our lunch adjournment. Over the last 7½ years, since I have been the member for Melton, both the Andrews and Allan Labor governments have delivered in excess of $9 billion of infrastructure and services into the Melton electorate, and I will refer to it later. We have seen a massive change in the skyline of Melton in regard to that infrastructure bill. I see a complete contrast from those opposite, because while this government is investing in Melton's future, those opposite seem to continue to show people in

Melton's west exactly what they think of them, and I will come to some comments made by the member for Bulleen very shortly.

One of the clearest examples of that is on our public transport. People in Melton know the pressures on our train line. They live it every single day with our packed platforms, overcrowded trains, long commutes, families trying to get into the city for work, students travelling to universities and off to school and of course many workers spending hours each week commuting because housing affordability has pushed them further away from the city centre and the closer-in suburbs to areas like Melton and Wyndham. When people in Melton hear that this government is investing in our rail corridor, they understand how important that is and how important public transport is. The budget just recently announced includes a $76 million injection for the next steps towards electrification of the Melton line, and that investment does not exist in isolation. People can already see the preparation work that has been happening out in that corridor – the level crossing removals. We are seeing four level crossings being removed, with one of those completed and opened as of next Monday on Hopkins Road, which is actually in the electorate of Kororoit.

I know my neighbour the Honourable Ms Grigorovitch will be out there opening up that road overpass over the level crossing on Hopkins Road on Monday. We are seeing the rebuilding of the Melton railway station with extra platforms, which will allow for greater capacity. And again in preparation for electrified trains and the planning works that are necessary before electrification, there is the building of the stabling yard at Cobblebank. I am going out there on Friday, where we have just acquired some land for a stabling yard for V/Line and electrified trains out at Cobblebank. These are not promises just floating around in a media release. These are projects that we can actually physically see happening out there in that growth corridor. As I said earlier, the skyline in Melton has completely changed in the last 7½ years. Our government understands that population growth in Melton means we need more capacity, not less, and that matters enormously right across Melbourne's west. I know that both through Wyndham and Melton and the population growth – our population in Melton over the next 20 years is going to double, and I believe that the population between Wyndham and Melton will be 1 million people by 2046, which will be about one-tenth of the Victorian population. So we can see the pressures on that western corridor of the state.

Commuters in Melton do not need lectures about transport planning from people who rarely use the network. They understand it backwards and they understand where the investment needs to go. This budget recognises that public transport in Melton is not just about the trains into the CBD. It is also about local bus connections, and that matters greatly to our local commuters trying to get to and from each suburb in the Melton electorate, where their families want to go to the schools and the shopping centres, the sports grounds and work, if they work locally. That is why our budget delivers a major boost for public transport in Melton South, including two new local bus services and bus routes connecting Weir Views, which is a newish suburb in Melton, to Melton station and then Strathtulloh to Cobblebank station. The budget also upgrades the existing route 454 service with increased frequency and an extension through to the Woodgrove shopping centre, which is the biggest shopping centre within the Melton township. Again, it connects people to their work, to their schools, to the shopping, to essential services, to their sports clubs. It is really important that those local transport services are provided for our commuters.

When we combine that with free public transport for kids under 18, it also gives young people greater independence and flexibility to move around. We have seen the take-up of that free public transport to be enormous across our electorate. It also takes pressure off families in regard to spending and time for parents driving kids around from one side of Melton to the other, because it is an expanding area. Whereas again, I think those opposite do not understand that the free public transport for under-18s and for others during April and May releases some of the pressures on families. While this government is investing in more buses and trains with more capacity, those opposite announced that they would cut train services out in the west, in particular in Melton and Wyndham, and those carriages would go elsewhere.

My understanding is that the member for Bulleen, who publicly stated on radio that he thinks people in Melton have excessive carriages on our trains, wants to ship them off to the Warrnambool line, which is interesting. Of course he told the Melton commuters on radio that it would stretch the capacity out in the west, but he has probably not been on a train in Melton. I invite him to come out to Melton and to jump on a train and see how they are utilised by our communities out there. He wants them to accept overcrowding, and he also wants them to accept reduced capacity. He wants them to accept being treated as less important. Let me tell you, the people of Melton have heard loud and clear that the opposition will cut train services in Melton. That is what he stated on radio. They are not my words, they are his words. Effectively, they have become the great train-robbers of the west, if that is what their policy is going to do, which is reduce and take away train carriages from Melton to give to Warrnambool, when again, as I say, our population is going to double over the next 20 years. We need extra capacity, not less capacity, but clearly they do not understand. While Warrnambool might want more train carriages, that is fine, but so does Melton – a lot more than what Warrnambool will ever need, probably.

I was speaking to one of the commuters, a young woman by the name of Claudia, at Melton station, and she was not impressed by that statement, and of course neither were many other commuters that we spoke to after the member for Bulleen made that statement about taking carriages away. She said what every person who catches the train to or from Melton already knows – that there is not spare capacity sitting around unused:

> The trains are already crowded. People rely on them every day for work, school, medical appointments and social connection.

She knows commuters already struggle with finding room on services, particularly during peak periods, so, importantly, she was pleased to hear that this government – our government, the Allan Labor government – is investing in longer trains and additional capacity, not ripping services away from growing communities and sending them elsewhere.

Our plan is to deliver nine-carriage trains for Melton as of next year, and we are currently expanding the length of some of the platforms at both Cobblebank station and Rockbank station. Deer Park has been completed, and I believe Caroline Springs has been completed. Those nine-carriage trains will run on the service in Melton next year. Whatever Warrnambool might need, go right ahead, but as far as I am concerned we do not need a reduction in carriages, as our commuters have already told us.

Transport policy is not abstract in Melton. It is not theoretical. It directly shapes people's daily lives. It shapes how much time parents spend away from their children. It shapes whether somebody can reliably get to work. It shapes household budgets through petrol costs and commuting expenses, and that is why this budget's broader cost-of-living measures matter so much as well, because families are under pressure right now. We all know that. Interest rates have hurt households. Groceries are expensive. Insurance costs are rising. Fuel prices continue to fluctuate, as we have seen, in particular with what is going on with the war overseas. Of course our outer suburban communities, like Melton, often feel those pressures hardest, because people travel further to work and they rely heavily on transport. That is why the government is delivering free public transport during April and May, and that is why this budget includes $278 million to halve the cost of public transport until 1 January 2027. That has been taken up by people. It is a great move by the government, and people are really appreciative of that cost-of-living measure. That is why under-18s can now travel free on public transport across Victoria, and that is a great policy that came in at the start of the year for our kids under 18. Again, the take-up rate has been enormous, not only on the trains but on the buses and trams where required – certainly the trams in the city.

We are also delivering 20 per cent registration rebates for Victorian motorists. Some people might dismiss this and these measures individually as small things, but collectively they are not small to families. Families do not experience cost-of-living pressure as one giant bill arriving all at once; they experience it through hundreds of smaller pressures and a build-up of those pressures, such as fuel

costs, school costs, transport, food, uniforms, registration, electricity and child care every single week. So when government can reduce some of those pressures, it really matters, and the feedback back to me and I am sure to all my colleagues has been enormous in regard to some of those cost-of-living measures. Of course our government will continue to support Victorians, not have a $40 billion cut like the opposition have proposed, which is frightening for some of our people going forward if they feel that those cuts are going to be coming into place: what does that mean for their cost of living?

My electorate office has already assisted many local families dealing with the cost of living through the provision of school uniforms. People would be surprised how often this issue comes through our electorate office doors, with parents trying to do the right thing, working really hard, really struggling at times to pay the bills and wanting their kids to feel included at their schools. Of course uniforms can become incredibly expensive – we know that – especially when there are multiple children in a household and parents are paying for all of their uniforms. That is why we have the affordable school uniforms program, and that is why it is so important – it helps directly to assist families at all of the schools across Melton. Importantly, this government has also acted to reduce unnecessary costs by banning unnecessary uniform logos, which is one that has been taken up. We had a few issues in Melton at one of our schools, but we have managed to sort that out. But it is a really important thing for families in regard to the logo situation and the provision of uniforms.

These bills are really important, obviously, to keep the state moving, to keep investing, to keep providing infrastructure and to deliver to communities like mine out at Melton and right across Victoria. I am pleased with the budget outcome in particular for my electorate and for the broader statewide policies, and I commend these bills to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:00): I rise today to speak on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 or the Victorian budget, and if you listened to the contributions by Labor members today, then you would think that all Victorians are satisfied and very happy with what is allocated within the pages of the budget. If you had a look at any social media page which links to any announcement by Labor, you would see a different story. If you read the comments on any media article, you would see a different story. If you got out of the bubble of what happens here in the Parliament, you would actually hear from people how white-hot angry they are with a Labor government that has completely forgotten about the people who elected them to govern for them.

When you hear their rhetoric about cost-of-living pressures, it is just not matching with what we are hearing in the community. There are families who are struggling more and more each and every week when it comes to the weekly grocery shop. It is becoming the most stressful thing that families have to deal with week on week. They are doing away with meals for themselves. We know that parents are doing it so hard at the moment to keep up appearances so that their kids can have food in their lunch box and can go to the school camps and so that they can make sure that they can support them in their tuition where they can. Yet the Labor budget does not deliver for these families. You might say there is a little sugar hit here or there. But at the end of the day we are seeing little sugar hits but a massive spend outside of how much money is available. When that occurs, all it does is drive up inflation. It drives up the cost of living. It drives up the cost of your groceries every week. Labor is driving up the cost of our fuel every week. It is driving up the cost of our energy bills. Every single time we hear from the Labor government that they know about these issues, we do not see a response that makes any difference, and all we see in this budget is more spending, more debt, more Victorian taxpayer money spent on interest repayments rather than on the frontline services that we desperately need to see in Victoria. Our people are white-hot angry. They are so angry because they are sick to death of Labor not listening and just supporting their own.

They are frustrated when they look at the budget and they see that funding has been cut for the Western Highway duplication, a project that should have been completed back in 2016, but 10 years later we have still got trees growing up through culvert pipes. We have got a donga there, a workstation there, that has had the same white ute parked out the front for about the last five – before COVID anyway. I think it has recently changed to a silver ute. We have still got the fences and the security guards at the

birthing tree, yet we have got no plan going forward and no money from the Victorian government when it comes to making this road safe. It is unfair for the people who have to turn up to the accidents. It is unfair for the local community, who know that this has got to be fixed, yet Labor will not put the money there. For those that say we need to make all these electorates marginal to make sure we get anything, there is no seat more marginal than the Ripon electorate, and they still do not prioritise that region. It is a Labor government that is out of touch and simply does not care.

The Nationals will always stand up for regional Victoria. We live it, we know it and we will fight for our community's fair share every single day. That is why we know, when we speak to people in our communities, that people are frustrated. They know that their highways are falling apart. They are so angry because they have got transmission lines being planned to go through their properties and they have not even had the opportunity to have their say. Labor talks a lot about consultation, but what it should really be is notification. Farmers are just being told what Labor plans to do on their land without listening to their concerns. They have never, ever bothered to turn out and listen to farmers. They are frustrated because they just want their local member to turn up and listen to them and take their views back to this place, back to Parliament. Yet they do not hear from the member for Ripon, and they are very, very angry about that. They simply do not believe what they say when what they do is a completely different story.

It is exactly the same when it comes to renewables. We are getting this industrialisation of agricultural land where there is no explanation of what we get back in return or even how on earth it will deliver affordable and reliable energy – the affordable and reliable energy that every Victorian needs. Whether you are a householder or whether you are a business, the cost of energy is going through the roof, and more and more often we are hearing from people, 'How on earth can we ensure that we are going to have the lights on in even a year's time?' There are people within the energy sector who think it is astonishing we have not had blackouts yet. There simply is not enough energy planned for the state of Victoria for Victoria to get ahead. This is a government that has been completely asleep at the wheel when it comes to securing Victoria's energy future, and it will be generations that have to deal with that, because you cannot bring new energy on board quickly and easily. When we hear a government that condemns gas as 'fossil gas' and turns away all investment to unlock new gas reserves in Victoria, we know it is a government that has got its priorities all wrong. When they are simply looking at all of regional Victoria as a massive block of undeveloped land and an opportunity to roll out wind farms and solar farms and not considering what the impact will be on our agricultural productivity – the agricultural sector that now delivers more than $200 billion in economic value to our state – you have to wonder how on earth we have got to this point, and that is because we have had Labor for three terms now.

We have had a Labor government for 12 years; in fact we have had a Labor government for all but four years since 1999. That is a long time for one government to be at the wheel, and it is no wonder that backbenchers and Labor stalwarts right across the state are saying they need a break. It has been too long and we have gone too far, and this budget just proves that, because what we see are the same old lines coming out. We see more and more coming into the state coffers through taxes, and people are getting less and less. This is the story of the Allan Labor government: you pay more and you get less. In fact we are spending now over a million dollars each and every hour on interest repayments – interest to the big banks. That is a million dollars every hour that could be spent on fixing our roads, on fixing our health services, on upgrading our schools and on expanding our public transport network so people actually can catch a bus in our region.

What I would love is to have a train returning to our region and for them to actually treat Horsham and Hamilton like the regional cities that they are. Bring back the train services. It is unfathomable that we have got one of the key things that Labor are trying to wave the flag on, that they are going to halve the cost of public transport across Victoria. That is of no help whatsoever if you have no access to public transport. It is inequitable investment, and it is not fair on those rural and regional people who rely on others to be able to get them to health appointments, to get them to school, to get them to work.

We rely on our roads, and our roads are falling apart, and you can see in the budget papers that less will be done by Labor – there will be less repair and maintenance of our roads. People are paying more in taxes, and fewer roads are being fixed. This is Labor, and that is the one thing that I will agree with the Treasurer on. She has said quite explicitly it is a Labor budget. Well, I agree wholeheartedly. It is a budget paper that outlines more and more taxes and increasing revenue from taxes and is leaning on people – Victorians and Victorian businesses – who are doing it so hard at the moment to spend more, to put their hands in their pockets and give more money to Labor, and yet they see that their opportunities are diminishing under a Labor government that simply do not know how to balance the books.

CFA volunteers are equally frustrated. The emergency services tax revenue line is twice as much as the previous fire services property levy revenue line was, so every Victorian is paying twice as much in emergency services tax as they were before, and yet we are seeing a lower investment in our fire trucks, in our stations and in our SES sheds. The volunteers are not getting the supports that they need and that they deserve and that they are paying for – and not just a little bit; they are paying a huge amount for it.

We have got simple things that would be easy for the government to fix, like unlocking the gas monopoly to western Victoria so we could actually get a pay-on-time deduction on our energy bills, get a reduction on our energy bills for being able to actually shop around and get some competition, but for 12 years Labor have refused to deal with that. We have got issues around policing shortages right across the electorate. In far western Victoria there were only seven police on duty for a number of weeks over Easter between Dimboola and the border. There should be a dozen cops covering that roster, but there simply has not been the investment in police that ensures that we get people in rural and regional areas. It is no wonder that farm crime is surging at the moment. It is little wonder that we have got an increase in theft of cars in our townships, that people are now locking their houses for the first time ever. This might sound astonishing to those from Melbourne, but people generally have not been locking their back doors in country Victoria. Everybody does now. Everybody locks their door. They have got security systems. They are making sure that they are the frontline defence when it comes to somebody coming into their home, because everybody knows somebody who has been violated through crime. That is not the Victoria we used to have, but this is Victoria under Labor.

We know that the Nationals will always fight for a fair deal. We fight tooth and nail for it, and we do manage to get some funding for our communities. We stand by them. I am proud to have stood by the Stawell Primary School and Dunkeld Consolidated School in securing funding in this budget. We have fought so hard for the Dadswells Bridge upgrade in Dadswells Bridge and also an extra turning lane, which we will be getting in this year's budget. We have also been fighting along the Murtoa-Glenorchy and Horsham-Lubeck roads intersection, which has been the subject of a number of horrific fatalities. It is so pleasing that after so many years of fighting, with that community – with Darren Schultz and the other CFA volunteers who turn up to the accidents at that intersection – that we have been able to secure funding for that.

But there is much, much more to be had, and we can only deliver that from government. That is why the Victorian Nationals and Liberals have already released our 10-year plan to secure Victoria's economic future. It is a plan which is fair. It is not about cuts, as Labor would say – they are all about spin and are forgetting, I think, what they are actually elected to do, which is to make sure that they deliver for all Victorians. It actually will make sure that our children and our children's children will have access to the same opportunities that my generation had access to. That is what is fair, that is what is equitable and that is what everybody should be fighting for. I am enormously proud to be part of the Nationals team that will always fight for our fair share in rural and regional Victoria. We are out there in our communities – we live it and we know it. We stand with our volunteers. We stand with our workers. We stand with our businesses. We stand with the people who cannot get the support they need or the help they need. We stand by the people who cannot access health services. We stand by the people who cannot access small amounts of funding – like a CFA volunteer I spoke to last week

who cannot get funding for chocks to hold their wheels up so they can safely fill up their truck in a dam. We stand up for people who have got broken rims and broken wheels and cannot afford to get them repaired, because they have damaged their rims on their roads.

We know exactly what the issues are, and we will fight for that. But there is only one way we can deliver, and that is to be in government. I have now stood in this place for three terms. This is the 12th budget that I have responded to. Each and every year we get the budget papers and we look excitedly for something. This is the thinnest budget I have ever seen. It is the thinnest budget when it comes to deliverables, but it is the fattest budget when it comes to taxes. It is the fattest budget when it comes to debt and deficit and interest repayments. It is a disappointment for every single Victorian. So I urge those on the Labor side of this chamber to have a look at the comments, to speak to the community and understand that they are unhappy – in fact they are very, very, very angry. I have never seen Victorians as angry and frustrated with government as during the COVID lockdowns. We have got exactly the same situation going on, where Victorians feel like they have got a government which is making decisions about them, for them, without them, and it is having a massive impact on their lives – on how they run their business, on how they raise their children and on how they go about their day-to-day opportunities in life. They are worried about what happens in the future. That is why the Nationals will always stand up for our fair share for regional Victoria. While we can deliver well in opposition, I look forward to the day we can deliver our own budget after November this year.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (15:15): I do not think I have ever seen the member for Lowan so rattled. You are a bit worried about what happened in Farrer, clearly, and clearly worried about what is going to happen in November in Lowan, no doubt. This is a really important budget, and I am going to unpack for the benefit of members just in relation to the –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Essendon is projecting his emotions about being rattled, and I ask him to perhaps reflect on himself rather than on others in the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): The member to continue.

Danny PEARSON: You really should know the standing orders by now, Emma, you really should. This is a really important budget. I am going to explain why this is important. We achieved an operating surplus as a result of the budget. For the benefit of those opposite, I know the Leader of the National Party, who is probably the only person on that side of the house who has got an interest in accounting standards, would know that an operating surplus deals with the fact that money comes in, money goes out, but that you also allow for depreciation. This is all part of our five-step fiscal strategy, which we released in November 2020, and that was about growing the economy. What the budget papers clearly show is the economy is continuing to grow and expand across the forward estimates. What it also means is that – and we achieved this in 2022–23 – you get more money coming in than going out the door. That is on the operating side of the budget.

I know the Liberal candidate for Malvern has made some comments recently, but she is clearly confused in relation to the operating side of the budget and the capital side of the budget. What the budget papers show, in budget paper 2, page 47, is we will have an operating result this year of $700 million, we will have an operating result of $1 billion in the next financial year, $1.9 billion in 2027–28, $1.9 billion in 2028–29 and $2 billion in 2029–30. Why is this important? Well, it means that we can continue to provide the services that Victorians rely upon, and we are not borrowing money to do that. That is important, because compare and contrast that to New South Wales. Bear in mind we are the first movers – we go first; they are yet to hand down their budgets. But in the last budget that New South Wales handed down they were going to have a deficit this financial year of, guess what, $3.4 billion. We are in surplus, which those opposite seem to discount and disregard; New South Wales has a deficit of $3.4 billion. We hear this narrative from time to time about the superiority of those on the opposite side at being economic managers. Want to have a guess what Queensland is going to be this financial year, member for Polwarth? $8.6 billion. I am talking about the operating

side of the budget, member for Polwarth, and you should know this. They are profligate in relation to their expenditure.

The other point to make is that as you read the budget papers – and again, in budget paper 2, page 47, if you look at net debt as a proportion of the gross state product of the economy, what is happening in the size of the state of the economy?

Richard Riordan interjected.

Danny PEARSON: No, you cannot count, mate. It does not hit 25 per cent. It is 23.7 per cent. But the point is, when you are dealing with the size of the Victorian economy, member for Polwarth, you will have an appreciation of the magnitude and the size of the economy. The economy in the next financial year is projected to be $669 billion, growing to $705 billion, then $739 billion, then $770 billion at the end of the forward estimates. Why – because gross state product is increasing at 1.5 per cent next financial year, then 2 per cent, then 2.5 per cent, then 2.5 per cent. The economy is expanding. If you have got an expanding economy, then you have got the ability to manage your debt levels, and if you are in the serious game of wanting to materially increase living standards in this state, it comes down to the three Ps. It comes down to population growth, and we have got one of the fastest population growths in the country. It comes down to participation. Invariably this relates to primary care givers having the ability to go back to work. Again, Victoria is above the national average, and we are at historic highs. The third relates to private sector investment or productivity. If you are looking at the national accounts, which were released for the December quarter, and gross fixed capital formation – that is, private sector investment in the state – Victoria increased 1.9 per cent for the quarter. Compare that to New South Wales: 0.5 per cent. Compared to Queensland, they contracted – they went backwards by 1.3 per cent; South Australia, 1.4 per cent; Western Australia, 1.8 per cent; Tasmania, 2.8 per cent. The national average was 0.7 per cent. When it came to getting private sector investment in this state, in the December quarter we went to 1.9 per cent.

Why do you think that might be? It might have something to do with the fact that the hyperscalers like Microsoft, Meta, Oracle, Amazon and Alphabet are all proposing to invest A$1.1 trillion globally when it comes to AI infrastructure – $1.1 trillion. When I talked to the hyperscalers what they were saying to me was that Australia is a key focus for them. They focus on America, one, because that is where they are from, but then they focus overwhelmingly on Australia. Why? It is for the reasons I outlined in an earlier contribution today. Victoria has got all the key components and the ingredients to build the digital spine to create prosperity for future generations here in Victoria. From my perspective, we are on the right trajectory to be able to make sure that we can continue to do that. The other point I would make is that when you are seeing that level of private sector investment, you are starting to see the fact that it is underpinning this level of growth and economic investment. It is borne out by the figures and the projections that are identified in the budget papers.

I note that in her contribution the Leader of the Opposition talked about there being a cash surplus in 2032. So like the Liberal candidate for Malvern, she is confusing the operating side of the budget with the capital budget. But I think what the Leader of the Opposition was saying is that come 2032, there will be no cash deficits – that is, you will either have a zero amount or you will have a positive amount. Delivering major transport infrastructure projects is not like going down to JB Hi-Fi on Saturday and buying a telly. These things cost a heap of money. They take a long period of time and a lot of planning. So what is the Leader of the Opposition actually saying? Is she basically saying, 'Well, if you've got holes in the ground, if you've got transport infrastructure being built, and it is not done by 2032, we're calling time'? So are we going to have a hole where the Suburban Rail Loop is? Is that your grand vision for the state – a hole? It is like in *The Castle*. It is like Dale saying, 'I dug a hole.' Well, fantastic. That is what the Leader of the Opposition is going to do. What a bunch of low-altitude flyers. I mean, honestly, the laziness, the absolute lethargy from those opposite – for goodness sake, you have been in opposition since 2014. Come into this place with a bit of vision, with vim and vigour and a sense of where you want to take the state. This is just a charade. The notion that you are going to turn around

and basically just shut down the Big Build in 2032 is absolutely laughable. While those opposite are playing their games, we are getting on with making sure we continue to have these investments.

From my perspective, again, in my former portfolio, I was really pleased that we have got the Victorian AI investment package of $13.7 million across the forwards. It is not a huge amount of money, but the point here is we want to make sure that we use the power of the state. We want to make sure that we have got efficient processes in place to create this level of investment. If you have got $1.1 trillion of free-flowing capital that is eligible to come to this state, why on earth wouldn't you be trying to land that here? Why wouldn't you be trying to build the future? Because again, so much of Victoria's historic prosperity has been as a result of manufacturing, and AI will present that opportunity to create that investment for the future. It is something I am incredibly proud of.

I note that we are debating two bills concurrently here, two appropriation bills. Back in the day we used to treat them separately. I remember the former member for Prahran was quite aggrieved, I think, by some comments I made in relation to parliamentary appropriation. But for the next financial year Parliament will be appropriated $419 million. For a population that is 7.27 million, that is about $57.63 per capita. I checked on Dan Murphy's site this morning and a slab of Carlton Dry is $55.95. So you can have a Western liberal democracy for slightly more than a slab of beer for the year. Now, which would you rather? I ask the question. I think all of us know the answer to this question.

I will be serious for a moment: the importance of this institution should never be underestimated. We are operating in a time when Western liberal democracies are under siege through what is happening on social media, and I think there is an opportunity for us to try to reframe this discussion and find ways in which we can connect this great, august institution to the community, because Western liberal democracy is not perfect. I am not going to be arrogant enough to say it is a perfect form of government for every nation in the world – it is not. But what we have to try and do is recognise that at the moment there are those who will be seeking to undermine this institution. I think there are enough of us on both sides of this house in particular who do not want that to occur. Some of the disgraceful behaviour we saw at the last election – look, pre-poll at Essendon last time was like an English garden party. It was like, 'Oh, hello, how are you? Nice to see you out today.' It was all very polite and civil. That was not clearly the case in other pre-polls. If you are an ethnic minority, if you are a woman or if you have a disability, the idea of being out at pre-poll and being aggressively targeted is really, I would imagine, quite confronting. A lot of people turn around and say, 'Maybe this whole democracy thing ain't for me,' and that is a problem. That is an absolute problem, so we need to really think about what we can try and do about that.

I note that if you compare and contrast the diversity of members of this place and the importance of that to the Roman Senate – in the Imperial period of the Republican period – you were required to have 1 million sesterces in order to be a Roman senator. We do not have those property qualifications. Indeed the property qualifications were abolished by I think the first Cain government in about 1947 for the Legislative Council. But if you compare and contrast that to purchasing power, if the silver in sesterces was extricated now and used on the common market, it would be about $13.8 million to $14.7 million Australian. That is a significant property qualification. Alternatively, rather than using silver as an asset, if you used labour as an asset, a Roman legionnaire would have earned about 1200 sesterces a year. So in order to have enough funds to be elected to the Roman Senate, you would have needed around about 800 years of service as a legionnaire.

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I just would like the member to clarify: what did the Romans ever do for us? I think it is in light of where the debate is today. I think it would be useful for him to come back to the topic of the budget.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O'Keeffe): The member for Essendon to continue.

Danny PEARSON: Where do we start, member for Polwarth, about the Romans? If you think about the height of the Roman Empire and all the things it underpinned for us, we are so fortunate and

grateful to have had that as a predecessor. If you think about it in terms of Western liberal democracy, the money that we invest here is really important, but I do think we have got to think about how we can try to continue to engage with – I do not think so much kids in primary school – particularly teenage boys and young men. How do you try to make the Parliament relevant to younger people in those really formative years? I do not have the answers, but I am worried. I have seen enough over the journey. I think those of us in the class of 2014 would say that things have gotten worse since we arrived. I think as a general proposition most of us would say it is just a lot harder, it is nastier and it is more vicious, and I do not think we want to see that. I think the majority of members of this place and the other place would acknowledge that that is not something we want to see. So there is a role for this great institution to try and find ways where we can engage with people. Of course there will always be the argy-bargy of the opposition holding the executive to account. There will always be the theatre of this place, and I am not saying we have to do away with that, but there are times in this place where we have had really good, constructive, thoughtful debates and a number of times where we have said, 'This is the Parliament at its best.' We all see it, but I am betting people out there do not see it. People out there just think we are some sort of glorified *Punch and Judy* show that get paid by the taxpayer – like the World Wrestling Foundation. So there has got to be a better way of going forward. Hopefully with the investment provided to the Parliament we are able to do that. But again, we have got a surplus because of sheer hard work determination, and we are doing it off the back of the fact that we have got a growing and expanding economy.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Danny PEARSON: If you want to go to New South Wales and you want to go to Queensland and deal with their depths of despair – because again, if you look at Queensland, they have got budget deficits, member for Lowan, as far as the eye can see. They will not be producing a surplus until after the Olympics. I am really pleased and delighted that we are in this position now. This is my last budget contribution. I am not sure it is my best, but I have enjoyed myself.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:30): I rise today to offer the Polwarth slant on this year's very, very sad and depressing Victorian budget. Much was revealed in the previous contribution from the member for Essendon, who as Minister for Finance called this great act of fiction 'sheer hard work.' I think we will let the historians decide and those writing about the budget into the future determine whether it was sheer hard work. Most of us – the business community and certainly the people of Polwarth – look at this budget and do not see sheer hard work but just see sheer neglect. Why do they see sheer neglect? Because this budget continues unashamedly in a full-throttle direction of out-of-control debt, out-of-control spending and a government who refuses to listen to the people of Victoria, refuses to listen to the people in its own electorates and, worst of all, refuses to listen to the experts who have said now for quite some time that the Victorian government must start to lead, it must start to have a plan and it must start to show the path forward about how it can control its out-of-control spending and its skyrocketing debt. What this budget told us is that we now have a situation in Victoria where future generations are having all their taxes spent, all their income spent, and we will be robbing future generations of the ability of a good Victorian government to provide the health care that we need and the schools that we need.

Certainly right across Victoria now our public transport and our roads are just a disaster. It does not matter whether you are in the outer suburbs or in Geelong or out on the Warrnambool line or wherever you are in Victoria, it is taking you so much longer to get where you want to go to do business. People in my electorate of Polwarth – elderly people, vulnerable people, people that really rely on public transport – are living in fear about what it means to try and get to the doctor in Melbourne, try and get to their grandchildren or family members in Geelong or Melbourne and rely on the train to do it. People have contacted my office. They are worried that they will be trapped on the train and not able to get to the toilet. They are not comfortable that they will be able to get a seat and travel safely if they are disabled or have had hip or knee operations. They just simply cannot stand for that length of time. This budget delivers no relief whatsoever to the people right across Polwarth who rely on that one simple

public service; that basic piece of infrastructure and service that a good, sensible and reliable government with an honest budget ought to be able to provide. In fact many of my constituents are saying, 'For the best part of 150 years we have had a regular, safe, reliable train service where you could book a seat, receive some refreshments along the way and, most importantly, it would be there when you want it.' We have an endless situation where people from one day to the next cannot be sure that they will have a train that they can get on – it is cancelled for one reason or another.

We have got the situation where this budget fails to properly fund and support law and order in our state. We have had the ludicrous situation where in the electorate of Polwarth we only have one 24-hour police station, based in Colac. That one 24-hour police station for nearly all of February and into March had its front door closed. Why? Because this government could not even afford to fix the front door on a police station. What does it mean when we do not have those services? What does it mean when little townships around my electorate, such as Beeac, have had for two years now a vacancy to try and find a policeman that will look after that community and look after that police station, and they just cannot replace them. Why can't they replace them? Because they just do not have the spare resources within the police network. What does that lead to? That leads to communities that are waiting longer for police call-outs. It is certainly leading in rural communities to an increase in crime: cattle duffing, theft and robberies from farm sheds and farm homes are at all-time highs right across the region because there is just not the police presence. The Allan government has failed again in this budget to provide the credible plan that people want to see.

What else has it meant? It has also meant in our healthcare services increasingly there are longer waiting times, people are experiencing being turned away from health and people are having to travel further to the bigger cities and metro areas because the reliability of the local services just is not there. For example, at Colac Area Health now three times the number of presentations go through the urgent care service than went through there 10 years ago. That is because the cost of living has forced more people to seek lower cost public care, but the lower cost public care just is not being funded properly. It needs greater support, and this budget has again failed to deliver on that.

Why is the government failing to deliver on that? Because, unlike in the contribution from the former finance minister, what we know is that this government is increasingly having to spend more and more on its burgeoning debt problem. When Labor came to power back in 2014 – and a lot has been talked about what this government has achieved in those 12 years – it had a $21.8 billion deficit. Keeping in mind that up until –

Members interjecting.

Richard RIORDAN: Debt, sorry – quite correct. The net state debt was $21.8 billion. This government in that time has now ballooned that out to a projection, by 2030, of around $200 billion. The interest payment alone could pay for all our police services; it could pay for a variety of services that the state and the people of this state expect and want from their government. It could certainly do much. Just the interest payments alone would see all our roads, our country roads in our country communities, in much better condition and much safer. Of course, when we have safer roads, not only are our communities safer, but our product that we are producing in rural and regional Victoria – our great-quality milk, our grain, our timber and the range of products that we are producing in rural and regional Victoria – will get to the markets quicker and more affordably. There are great benefits in a well-run budget that can deliver on the basic services that a responsible government should be able to deliver on.

This budget is also damning for many in Victoria because of the increased tax burden. This budget, again, is receipting record revenue streams from the people of Victoria. Victorians are definitely paying so much more and getting so much less. The much talked about fire services levy is just one example of a tax that this government has found as a new method to punish and penalise people particularly in rural and regional Victoria, where there is a massive disproportionate effect on farms and small businesses out in the rural and regional areas. They are paying more and more for services

that they essentially provide to their own communities as volunteers. On any level, on any reasonable assessment of that, that is an unfair tax. This budget, like the future budgets that this government will bring down if it has an opportunity to, will continue to increase up to a figure of two and three times the levy that once was put in place and was designed to be a fair spread of the cost of providing emergency services to all Victorians, not the massive new tax grab that Victorians find themselves having to put up with.

Labor – and it was brought to our attention by others contributing from the Labor side – have talked about the surplus that this budget presents. If ever there was trickery in budgets, then the surplus is that. We know, not by disclosures from this government but from the fact that the opposition is ever on the ball and aware of keeping an eye on the way this government operates, that it came through the early sale of a lottery licence for over a billion dollars. The surplus in this year's budget has not come around through sheer hard work, as the Labor Party like to coin their work, but actually through sheer skulduggery and sheer sneakiness. That is what brought about a budget surplus in this budget. The worst part about that action alone is that it is another asset sold off by this government and we will never know whether it was at a price that was the best deal for the state, but it was brought in for short-term benefit so this government could limp across the line at the upcoming election in order to present its case as a responsible government.

Unfortunately – or fortunately, for the people of Victoria – not only are the opposition awake to them but so are others in the community who want and expect greater of their government when it comes to running a good and reliable budget into the future. What does the plan look like for the state? The plan for this government does not exist. There is not a plan about how it is going to start addressing debt and deficit. There is not a plan about how it is going to continue to maintain and fund its ongoing and ever-increasing interest payments. But the opposition do have a plan. We have a very clear plan that we have put forward to Victorians. We talk about bringing government costs and operating costs back in line with population growth to a relative number that is justifiable and will provide the level of service that Victorians expect. Most Victorians realise and have certainly felt in recent times that $15 billion blowout that was recorded and reported on in the last 12 months from the overblow and crime and corruption in the Big Build process. Victorians are aware of that. They have sensed for a long time that the Victorian government pays way too much for too little and does not return value for money for Victorian taxpayers. Part of the Liberal promise, the Liberal plan for the future, is that we will deliver a responsible government that looks to what the community needs and provides those necessary adjustments to the way we run the state to not only be prudent with the money we get but to manage the budget and the economy not just for today for short-term political gain but for the future so Victoria can truly thrive.

This budget did not deliver for the seat of Polwarth. The key items where my community was really looking forward to some support in this budget included Winchelsea Primary School, which sits on the Princes Highway. The condition of the fencing around the school is such that it is not safe for the young pupils to play in nearly half the playground. That leads to all sorts of playground problems for the school to manage, but on top of that it is a very antiquated structure for the school. It has not received the promised planning and futureproofing that that school community has been desperate for for a very long time. That school has been forgotten, and that is the type of school that a responsible government would be working with. It is a growing community, it is a commuter community through to Geelong and it is actually a community, at times, of great social disadvantage. It is a community that absolutely needs a world-class state primary school. There are no other options in that community for education, and while this government continues to neglect it, those students at Winchelsea Primary School are missing out and missing out on future opportunities.

In one of my other communities we have the situation in the Corangamite shire of the Cobden swimming pool, which was actually built and is operated and run by the local community. It is a huge effort by the Cobden and surrounding community to build and provide their own indoor heated pool, which provides not only great therapy for older people but also somewhere that people can do lap

swimming and so on all year round. That pool desperately needs around $250,000 just to fix up the equipment and bring it back online, otherwise the entire Shire of Corangamite has no 365-day-a-year swimming opportunities for that community. They would have to drive an hour or so to Colac or an hour or so through to Warrnambool. It is simply not fair. That is a simple, low-cost option to provide a piece of infrastructure where many other communities would want many millions, if not tens of millions, to provide a similar service. This community has shown its initiative and enterprise. It built itself a pool and now needs some support to maintain it.

In another area, along the Surf Coast there is Torquay Bowls Club. The Surf Coast shire council has put to the government for quite some time its cycling plan. It has got bike paths and opportunities there for the great outdoors and for the community to have the passive recreation and transport networks that they need. Likewise Torquay Bowls Club, sitting on Crown land, requires some assistance to make sure it is still a premium community activity centre for a growing community, and it is the only bowls club in the area. Both those projects have been long known to this state government, yet this budget has failed to in any way provide that. It is a bit like this government's two election promises, in 2018 and 2022, for a Torquay community hospital. There was confusion in the lead-up to budget week, with the Minister for Health saying that the project was going ahead but later not confirming that, so this government has been playing politics with really important community services.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (15:45): This is a budget that really, I have to say, has delivered some real help to people who need it most. It is a budget that focuses on what matters. I thoroughly enjoyed the contribution of the member for Essendon – many, many great points made. I did like the delving into a bit of Roman history. Way back when, my ancestors would have definitely been Roman. It is always enlightening listening to the member for Essendon, but on so many levels too, because there was such a good explanation there of this budget and the work that we are doing to make it as responsible as possible but spend in the right areas as well. When I say the right areas, it is about taking care of those who need it most. There is cost-of-living relief baked into this budget, and that speaks to our values as a Labor government. It is really important. I have been having so many conversations across the electorate with people who are eternally grateful for the two months of free public transport and understand too that the six months following to the end of the year of half-price public transport is really helping them when they need it most. The cost of fuel soaring overnight back in February, I think it was, was a shock to everyone. It was a shock around the world, and the reverberation continues. It will have a long tail. It is not over yet – we know this. We made quick, decisive actions as a government to help people out, and so too did the federal government, with a cut to the excise on petrol, which has definitely assisted.

But one of the great things that we did – it was just an accident of timing, in a way, although there was great foresight – was develop Servo Saver. It kicked in just at the right time, and I cannot tell you enough times how many people have said to me that that app, Servo Saver, has made such a difference to them in being able to budget and forecast what it will cost for them to fill up their tank and where they will do it. Better yet, it is not just about where they live – it covers the whole state of Victoria. I have spoken to drivers who actually drive for a living. As part of their work they have got to get out on the road and cross all around the state, and they said it is incredibly helpful for them. Even going on a holiday and working out where you can fill up with fuel – because we have brought in legislation as well to ensure that they have got to tell you by 4 o'clock in the afternoon what they are going to charge you as a cap for the next day. That has been so well received. Again, it was an accident of timing that it came into effect just as petrol prices around the world went crazy, but it could not have been better timed if we tried. It is an amazing initiative, and that has been funded in this budget.

More locally, though, there have been some excellent, excellent projects – really worthy projects – that we have funded in this budget. There are so many. There are quite a few I want to speak about, but I have to say I am so incredibly excited about Sherbrooke Community School. This beautiful P–12 school in Sassafras is so well loved, and it has been in such need of beautiful upgrading and modernisation of its learning facilities, and this budget actually provides for that. As the local member,

I cannot tell you how excited I was to see that it had come through, and then to be able to share the news with principal Sue Holmes and then share the news with some of the student leaders there was an amazing moment. When I spoke with them, one of the SRC members there said to me, 'I can't tell you how important this is for our school and for all of us who go here. Thank you so much.' We all actually got a little bit emotional and a bit teary, because it meant a lot to those kids. I am absolutely delighted that money will be provided for this wonderful, wonderful school in the hills, which takes such great, extraordinary care of amazing, amazing students by a staff – I tell you what, I would have been happy to be on staff with any of them there; they are just an incredible cohort of teachers, as are all of our teachers across the state. So that was a fantastic announcement in this budget. I cannot wait to see it bear fruit at the end.

Another wonderful announcement in our budget was $44.79 million to operationalise the Angliss Hospital. The new wing, which was promised at the last election – we said we were going to do it – will be opening very soon. Like my dear friend the member for Bayswater, I cannot wait to find out what date that will be. It is going to be extraordinary. The Angliss has been around for nearly 90 years. It is 87 years old, and there are so many people who were born there – I think I just heard that the member for Footscray was born there. When I doorknock around our electorate, a number of people say, 'I was born there' or 'I've had my children there'. Actually yesterday in Cockatoo, doorknocking, I met a lovely young woman, who told me that her little bub – she said, 'Little dude's going to be born at the Angliss in a few weeks.' So congratulations to Alicia on the upcoming baby. It is a marvellous hospital, and this new wing has completely changed it – 32 new beds, four operating theatres, and it has even got a sterilisation unit. At the beginning when I heard about that, I did not even know what that was, but it means that they can actually sterilise all their own equipment there and then. It is really important that a hospital can do that, and it makes a lot of sense to be able to do that in-house. There will even be additional car parking at that hospital. It is going to be an absolute game changer for our area. And for those who live in the southern part and the eastern part of the electorate, Pakenham Community Hospital has also received $18.79 million to operationalise that hospital. I know the member for Pakenham has been an incredible advocate for that hospital and I know there are constituents of mine who will benefit from that, so to see that funding come through has been brilliant.

Another wonderful local win I am delighted about is the school zone lights – the '40' signs are going to be lit up in Cockatoo. It is such a busy road, Belgrave-Gembrook Road, running past Cockatoo Primary School, and when the fog comes in it is like a pea souper. So to be able to light up those signs to just let motorists know, 'Slow down. You're in a school zone,' is really important. We have trucks that go through there, a lot of heavy haulage cars that just fly through, and when you cannot see terribly well because of the fog – this is critical to get that in. I was able to get that in the first budget when I was elected as member for Monbulk, out in Gembrook, and now to be able to say to Cockatoo residents and those whose children go to Cockatoo that this will happen for them too was absolutely wonderful in this budget.

Another fantastic announcement from this budget is the fact we are going to uplift weekday evening services on the Belgrave line. Forever, people have lamented the fact that the service is every 30 minutes to be able to catch a train out to Belgrave. Well, we are going to make it every 20 minutes, so instead of two services on the hour, there will be three. That is a huge uplift, and it is the fastest we can do on that single track. It is going to make a significant difference for commuters here in the city, because when they need to get home, if they just miss that train, they will not have to wait another 29 minutes. It is going to be there in about 19. That difference means a lot to people, that difference in time. We are all about ensuring people can get around faster and easier, and of course, as I said before, we have made public transport free for the two months ending this month and then half-price to the end of the year. To be able to make these announcements is incredible, because it does help people in their daily lives, because people sometimes do not just feel the pinch economically; a lot of us feel the pinch when it comes to time. Many, many of us are time poor, so where we can save people time, it is a win for everyone. That is why I am really proud of this Labor budget, because the way you spend your money speaks to your values, and for those who are doing it tough, those who are time poor,

those who are feeling economic constraints, we are trying to make their lives easier through this budget, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Another wonderful local win was that we have got an incredible tennis club up in Emerald. It is the tiniest little pavilion you have ever seen, but there are hundreds of people who go there. It is a regional tennis centre, and competitions are played all the time. We were able to get new lighting for them a few years back, and that has been wonderful to be able to assist with night matches. But this tennis club is not run for profit. Do you know, you can send your child there for 2 hours on a weekday evening. Your kid can go and hit that ball with their racquet and play tennis for 2 hours for $5. That is less than the cost of a cup of coffee nowadays. That is extraordinary; it is such a great club. We have funded in this budget a master plan – up to $100,000 to make sure that they can get a great master plan – which looks at the future of this club and looks at setting up the facilities for them so they can continue to thrive but also to provide that wonderful service to families, and it makes it affordable. To make sport affordable for kids is incredibly important. We have got our Get Active Kids vouchers as well, which we have continued, and they are fabulous. But for this little club – well, not a little club; it is a good, strong club in a tiny pavilion – that master plan is going to help them with their future, and I am really, really delighted about that.

There are so many great initiatives in our budget that I have been really pleased to talk about with people, and I know it is resonating with them. I mentioned before the Servo Saver app, but that 20 per cent rebate on rego is already being well received by people, because it will help give them immediate relief. For those who could not use the free public transport to their advantage, because maybe public transport is not as accessible for them or where they need to commute to – it is just not possible; they need to use a car – this helps give them some relief too, because the times have been a bit challenging these past few months with the oil crisis going on and another interest rate rise from the RBA. It is a tough time for a lot of people – not everyone, but there are a lot of people who are really feeling that – and this is a great budget, as I said before, that speaks to our values and makes sure that we are actually investing in our communities and supporting people where and when they need it most.

I was just explaining how this budget really speaks to our values as a government. I was highlighting too that we have really given assistance to people when it comes to public transport and with registration to be able to apply for the rebate. I want to give a shout-out: if there is anyone watching, please be aware you need to apply between 1 June and 31 July. Do not miss out. Put it in your calendar, put something up on the fridge, whatever works for you, but make sure that you are not missing out on 1 August.

The other thing I really want to speak to as well is the investment of $2.2 billion when it comes to disability inclusion. I think there is nothing more important than ensuring we support children in particular to learn to be at their best, and if they need extra supports, being able to invest in those is absolutely critical, crucial and important to do. It is just absolutely fundamental that we ensure children who have special needs in learning or who have a physical disability get the assistance and the supports that they need. $2.2 billion is a significant amount of money that we are investing, and it is worth every single penny without a shadow of a doubt.

When it comes to other supports for families, we cannot go past the affordable school uniforms program, which saves families about $93 a year on uniform costs, the $24 million that we spend on outside of school hours care for young Victorians with a disability and the $16 million to continue and expand Glasses for Kids. I have spoken at length about that, but Glasses for Kids is critical because if you cannot read the board it makes it very hard to learn. I know that the member for Bayswater was talking about his experiences with his young George when going to Werribee zoo, but continuing free access for under-16s to the zoos – to Healesville, which is closer out my way, to Melbourne Zoo, to Kyabram Fauna Park and to Werribee Open Range Zoo – is important too. Parents are at the moment able to take their children there for free on public transport, and the kids are free for the whole day. Pack a lunch. It is free for everyone to get there, and it is free for the children to go there. That is a

great day out for young people without breaking the budget for families, and it is really important to be able to support those things as well.

The school breakfast clubs: I have spoken about them so many times in here, but I will always come back to the fact that this is one of the best initiatives we have made in this state to ensure that kids do not have empty stomachs, so they can learn well and they are fed. And it is not even just about the food – that is important because you do not want children with empty stomachs. But the socialisation that happens when kids are sitting there talking with each other – there is something about breaking bread with others that –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance. The member will have the call when the matter is next before the Chair.

Business interrupted under resolution of house of 1 April.

Matters of public importance

Economic policy

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

> That this house condemns the Allan Labor government's legacy of record debt, record taxes and record waste while essential services deteriorate, and affirms the need for a disciplined 10-year economic plan to clean up the books, restore budget honesty and guarantee the services Victorians rely on.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (16:01): Victoria's debt clock is ticking and so is time on this tired Labor government. Nothing is a more significant matter of public importance than government debt and how Labor is borrowing from the future to cling on to power today. With debt soaring to $200 billion, the interest bill to repay that debt is starving the budget of the funding needed for essential frontline services that Victorians expect and deserve. Put simply, Labor's legacy of financial mismanagement – the highest debt in the country, the highest taxes in the country, the waste, the corruption on Labor's rotten Big Build – is putting essential services and frontline workers at risk. Crime in Victoria is at a record high, yet the Victoria Police budget was cut. Victorian schools are the lowest funded in the country, and teachers are the lowest paid in the country – just ask the education union – and our hospitals are no longer fit for purpose, with the Labor government ripping $1 billion from the health budget to rebuild Maroondah Hospital, Ringwood, alone as well as sacking workers from the Department of Health. Despite a shortage of nurses, and on International Nurses Day, Labor could not afford to fund jobs for thousands of graduate nurses. So not only are Labor not hiring more of the frontline workers Victoria needs, the Labor government are in fact sacking thousands of public service workers; Premier Jacinta Allan admitted that herself just days ago. Only Labor are sacking public service workers. Only Labor are ripping billions from the health sector, breaking their promise to Victorians to rebuild and upgrade a number of hospitals that have been seriously neglected under Labor. Only Labor have put the safety of Victorian communities at risk, with a crime being committed every 50 seconds in Victoria and family violence serious assaults up a distressing 24 per cent under Labor. Forty police stations have been shut down or are on reduced hours, and Victorians live in fear, with recidivist offenders well aware of Labor's weakened bail laws, with a revolving-door bail system that prioritises violent youth thugs ahead of victims.

That is why today's matter of public importance is that this house condemns the Allan Labor government's legacy of record debt, record taxes and record waste while essential services deteriorate and affirms the need for a disciplined 10-year economic plan to clean up the books, restore budget honesty and guarantee the services that Victorians rely on. Net debt in Victoria under Premier Jacinta Allan and Labor is growing by $1.35 million an hour and will reach $200 billion in just three years time.

Labor's 2026–27 budget sealed Premier Jacinta Allan and Labor's legacy as the most fiscally reckless government in Victoria's history. Labor has delivered higher debt, higher taxes, higher interest repayments, cost blowouts and delays on corrupt infrastructure projects and put the essential services and frontline workers Victorians rely on at risk. Labor's budget is full of excuses and offers no solutions. Embarrassingly, the Premier and the Treasurer tried to boast Victoria had a surplus – only it was an operating surplus, not including the state's massive project costs.

What the budget actually exposes is a cash deficit of $7.7 billion. Labor has posted deficit after deficit, and debt keeps soaring. In fact debt has increased nearly tenfold since Labor took office in 2014. In the 12 years of this Labor regime net debt has increased from $21.8 billion to nearly $200 billion. Net debt was less than 6 per cent of gross state product and now represents nearly 25 per cent of GSP. Nearly a quarter of the Victorian economy is debt under Labor. Interest repayments have increased from $2.1 billion to $11.8 billion, and total tax revenue has increased from $17.9 billion to $50.2 billion under Labor. The budget is in a bad way, and the essential services Victorians rely on are at risk under Labor.

Not only is crime at an all-time high, but also it takes longer to get an ambulance today than it did 10 years ago. Construction of new homes is at a decade low. And could you find anything about their promise to build 80,000 homes in their budget? No, you could not. Known dangerous roads are not fixed, and we all know too well that roads are littered with potholes. As debt soars to $200 billion, the higher the debt, the higher the interest bill becomes. Under Labor the interest bill on debt will cost Victorian taxpayers $32 million a day. That is $1.35 million an hour, or $337,500 in the time it takes me to deliver this speech. Victoria will spend more money servicing its record debt than it does on Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and kindergarten services combined. It is an absolute disgrace. Just think what we could achieve with $32 million a day – how many dangerous roads or potholes we could fix, how many graduate nurses we could employ, how many more hospitals we could upgrade, how many more SES, CFA and FRV trucks we could roll out or how many more buses we could put on for the school students stranded due to overcrowded public buses across the network. Under Labor that $32 million a day just goes on paying interest on debt. These interest repayments represent a huge opportunity cost for Victorians. Billions and billions of dollars are wasted just repaying interest on debt, not even paying down the principal, rather than funding essential services and workers like more nurses, more teachers and more police.

Under Labor Victorians are the highest taxed people in the country. In the budget Labor plans to take more than $50 billion in tax from Victorians in a cost-of-living crisis. Victorians are already the highest taxed people in the country, but under Premier Jacinta Allan Labor will tax you even more, with the tax take increasing by 5.1 per cent each and every year. To put that into perspective, this equates to around $6605 in tax per Victorian. Labor has added or increased taxes 67 times, yet tax revenue is barely enough to pay for its public sector wages bill. This means Victorian taxes do not even go to paying for more of the essential services, like police stations and hospital emergency departments, that are desperately needed.

We know Victorians have had enough. They are frustrated and desperate for change. Victorians deserve a financially responsible and disciplined government that will secure Victoria's economic future. Our Wilson Liberals and Nationals comprehensive 10-year economic plan will do just that. Our 10-year economic plan will secure Victoria's economic future. We will clean up the books, restore budget honesty and guarantee the services that Victorians rely on. Labor has created serious economic challenges, so it will not be easy. But with a fresh start and our comprehensive 10-year economic plan, we will repair the budget to deliver a cash surplus by 2032, to guarantee the essential services and frontline workers that Victorians rely on and to lower taxes to help ease the cost of living.

As Liberals, we believe that Victorians should keep more of the money that they earn, so we will lower taxes. We will lower land tax and payroll tax, and we will scrap the emergency services volunteers tax. Land tax is a tax on families, on mum-and-dad investors and on renters. We will make housing more affordable by reversing Labor's 2023 land tax hikes. Our Liberal solution will raise the land tax

threshold from $50,000 to $100,000 next year, gradually increasing the threshold back to $300,000 over the next five years, making housing more affordable and saving up to $975 in tax per year for hundreds of thousands of Victorians.

We will also back business and reduce payroll tax, which is a tax on jobs. That is why we will increase the payroll tax threshold to $1.2 million, consistent with New South Wales, making Victoria far more competitive. This measure will provide real tax relief to around 23,000 businesses, making it more affordable for businesses to hire more people, to create more jobs and to help our economy to grow. We will also scrap Labor's emergency services volunteers tax on every household, including renters, on every business, including manufacturers, and on every farm. Labor plans to rake in $6.85 billion with its ESV tax, yet we have not seen any money quarantined for the Lilydale SES unit in my community or the CFA fire brigades of the Maroondah and Yarra Valley groups, with emergency services in my region and in many parts of Victoria still having to attend fires and storms in 30-year-old trucks.

Under our 10-year economic plan, we will prioritise essential services and frontline workers with a hiring freeze on the back office. The hiring freeze is simple: no-one will be sacked and there will be no redundancies – that is a fact. Our essential services guarantee is crystal clear. Our plan will secure the critical frontline workforce for health, education, police and law enforcement. In fact we will grow our emergency services to help keep communities safe by recruiting 3000 more police. That will allow us to reopen the police stations shut by Labor, including Mooroolbark police station and Croydon police station in my local community – stations which have been shut for more than four days a week under Labor.

The Auditor-General and the Silver review both identified significant concerns about the public sector bureaucracy cost blowouts that have put the sustainability of Victoria's economy at risk. Our plan will reduce the back office so we can protect the frontline services at risk under Labor. For Labor MPs who might try to mislead Victorians in their communities about this sensible and fiscally responsible measure: we will manage the public service through attrition. This equates to just over 2 per cent of the public sector workforce. Surely Labor will not refuse hardworking public servants retirement should they choose it. If you work in the public sector today, we are securing your job. And if you choose to retire or choose to work elsewhere, those roles will not be replaced for a short period of time, instead enabling us to put that money back into essential services and frontline workers, like more police, more nurses, more teachers, more paramedics and more firefighters that Victorians need and rely on.

It is a real point of difference to Premier Allan and Labor, who have admitted that over the last year they have cut thousands of public service jobs. We know that critical frontline services like health, education and police are under significant pressure with workforce shortages. That must be fixed, and that is what we will do. Under Labor we are short thousands of police, nurses and teachers. In this budget Labor has not outlined any plan to tackle these critical workforce shortages. We absolutely must take these fiscally responsible measures in order to do that.

In November, the Allan Labor government is asking Victorians to give them 16 years in power, and the Wilson Liberals and Nationals are offering Victorians a fresh start. Only the Liberals and Nationals will strengthen our economy to ease cost-of-living-pressures, end the crime crisis and keep communities and families safe, deliver a world-class health system that Victorians can have confidence in and give every Victorian the best opportunity to own their own home. We will deliver this with a financially responsible and disciplined economic recovery plan. That is the 10-year economic plan that we have announced and will stand by, because under Jacinta Allan and the Labor government, we are headed in the wrong direction. It has to stop. We have to turn our economy around.

The SPEAKER: Correct titles, member for Evelyn.

Bridget VALLENCE: Our plan, as I said, is disciplined and responsible. It will restore confidence in the Victorian economy. It will bring back investment, which has flatlined under the Labor government. In fact this budget shows that economic growth will actually decline next year under the Labor government to a mere 1.5 per cent. A fresh start and our 10-year economic Liberal plan will lower taxes and protect the essential frontline services that Victorians expect and deserve. I commend the motion to the house.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:16): I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow on and make a contribution to this matter of public importance submitted by the member for Evelyn and to take up some of the points made within the MPI this afternoon, in particular the words 'while essential services deteriorate'. The words 'while essential services deteriorate' are in this matter of public importance. I want to take the opportunity to point to the significant, large and sustained investments that this government has indeed made in so many of those essential services, which people within my community and people within communities right across the state use each and every day, which seem to be completely disregarded by those opposite. Certainly listening to much of the debate throughout the journey of today's sitting, to listen to and understand the importance around that investment and to point out some of the truths that are skimmed over by those opposite when it comes to investing in those essential services – we have of course embarked on a massive pipeline and program of works that go to supporting essential services in our state. Whether that be the delivery of the Metro Tunnel, which we opened last year, the uptick in services –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Josh BULL: Member for Mordialloc, I was indeed there, and I believe you were as well. Just to be able to see the difference that that project makes to not just the two interconnecting lines, the Sunbury line and the Cranbourne–Pakenham line, but indeed the entire network. This is a significant investment – work that has taken more than a decade. That is what you get when you deliver large-scale projects. That is what you get when you have got a sustained vision and a commitment to deliver a project that is so important to the community and indeed an essential service. It is not just about having the ability to run more trains more often; it is about getting people to places like our uni precinct and our hospital precinct, enabling that support and enabling options and opportunities for Victorians to access those places. Whether you live in communities like mine or whether you live in that great place of Bendigo, all of these places then become available for use, opening up new options for education and opening up new options for our world-class hospital precinct – that is what this investment does. So I had to read a couple of times those words around essential services and make sure that I could actually see and understand that they were the words that were put in by the submitter of the MPI. The list is long and comprehensive, and I certainly do not have in my 11½ minutes that are remaining an opportunity to go through all of that investment in all of those essential services.

But whether it be Metro, as I just mentioned, the West Gate Tunnel, the removal of nearly 90 dangerous and congested level crossings, free TAFE or free kinder, making sure that people have an opportunity within local communities to have these services is something that the government is focused on. I note that time and time again when we hear from those opposite, as we heard today and from the Leader of the Opposition in her budget reply speech, there is just a complete disregard of the investment in any of these services. What I find astounding is that the commentary around those is simply, as I said before, disregarded. That is something that certainly does not add any fact to debate.

The opposition should take some time to have a good close look at page 4 of budget paper 2 to learn about the responsible fiscal strategy, the five-step fiscal strategy, that is outlined in the budget. On that page they might learn about step 3 of the fiscal strategy, delivering the surplus, which is a surplus of more than $700 million, the only one amongst eastern states. If they read on, they will of course learn that the budget forecasts five consecutive surpluses with an average surplus of $1.7 billion over the

budget and forward estimates for years to come. Two pages down they could read about steps 4 and 5 of that fiscal strategy, which go to stabilising and reducing debt as a share of the economy:

> As a proportion of GSP, net debt is projected to reach 24.9 per cent at June 2027 before declining each year across the forward estimates to 24.4 per cent by June 2030. Compared with the *2025–26 Budget Update*, net debt to GSP is lower across all published years.

What that is saying and what that is all pointing to is indeed that important strategy, the ability of our state to continue to grow and the ability of the government's fiscal strategy, which is working. It is pointing to some of these key points which go to the Victorian economy growing faster than any other state over the last decade, with more business investment and more jobs than any other state – I did not hear that mentioned – over half a million more jobs than in 2020, 123,000 more businesses than in 2020, business investment up 44 per cent since 2020 and of course the resilience within the economy, which has had to weather, as I mentioned in an earlier contribution, some of those global challenges.

This all points to good economic management that is based on facts and based on the read of the numbers. If I add to that some of the other impressive features that we see, we are building more homes than any other state, 55,000 last year alone; we have the biggest employing manufacturing industry in the nation; we are home to 3500 startups now worth almost $130 billion; we are number one for food exports; and we are a world leader in health tech medical research, that being the largest sector in the nation. Those are a couple more facts based upon the data and the figures that we are seeing. That stands in stark contrast to much of what we have heard both from the previous speaker and through some of the debate today. Making that investment in those essential services, underpinned by the five-step fiscal strategy which we have outlined, goes to providing for better services and more support for local communities.

That takes me to where I wanted to go, and it only took me a lazy 9 minutes to get there. That goes to the point around having resilience in the economy at a time when we have seen significant global challenge. I met with some industry groups that spoke about there being somewhere in the order of a 15 per cent cost escalation as a result of the war in Iran over two weeks.

When you hear of business and industry talking to you in those terms, it certainly should be ringing alarm bells. Members of this government I know are focused on addressing those concerns, not simply ignoring them and putting their head in the sand and saying, 'That's a matter for another country and that doesn't affect us.' It does. The reality is that when you are responsible and you are responsive these are the steps and the measures that you take, like announcements that were made in the lead-up to the budget – the 20 per cent off car rego and the extension of free public transport and then half-price for the rest of 2026. We are making these investments and so many more, whether that be more PSOs for more hours in more places, funding for a violence reduction unit, the roads maintenance package, better access to the Get Active Kids program, public IVF, the police reservists – the list goes on. We know that we need to keep doing these things to make sure that the Victorian community is supported.

That takes us to those investments and that plan that are all underpinned by those fiscal numbers, making up what we see as that important investment. Many of those facts and figures are something that we have focused on and that are, unfortunately, politicised by those opposite to a point where it is about fear and division and talking the state down. What we bring to the table is a completely different approach. That approach goes to investing in jobs, transport and health and all of the services that I have mentioned in my contribution so far. There is of course the approach to go a different way, and we will remain focused on providing Victorians the support they need at a really challenging time. The words that are in the MPI do create an interesting conversation about the delivery of those essential services. When it comes to the delivery of those essential services, what we see and what we hear from those opposite should certainly strike fear into many, many Victorians. Thankfully there has been a considerable time since the people of Victoria had the damage inflicted on them by the Liberal

government. While I say that, if you are looking at a national approach – and I spoke about this earlier in my contribution – and if you look at what was served up from Canberra for the best part of a decade, we were just sort of a forgotten jurisdiction of the Commonwealth. We were just sort of a forgotten land down here, and there was no support for projects like Metro. What was that figure that was just thrown at me?

Lauren Kathage interjected.

Josh BULL: I will take up the interjection. It was 7 per cent Commonwealth funding with 23 per cent of the population. If those opposite are serious about levelling the books and making all these representations and all of these sorts of statements that they come in here and make, then I would have loved to see some of that advocacy to Canberra in those times. Thankfully now we are dealing with a different show, and as the federal Treasurer hands down the federal budget tonight, yet again thanks to a federal Labor team, I am sure that there will be the investment in Victoria that we are entitled to and that we deserve. That partnership goes to providing for, as my very good friend from Yan Yean just reminded me, population and the population of this state when it comes to the national picture. Making those investments is really, really important, and having partnerships is really, really important.

I will finish where I started, and that is to say that the words in the MPI 'deterioration of essential services' really caught my attention. When you look at that really long list – I have got absolute mountains of paperwork here that I could go through – when it is about supporting all of those services that we know are so important to Victorians, especially in communities that are fast-growing communities, making those investments for those services is something that we remain committed to and focused on. The provision for that sustained investment is only made possible when you have got a Premier and a Treasurer who are acutely aware of the challenges that Victorians are facing but who also have the ability to respond to those challenges. That of course is what this previous month in particular has been all about.

There is a long, significant and sustained pipeline of projects that have been delivered by this government, and I do not think I have ever heard anyone on this side of the house say it is perfect at all times in all places. Of course it is not; that is just not reality. But the difference between our side and what we see from the other side is that we remain committed to making sure that we are providing for Victorians, no matter which community they live in. Whether you live here in the city, in the growing suburbs like where I live in Sunbury or out in the magnificent parts of rural and regional Victoria, making sure that we are supporting you is something that we remain focused on. All of the programs and the initiatives that have been outlined in the budget are very, very important. Meeting those commitments is something we will do today and every single day we have the opportunity to be in government.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:31): Of course I rise to support this matter of public importance, because Victorians are living through the consequences of a government that has lost control of the finances and, as we know, cannot manage money. The tragedy of it all is that for all the record spending that we hear about and pats on the backs being given to members on the other side, for all the announcements, the glossy media events, the artist impressions and so on and so forth, ordinary Victorians are asking a very important question: why is it getting so hard to make ends meet? Because people can feel the decline and they can see it. They can feel it when they open their power bills, they can certainly feel it when they hit a pothole, they can feel it when they pay their land tax, they can feel it when they sit on an elective surgery waiting list and they can feel it when they drive on roads that are crumbling. Victoria is now the highest taxed state in the nation. Think about that for a minute. The state that once proudly called itself the economic engine room of this nation now has a warning label: record debt, record taxes and record waste. And yet the services that we are receiving are deteriorating before our eyes.

So what are Victorians getting in return? Because it is certainly not confidence, it is certainly not trust in government, it is not affordability and it is certainly not honesty. It is a culture of spin over substance and announcements over actual delivery, it is media management over financial management and it is politics before people. And the people have had a gutful. Every Victorian is paying the price. The fundamental job of everyone in this place is to put the people first, but to do that of course you need to listen.

Nowhere is this imbalance felt more sharply than in regional Victoria, because country Victorians are increasingly asked to pay metropolitan-level taxes, disproportionately, for less services. In my electorate, which covers about 16.5 per cent of this state's land mass, we are productive, we are resilient, we are innovative. We feed this state and nation, to the tune of an agriculture industry in Victoria that is worth $200 billion alone, which will be equal to the 2030 interest bill. But we are constantly forced to fight for things that should already exist. We fight for health care, for roads, for housing and for police resources, and too often we fight just to be seen, heard and believed. Regional Victorians are tired of being treated like they should be grateful for the leftovers: 'Thank you very much for the leftovers.'

The people I represent work extraordinarily hard. Farmers are battling import costs and water insecurity. Small businesses are being crushed by rising taxes and energy bills, healthcare workers are carrying workloads that you would not believe and families are travelling hundreds of kilometres for appointments that city residents can access within minutes. Despite contributing enormously to the Victorian economy, regional communities are too often treated as an administrative inconvenience or as an ATM. Outside of that, the inequity continues. People can see the double standard, and they have had a gutful. Regional people do not expect luxuries, but we do expect fairness. All we are asking for is the bare minimum – a functioning health system, safe roads to drive our families around on, reliable policing, affordable housing, a school system with decent facilities and school buildings that are not held together by chipboard, with students being expected to learn in them. Somehow, after more than a decade of this Labor government, these things now feel aspirational in the regions. It is absolutely absurd and disgusting.

Let us talk about the Mildura Base Public Hospital for a moment. That hospital services parts of New South Wales and South Australia, a catchment of about 75,000 people. It is the front door of health care for an enormous region, and yet the staff are under so much pressure in a hospital that was professed to have a master plan four years ago but has never been delivered. The emergency department desperately needs more beds, patients are under pressure and this government just continues to tell us things are on track. Well, you know what, the people waiting in the waiting room at 2 am beg to differ. Things are not on track. The system is absolutely broken.

Victorians have been hit with 62 new or increased taxes, levies and charges, all dressed up as reforms, and the result of that is businesses are hesitating to invest or are withdrawing from Victoria altogether, developers are walking away from projects and landlords are exiting the market – and we wonder why we have got a housing crisis. It is because there is simply no incentive for landlords to provide those long-term rentals on the long-term rental market. Regional communities are fighting to attract a workforce because the accommodation supply has dried up, simple as that. It is not accidental. This is a consequence of this government's socialist economic decisions, and every time this government gets itself into financial trouble it comes to Victorians, the people, and we become the ATM, just like we have seen in the regions with the emergency services tax, which we will scrap.

There is another issue. I mean, there are plenty of issues, but budget honesty is one of those things. The Victorian people are sick of being treated like fools. You cannot continue to announce headline figures without transparency around blow-outs. You cannot continue hiding waste beneath layers of bureaucracy and spin. At some point governments have to tell the truth, and the truth is that Victoria's financial position is now constraining our ability, as the Leader of the Opposition said earlier today, to deliver the essential services that people need and that people pay for with their hard-earned taxes. That money could be building hospitals or fixing roads. That money could be supporting frontline

workers and it could be strengthening regional infrastructure that is so desperately needed. Instead, it disappears into interest repayments on a debt hurtling towards $190 billion. That is not leadership. It is not visionary. It is a fiscal anchor wrapped around the ankles of future generations, and it is not fair. While Labor lecture everyone else on sustainability, they have delivered one of the least sustainable financial positions this state has ever seen.

It is time for a fresh start and a real plan, because failing to plan is planning to fail, and that is what Labor has done. The Leader of the Opposition did present our 10-year plan to secure Victoria's economic future earlier today – a real, tangible, readable, honest and transparent plan. It is a plan to fix the budget, lower taxes and give Victorians actual accountability and transparency into where their hard-earned tax dollars are actually being spent. It is about discipline, it is about priorities and it is about restoring confidence that has been eroded by this Labor government that fails to deliver outcomes but always delivers a headline.

This is a disciplined 10-year economic plan, and it is not radical. Families budget, businesses budget, small businesses budget, yet Labor governs as if there are no consequences to failing to budget adequately. Eventually those consequences show up, and they have arrived. Every single Victorian is paying the price, and regional Victorians are sick and tired of being regarded as an afterthought. We contribute enormously to this state. We grow the food, we power industries, we drive exports, we sustain agriculture, we underpin tourism and we keep supply chains moving. Without regional Victoria, Victoria grinds to a halt. Yet too often regional communities are expected to accept a measly 12 per cent of Victoria's infrastructure spending with gratitude. That is not equity, that is managed neglect.

Victorians deserve honesty. They deserve a government willing to admit that endless spending without discipline has consequences. They deserve a government that understands that every dollar spent is a dollar earned by somebody who has worked extremely hard for it, and they deserve a government focused not on the next media cycle but actually on the next generation. We have that plan. We have a 10-year plan that you can read and peruse at your pleasure. There has been zero transparency. It is time for a fresh start.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:41): It is great to follow the member for Mildura, who talked about the reading of a plan. Just because you say you have got a plan and it says '10 years' does not mean it is a plan. It does not mean it is anything other than one of the most aggressive attacks on the public service we have ever seen by taking one in seven people out.

Paint me this wonderful picture, Nationals and Liberal coalition. Paint me a story where those opposite try to achieve a cash surplus and still say things like, 'We will build hospitals, we will build roads and we will build new schools.' How on earth do you take $11.1 billion out of your revenue over the forward estimates and then slash and burn with a cash surplus attempt that takes infrastructure away? How on earth do the Nationals achieve any sort of infrastructure on behalf of their constituents? I will tell you, there is late-breaking news here, and I know, Speaker, you tune in to the late-breaking news: it cannot be done. Those opposite know that this would –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mordialloc will resume his seat. Member for Lowan, you are not in your place. Member for Frankston! This is unacceptable. Member for Mildura, you had your turn.

Tim RICHARDSON: A bit excited on that side, aren't they? We are only 27 weeks away from the first vote being cast at pre-poll, and goodness me, the orange tsunami that is hitting regional Victoria right now – it would cause me unknown anxiety. The Leader of the Nationals used to advise Barnaby Joyce. He must be looking on now, going, 'Maybe there is a coalition we could form here. Maybe we could bring the orange and green together.' I am colourblind; I do not know what orange and green together looks like, but I know it is an absolute hot mess. It is a hot mess out there in regional

Victoria right now, because we see now a situation where the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer is making Scott Morrison blush at the number of portfolios she is taking on, because there is no depth on that side.

I do think the member for Evelyn made a very good shadow finance spokesperson, having served on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), because the member for Evelyn, in her political judgement and skills, would never have gone on the record, like the member for Kew did on 16 August 2024 when she said these immortal words: 'We're going to have to make cuts to health, and we're not going to be able to build schools or fix any of them.' When you look at that, you go, 'It was a moment of clarity. It was a moment of honesty when they said the quiet bit out loud.' Those opposite over there said,' No, no essential services will be harmed on our watch.' Goodness me, how many conservatives have we heard say that back to the dawn of time? Tony Abbott said it. Scott Morrison said it. The hero of the member for Kew, Josh Frydenberg, said it over and over. And what do we see – we see those opposite so agitated and excited, but when the Nationals and the Liberals federally took debt up towards a trillion dollars, you did not hear a squeak. You did not hear a word over there, because it was Liberal debt – it was productive debt, it was some other debt, it was saving debt. Whatever debt it was, remember, they all hid, they all put their heads down, because it takes Jim Chalmers, who will deliver an outstanding Labor budget tonight, to bring down tens of billions of dollars and reduce that debt over time.

Those opposite never talk about federal debt, do they? We saw the heroes of the member for Kew, Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg, ratchet up $1 trillion in debt. Debt to GDP is up in the mid-30 percentile, right. This is a really important point around the member for Mildura's point around the sustainability of the state and the federal government. It was absolute nonsense that was uttered, because our debt to state product is at 24.9 per cent. Federally it is over 30 per cent. So those opposite say it is cataclysmic and it is all falling into the world. How are we ever going to cope in Victoria? The biggest naysayers are on that side and have every bit of investment in talking down Victorians. They make Pauline Hanson blush, who stands at Flinders Street and says, 'I hate Melbourne so much, but I am coming for all the Liberals and Nationals at the next election.' The only people you can find that hate Victoria more than Pauline Hanson are the Liberals and Nationals, who want to burn our economy, who want to take us to a point of austerity. Let us just think for one moment. Where in any sort of calculation have we seen that austerity leads to better confidence and greater outcomes? In what jurisdiction or nation or state where you slash and burn your public service and drive confidence into the gutter, where you bring that level of harm and austerity, does that ever happen? The member for Kew will not answer that question, because what did the member for Kew say in that first speech? Oh, it is a goodie, this one, Speaker. I know you are tuned in and you are astute in politics. It was:

> It is business that creates jobs, not government.

Well, guess what, the hundreds of thousands of people that rely on governments for their jobs do not matter under the member for Kew's leadership. They do not matter. Your job will be cut. If you are working in a hospital, if you are working in a school or if you are working to build our state for tomorrow, for the generations to come, your job does not matter under the member for Kew. That is the sad reality of a statement so honest like that. Because when we see those opposite talk down our economy, when we see the drive towards a cash surplus, there will be nothing built. There will be no more hospitals, and there will be no education for over a decade. That is what the 10-year plan talks about. When you get through all the glossies – you know, there are a couple of stills from the TikTok reels there; you get the candid shot, the walk shot and the coming out of the chamber shot – when you boil this down, it has about 50 or 60 words of actual substance: cuts, destruction, austerity. That is what it is really about. What is it with Liberals and Nationals that they have to hold a book every time they go out and do something? It is like they need a prop to hold. Remember Tony Abbott had that book to hold, Malcolm Turnbull had a book and Sussan Ley had a book. They love a little glossy brochure. When you have got more photos than words, you have got the balance wrong. You have just got to go back to the printers and say, 'Where's our substance and where are we going here?'

What I heard in the Shadow Treasurer and Leader of the Opposition's speech today was nothing more than more naming of challenges and problems and no solutions. That is basically what we hear each and every time – a great boundary rider commentator, will name you a problem a thousand times over but never come up with a solution. Haven't we all heard of those in a workplace before? Every doorstop, every news conference and every time you see the member for Kew on the TV, it is someone else's problem. It is, 'We don't have a plan. We don't need a plan. The government's bad.' It is just constant negativity, always talking down the place. And then we get a 12-page glossy brochure that says they are going to tear the place apart, worse than Jeff Kennett and worse than Tony Abbott. I mean, Joe Hockey and Tony Abbott – the member for Kew would have been well placed in that government with the level of cuts and destruction that is on the way. So that is the choice for Victorians. Do we drive forward at a hard time in our state –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, this is about the matter of public importance. It does not refer to the member for Kew, the Leader of the Opposition. But also it is only the Labor government and Premier Jacinta Allan that have cut thousands of public sector jobs. Only Labor is cutting jobs.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: I just want to say, for the opposition leader's staff tuning in from Spring Street, sitting in the opposition leader's office: member for Kew, I value you more than the member for Evelyn there. You are relevant to this debate because you are the Shadow Treasurer and we are talking about – check, is this microphone on? Goodness me – the Shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition are not relevant to an MPI about the economy, about debt and about budgets. I think we have just entered the twilight zone. I do not know where we are at the moment, but goodness me, what a point of order that was. Maybe I am wrong, member for Evelyn. Maybe the document that has been put forward, the 10-year plan, is so irrelevant that the member for Evelyn has opened up the can of worms, has detailed the lack of seriousness in this documentation and what has been put forward. It is disorderly to acknowledge people in the gallery, but we do have someone in the gallery that might be – no, we cannot acknowledge someone in the gallery. But if there was someone in the gallery that might be the future member for Nepean – poor Rosebud Hospital, straight through to the keeper. It could not be done with a cash surplus. It was promised, and then the poor future member for Nepean has been thrown under the bus, because a cash surplus means no chance. It is wiped away – see you later for another day. We would not have that as an opportunity with that. So Victorians will be able to unravel this.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Oh, here we go. In comes the Leader of the Nationals. It is just a pop-up there. PAEC's finest over there, the Leader of the Nationals. He is getting a bit tense, the Leader of the Nationals, because all this discussion around change and destruction – they have got to thread the needle, the Nationals. They cannot talk the state down too much because One Nation then gets a bit of a foothold in. The Nationals have got a really rare thing where they have got to be aspirational a bit, not so much like the Liberals, but then One Nation is banging on the door, and if they go full austerity and full impact they know their communities will only vote for Pauline Hanson. Right here today it is a Labor government that has got the plans for the future, while the captains of austerity over there will destroy our state for the future.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:52): What a tragic budget this government has delivered to Victoria. It is 200 days until the election, when Victorians get a chance to decide and to ultimately and finally boot this government out, to send it the message that they have had enough, they have had a gutful and we have got to get Victoria to where it once was, because this is a government that has no idea how to manage money. That is the issue. They have delivered a budget with no idea how to actually manage money. This was the big budget that was going to send them into an election and to tell Victorians, 'This is what we have planned.' It was such a great budget that they went radio silent

after budget day. We have not heard a whisper; we have not heard a thing. Where are all the big budget lunches? Where are the corporate lunches? Where is everybody saying, 'Hey, look at us. We're fantastic. This is what we're going to do for you'? Not a whisper. Why – because it was a few sugar hits, and even on the free public transport, Natalie Barr from *Sunrise* pulled up the Premier there, didn't she, and said, 'How are you going to pay for that $200 billion worth of debt?' 'Well, we have a surplus.' And then nothing. Only a couple of days after Anzac Day all of the premiers were on *Sunrise* except for the Premier. She will not go back to *Sunrise*.

Luba Grigorovitch: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I would ask the member to come back to the substance of the MPI.

David Southwick: Deputy Speaker, I understand there is a new minister at the table, but we must understand there is no point of order, because this is a government riddled with debt, with corruption and with crime, and the minister at the table, who I will be getting to in a minute, headed the CFMEU corruption scandal – $15 billion worth. Again, I would say this is a government full of waste, full of mismanagement, and we know where your union mates are, Minister.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. But I do not uphold the point of order. The member for Caulfield to come back to the MPI, please.

David SOUTHWICK: On the MPI, CFMEU corruption, $15 billion – that is part of why we have the budget blowouts that we have. And this government is –

Belinda Wilson: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I believe the member for Caulfield owes the minister a bit of respect and an apology for that threatening remark he made.

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

David SOUTHWICK: When we talk about corruption, when we talk about debt, when we talk about mismanagement, you have to go to the heart of it. The member for Mordialloc had said before that you need to be able to see how you are going to be able to pay for things: 'How can we pay for things in a budget going forward?' You only have to look at $15 billion worth of corruption, CFMEU corruption, which this government were part of and this government ignored. Not only did they ignore it, but they promoted a minister that is mates with the very people that are part of all of this.

Luba Grigorovitch: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the substance of the MPI is totally being overlooked here. Could we go back to the MPI, which that member's party put up.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On relevance, the MPI has become a wider ranging debate than just the words in front of us. I do ask all members to stick to the substance of the MPI.

David SOUTHWICK: At the heart of this is how we manage a budget going forward. Clearly this government has mismanaged a budget with union mates, with ministers that have now been promoted because they are friends with union mates, which shows this corruption will not stop under the Allan Labor government; it will continue. Victorians will get the opportunity to decide in November: do they want more of the same? Do they want more CFMEU corruption on Big Build worksites, or do they want a stop to it? Because one of the things that we will do under our government, which will ensure that we get confidence back in Victoria – because part of investment is confidence, and we need investor confidence – is we will have a royal commission, and we will jail those that have done illegal activities here in Victoria, because that is what will build investor confidence in Victoria, that will build certainty and that will ensure that people will come back and invest in this state.

What we have seen in Victoria, unfortunately, is people that have said, 'Anywhere but Victoria.' Why? Because it is too hard to do business. It is the largest taxing state in the nation. You cannot get ahead in Victoria if you continue to squeeze the very people that will build more investment in this state, and people are leaving because of these highest taxes that we have. That is why a Wilson Liberal government will ensure that we have lower taxes – lower payroll taxes, lower stamp duty, lower land

taxes – to encourage more investment, to encourage more jobs, to get more confidence and to ensure more certainty, and that is what Victorians desperately need.

We have seen a budget that has been delivered by this government that is a fake budget with a fake surplus. We saw $700 million that was propped up by a lotto deal that has also been underpinned by a donation to the Labor Party. It is a 40-year deal – over $1.1 billion for 40 years. This is normally a 10-year contract, but it is a 40-year contract. Why? Just to deliver a budget surplus. The same lotto organisation that received the contract also donated over $100,000 to the Labor Party. This government has perfect form. They know what they are doing when it comes to corruption. They know what they do when it comes to scandal after scandal. They know what they do when it comes to not managing the money and ensuring Victorians get a fair deal. That is what we will fix, and that is why we do need the royal commission. That is why we do need to jail those individuals that have been connected to the corruption that cost Victorian taxpayers $15 billion, and we need to get the money back. We need to get it back, because this is all connected to building and construction here in Victoria.

Building and construction is the largest employer in terms of jobs. It is the largest employer in terms of getting things back on track, and this government has moved from the Big Build in transport to the big build in these activity centres. Who do you think is going to build the activity centres? Who do you think is going to be connected to these activity centres? It is the CFMEU; it is the one and the same. This government is absolutely addicted to the corruption dollars that they have through the CFMEU and their mates, and that is why we need to unpack it, and we will not be able to restore confidence in Victoria unless we unpack the corruption that goes with it.

We need to ensure that we get things back in this state. We cannot just have budget after budget that does not lay out a way forward that is going to get investor confidence, and that is what we will do. We will reform taxation, because we want to grow the pie. The only way to grow the pie in Victoria is to get consumer confidence, to get business confidence. I have spoken about tourism and major events. Major events have underpinned our reputation internationally, but we are losing major events. We have lost the MotoGP, we lost the Australian Open golf and we are about to lose the Supercars, and who knows what is next. We have had the Commonwealth Games and now $600 million to cancel the Commonwealth Games and $200 million for Glasgow to host the Commonwealth Games.

I wonder, when we see the Commonwealth Games, whether we are going to see some advertising for people to at least come to Victoria for the $200 million they got to host it. Because if we do not, then that has just been a huge waste of money. Think about how many hospitals and how many teachers and healthcare workers and public-facing frontline workers we could employ with $600 million of the wasted cancellation of the Commonwealth Games.

Chris Crewther interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: Think how much we could have done. Two Rosebud hospitals, we hear the member for Mornington say. That is because this government does not know how to manage money. And on events, the types of regulation and red tape that we have in Victoria – it is only in Victoria we have red tape. Taylor Swift internationally – we should call it the Swifty Tax. Every other country she goes to, she gets set up, has the best roadies and construction workers in the world setting up her major concerts. She comes to Victoria and it is a whole new set of laws and conditions here, a whole new way of doing business and a whole new cost. And guess who pays? The people attending the concerts. The people here, Victorians – we pay. We are turning events away. We are turning events away because the government is not investing in them, the government is not making business easier. Whether you are a business in Melbourne, whether you are a business internationally, whether you are a local, whether you are a tourist, whether you are a student here or an international student, no matter who you are, no matter where you come from, it is harder to do business in Victoria than in any other state. That game needs to change. Two hundred days to go, and Victorians finally need to ensure we get a fresh start and say no to a wasteful, corrupt Allan Labor government and yes to Jess to finally get a government that cares about all Victorians.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon) (17:02): What a curious day this is. I might pick up where the member for Caulfield left off: 200 days to the election. That is true. It is 16 sitting days until this 60th Parliament rises. I have been around for a while, and I remember my first term. We won in 2014. We did not quite think we would get there, but we got there. And then we thought to ourselves, 'Well, we have just fallen over the line, and the opposition may well take us out in 2018.' I remember those times and I remember 2018 very clearly. I reckon the member for Malvern, when he was the Shadow Treasurer, would have given a response and everyone would have been here in the opposition benches to hear him. I reckon if the opposition had a matter of public importance after the Shadow Treasurer gave a response, it would have been delivered by the Leader of the Opposition. And, do you know what, this is not our MPI – and I do acknowledge it is the government's obligation to fill quorum of the chamber – this is the opposition's MPI. And where are they? They are nowhere to be seen. It is their own motion.

I have got a bit of time for the member for Evelyn. She was a pretty good shadow minister from what I saw. We always had a good sort of working relationship. But honestly, what a desultory performance of a motion. I mean, did she sort of wake up this morning and think, 'Oh, geez, I'd better lodge an MPI for today,' or it might have been yesterday. It is very, very slim. It is very, very loose. I love budget papers. As many people know, I am a particular fan of budget paper 5. It gives me a peculiar delight on budget day when I break the spine of my budget papers for the first time and I read them cover to cover. I like budget papers. That is why I enjoyed being the Minister for Finance. I would have thought, if I was the Shadow Minister for Finance, I too would kind of make some enjoyment about the fact that one day I might want to frame a budget, set down a budget, and I would do it. I do like the member for Evelyn, so I do feel bad taking exception, but really, the member for Evelyn has been here since 2018. Surely 200 days before an election, surely 16 sitting days before the election, the member for Evelyn could have done better. Surely the Leader of the Opposition may well have wanted to lead off this MPI to double down on her budget speech, but she is nowhere to be seen. I think that probably says more about the current internal dynamics of the Liberal Party than it says about anything else.

But I am happy to take the motion on face value, and I dispute it. I dispute it because of the fact that there is a conflation between the operating side of the budget and the capital side of the budget. Specifically, if you look at budget paper 2, page 5, table 1.1, 'General government fiscal aggregates', $0.7 billion is the surplus this year, $1 billion next year, $1.9 billion the year after, $1.9 billion the year after that and then $2 billion.

Were you to peruse the Queensland budget papers, you would see a sea of red as far as the eye can see. They have got budget deficits each and every year, as it was published last year. I do appreciate Victoria is first cab off the rank when it comes to budget season. I had these figures in front of me earlier today. I think their budget deficit for this financial year is projected to be in excess of $8 billion. If you look at New South Wales, it is about $3.5 billion, so they are significant deficits. On the operating side of the ledger, what does that mean? It basically means you are borrowing money for operational services, for core government activities. If you are doing that, then effectively you are adding to your debt pile. Those opposite are not giving due weight in credence and credibility to a budget surplus, because of what that means. It means we are not borrowing for services. Indeed we have not borrowed for services since 2022–23. But of course under accounting standards it is important to acknowledge that you need to make an allowance for depreciation and amortisation, which is normally around about 2 per cent, and you write down those assets over 40 years. Obviously when you make investments of this nature the tail is longer.

I want to take the house's attention back to a comment that the Leader of the Opposition made today. I have not seen *Hansard* yet, but I was just here in the chamber. I think I recall that the Leader of the Opposition made a pledge that there would be no cash deficits – that is, you have got the operating balance; when you take out any capital expenditure, there will be no deficits in 2032. Let us say, for example, that the Leader of the Opposition is saying, 'We're going to have $10 billion worth of tax

cuts.' I know they dispute that figure, but let us say they are saying, 'We're not doing that, and we're going to have an employment freeze,' and those two things net out. If you look at the budget papers – again, net cash flows from operating activities – budget paper 2, page 5, that means across the forward estimates it is about $6 billion. Really what the Leader of the Opposition is saying is that come 2032 the capital expenditure in the state of Victoria will be around $6 billion. That is taking us back to when John Brumby was the Treasurer of Victoria. From 2006 to 2014 the average capital expenditure was around $5 billion. I think it was about $4.9 billion per year. Despite the fact that we are going to have a larger population, despite the fact we will have an older population and despite the fact that members on the other side have come in here complaining about the fact that there is not capital investment for their electorates in this budget, what the Leader of the Opposition will do will effectively ensure there is no capital expenditure in the state of Victoria – none, nothing new.

What is $6 billion going to get you? It will probably get you a playground. It might get you the odd school upgrades and school rebuilds, maybe a little bit in a hospital, but that is it. The Leader of the Opposition is saying, 'I'm being honest with the people.' To some extent perhaps she is. I do recall Jeff Kennett said things like no Victorian worker would lose their job if he became Premier, and we know how that played out. John Howard talked about making everyone relaxed and comfortable. We saw how that played out. I remember Ted talked about the best paid teachers in the country. Then we had the Orwellian sustainable government initiative. Tony Abbott talked about no cuts to health, no cuts to education and no cuts to the ABC. We know how that worked out. At least the Leader of the Opposition, to her credit, is just basically saying, 'I'm a Liberal, and this is what we do. We just cut, and it's going to be in the order of $40 billion worth of cuts.' The impact that that will have in terms of the economy will be quite significant. The public sector is worth about one-seventh of the state's economy. If you start to denude the capacity of the public sector, if you start to strip it out, then you are going to seriously impair the ability of the government to deliver core services and to provide some direction for the state.

I also found it curious that in the Shadow Treasurer and Leader of the Opposition's budget reply there was no mention of artificial intelligence – none. It is the biggest game in town. $1.1 trillion will be invested by the five hyperscalers globally in the 2026 calendar year. AI did not get a mention. If you think about what we are trying to do here in Victoria to crowd in that investment – and basically we have got a $25 billion pipeline when it comes to new data centres here in the state of Victoria – I would have thought that might have warranted a contribution from the Leader of the Opposition, even from the point of view, if I were to play devil's advocate, to say, 'We're going to harness and utilise AI to more efficiently deliver services, and we're going to have a fund.' I would have thought that might have been something that you might want come up with, but no.

The Leader of the Opposition did say, 'Call me old fashioned.' I think the Leader of the Opposition's formulaic thinking, her policy brain, was formed back in the 1990s. She is stuck back in the dark old ages. That does not reflect the common reality that we are experiencing now. This is really a desultory performance. The member for Bulleen is at the table. He is probably going to follow me, and I think he is just going to come out and say, 'Hey, guys, remember me? I used to do things better.' I have got to turn around and say, if the member for Bulleen was leading the debate –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Danny PEARSON: There you go. When one of the strongest members of the opposition when it comes to theatrics and performance in this place is on strike and has downed tools, doesn't that say something to you? Two hundred days to the election – 16 sitting days. Why is 16 sitting days important? When you come to this place, you come as an equal. For the next 16 days the opposition and the government in this great theatre – this great pantheon of parliamentary figures, this great colosseum of parliamentary debate and duelling – are on even levels. Yet with 16 days to go, how many more MPIs will the opposition have between now and when the house rises? Not too many. Where are they? I walked past the bar coming in. They are not there. I did not see them out on the back verandah. Where are they? Are they in their rooms? Are they trying to basically make sure: 'Hang on,

are we sure? Have we got it? Is it "yes with Jess" or is it "yeah-nah with Jess"?' One thing you know is that based upon their performance today it will be 'less with Jess'. This is a desultory performance. You would have thought after 12 years they would be hungry. I know the member for Bulleen is hungry. I know he would have done a better job. What an insipid, lazy performance from a bunch of dilettantes. They make the Greens look credible.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member's time has expired, and he should use correct titles.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (17:12): I rise in support of the matter of public importance:

> That this house condemns the Allan Labor government's legacy of record debt, record taxes and record waste while essential services deteriorate, and affirms the need for a disciplined 10-year economic plan to clean up the books, restore budget honesty and guarantee the services Victorians rely on.

After more than a decade in office, Labor has created a state where families are paying more than ever before yet receiving less in return. We have the highest debt of any state in Australia, and despite this our hospitals are in crisis, our roads are crumbling, crime is rising and families are struggling to make ends meet. This budget should have been a reset. It should have levelled with Victorians about the scale of the problem and set out a credible plan to repair the damage. Instead it is a budget built on spin, secrecy and wishful thinking. Victoria's net debt is projected to reach almost $199 billion. That is almost beyond comprehension. It means every Victorian man, woman and child is carrying a debt burden of $28,000. What is the cost of this debt? The state will spend around $32 million every single day on interest, more than $1.3 million every hour on interest.

That money does not build a hospital bed, it does not fix a road, it does not put police officers on the street and it does not employ a teacher; it simply services debt. This year Victoria will spend more on interest than on the entire frontline services of the police force, the ambulance service and the kindergarten teachers combined. That is the price of fiscal mismanagement. Yet the Treasurer still talks about a surplus while the state remains in a multibillion-dollar cash deficit. Victorians know you cannot claim to be in surplus while spending billions more than you receive. Families know that, small businesses know that and farmers certainly know that, but apparently this government does not. Faced with the consequences of its own decisions, Labor has turned to the only solution it knows: taxing Victorians harder. Since 2014 there have been 67 new or increased taxes: payroll taxes have doubled, land taxes have exploded and the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund has become a new tax on households, farmers, volunteers and renters.

The GP payroll tax has driven up the cost of seeing a doctor. Registrations on our cars continue to rise. Victorians are working harder, paying more and getting less. And for all this additional tax revenue, where are the better services? Our health system is under extraordinary pressure. Patients are waiting hours, sometimes days, in emergency departments because there are no beds available. Ambulance response times are worse than they were a decade ago. Graduate nurses who have finished their training cannot get a job, but we have nurse shortages. Regional communities continue to miss out on essential services. At the same time Victoria has fewer police, with 1500 vacancies. Crime is rising: home invasions, car thefts, retail crime and violent offending are occurring at levels that alarm families and businesses alike. Police stations in communities like Portland, Koroit, Macarthur, Heywood and Terang have reduced opening hours or are completely closed. People no longer feel as safe as they once did. Teachers have taken to marching in the streets. Schools face funding cuts of up to $2.4 billion. Families are being asked to contribute more while receiving less.

Then there are our roads. Regional Victorians know exactly how bad the roads have become because they drive on them every day. Potholes are larger, more frequent and increasingly dangerous. Motorists are paying thousands of dollars in damaged tyres, wheels and suspensions. Roads that should have been rebuilt years ago are patched and patched and patched again. For the third year in a row the Allan Labor government has also dipped into the Transport Accident Commission to prop up its failing budget, taking around $1 billion off Victorian motorists every year. Let us call it what it is: it is a

hidden tax on every driver. Motorists pay TAC premiums to support injured people on our roads, not bail out governments that cannot manage money. Then, after taking billions from the TAC, the government announces a $200 registration rebate and expects Victorians to be grateful. That is like taking a thousand dollars from someone's wallet and handing back $200 as if you have done them a favour. Victorians are not mugs; they can see straight through this spin.

This Allan Labor government has delivered record debt, record taxes and record waste, and yet somehow the services people rely on keep getting worse, not better. In South-West Coast people work hard, pay their taxes and contribute enormously to the state, and they often feel they are overlooked and ignored by a Melbourne-centric government more focused on announcements than outcomes. The redevelopment of the Warrnambool Base Hospital was announced in 2020, yet despite soaring construction costs this budget provides no meaningful increase in funding. The completion date has slipped again, and communities are rightly asking whether the project is now being quietly scaled back again to fit Labor's shrinking budget capacity. We are waiting desperately for the Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre Lookout rehabilitation facility, which would give vulnerable people a chance to recover. The Warrnambool Surf Life Saving Club has missed out again on funding. Portland is still waiting for progress to develop on its promised gymnastics facility from the 2022 election promises. And the list goes on: the Warrnambool basketball stadium, the Portland basketball stadium, repairs to the leaking gymnasium at Warrnambool College, a pedestrian bridge across the Moyne River in Port Fairy, swimming pool upgrades and additional Warrnambool train line carriages. These are not extravagant requests. And Portland is still waiting for the helipad to reopen – a vital piece of emergency infrastructure that remote and regional Victorians should never have had taken away.

No household could operate like this, no business could operate this way, yet government expects taxpayers to write a blank cheque while they waste resources with a breathtaking arrogance – billions wasted on cost blowouts and through mismanagement of funding, billions tied up in projects lacking transparency and accountability and billions funnelled into blatant corruption. Ordinary people understand something this government refuses to admit: if you continually spend more than you earn, eventually the bill arrives. Well, the bill has arrived, Victoria, and it is being paid by working families, pensioners, farmers, young people trying to buy a home and businesses struggling to keep their doors open. That is why the Liberal and National coalition are putting forward a serious and disciplined 10-year economic plan to bring the state back – a plan based on honesty and on respect for taxpayers.

We understand that restoring Victoria's finances will not happen overnight, because the damage Labor has done is enormous, but continuing down this path is simply unsustainable. Our plan includes an essential services guarantee to prioritise frontline workers and services that Victorians rely on most. While Labor continues growing bureaucracy, we will implement a hiring freeze on non-frontline back office roles so funding can be directed where it is needed most – to nurses, to teachers, to police, to paramedics and to essential community services – because Victorians do not want a bigger bureaucracy, they want functioning services.

We will progressively increase the land tax threshold to improve affordability for Victorians already struggling under enormous cost-of-living pressures. We will increase the payroll tax threshold and reduce the metropolitan payroll tax rate, because Victoria must once again become a place where businesses are encouraged to grow, employ and invest. Right now too many businesses are leaving Victoria and deciding not to expand because government has created a hostile environment for investment. You cannot tax your way to prosperity. We will restore integrity and transparency to the budget process through a charter of budget honesty and a real-time expenditure tracker, because Victorians deserve to know where their money is going and they deserve a government that respects taxpayers enough to be transparent.

We will establish a royal commission into the $15,000 million of Big Build corruption and create a new construction sector watchdog, because Victorians are rightly asking, 'Where has all the money gone?' We will lift the stamp duty threshold to $1 million for first home buyers because young Victorians deserve the chance to own a home in the state they grew up in. That is the legacy of this

government – a state drowning in debt, families under pressure, businesses losing confidence and essential services stretched thinner every year. Victoria needs a new direction and a fresh start.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:22): I am so pleased to be able to get up to speak on this matter that has been put forward by the member for Evelyn this week, and I do so because it again demonstrates that those opposite – and I will say this time and time again – do not care about the communities that Victorians live in. They do not understand what we need, and they will not deliver what we deserve, particularly in Melbourne's west. Now, like many on this side of the chamber, I have to say I have been absolutely flabbergasted – there are many words I could use, but I am going to say absolutely flabbergasted – by what has been announced by those opposite over the past couple of months as they try and try and try to paint themselves as an alternative government at the end of this year. Because what I have heard so far has not been great, but Friday's announcement, I have to say, takes the cake for me. I could not believe it: $40 billion in cuts per year for six years was announced by the Leader of the Opposition. That is a deeper, more savage cut than Victorians have ever seen before.

The member for Kew thinks that in six years she can create a cash surplus. What we know on this side of the house is that you cannot deliver that without having to cut, and you will need to cut deeply and you will need to cut quickly. That means savage slashes to public services – public services that people in Melbourne's west and my district of Laverton heavily rely on. That is $22 billion, at least, in cuts to public service departments and agencies. The Leader of the Opposition has had to back-pedal; she keeps saying on social media, 'Oh, no, I'm not cutting frontline services.' To get $40 billion in savings, you cannot not cut frontline services – you cannot not.

So if we are in this place and those opposite are talking about telling the truth and gaining respect with the community, then they need to start talking about what cuts they are going to make from day one. This is always true to form with the Leader of the Opposition, because upon assuming the leadership of her party, she went onto Sky News after dark – I cannot say I am a fan of these shows; 'Sky News after dark', what a title – and talked about having to make cuts to health services and cuts to schools, which means they will not get upgraded or even built. Now, you try and tell that to people in Melbourne's outer west, who are desperate for us to build more schools. On this side of the house, we have been getting on and building them. Under those opposite, under the Liberals, there will not be any schools. There will not be any school upgrades.

I listened to the member for Kew's speech this morning. I sat here and thought to myself, 'She's not talking about making life easier for folks in my community. She's definitely not talking to folks in my community.' The member for Kew is not talking about what is going to get us moving quicker, saving time and saving families money in a cost-of-living crisis. She is not talking about the family who is sitting at the table tonight trying to make ends meet. She is not talking about the young couple struggling to afford their first home. When I listened to the Treasurer's speech last week, when she stood in this place and handed down the budget, it was very, very clear that the single most important focus that she had and our government has is the cost of living. This is what matters to people right here, right now in Victoria. Our budget is about the cost-of-living support for Victorians who are doing it tough right now, and I have to say, they are in every household across this state – east, west, north and south.

I do not think I heard once how the Leader of the Opposition plans to deliver real relief to families that are not well off, who cannot afford to send their kids to private schools and who do not own investment properties. She is not talking to folks in Melbourne's western suburbs. The member for Kew sits here day upon day and pretends she knows the cost of everything, but she knows the value of absolutely nothing. That is the difference. That is the difference between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. She knows the cost of nothing. The member for Kew talks about reckless spending and debt. We are talking about investing in Victoria and investing in Victorians, because we know that that support makes the difference to whether someone can actually get ahead and is not left behind. People should not be left behind. The member for Kew in her speech this morning said that children like her son will

grow up with more debt and worse services. I mean, I found it difficult to move past that statement, because that was a big, bold statement.

So let me tell the member for Kew what our kids will grow up with, thanks to the investments that this Labor government has made in this state. At school they will benefit from the school breakfast clubs, and I think we just surpassed more than 60 million meals served over the course of this program. They will benefit from the free glasses program and free eye testing. Families who cannot afford the cost of having to get glasses for their child who cannot see are going to be better off with it. These glasses cost on average $300 per set. The dental Smile Squad is saving families hundreds of dollars to take their kids to the dentist and possibly saving them hundreds more in avoiding preventable tooth decay and surgeries. These kids will not have to pay to catch the bus to school, to play sport after school or to hang out with their mates on weekends. It saves parents money and fuel in having to drive them around. And when these kids finish high school, because one day they will, with the best outcomes in the state they can access free TAFE for a job that they will not struggle to find and save money on their Ls and Ps so they can learn to drive. They can take the Metro Tunnel. If the member for Kew has not ridden the great Metro Tunnel, I suggest she go to the train station and get on it. They can take the Metro Tunnel to get to university, and in 10 years from now they can do the same with the first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop to get to Monash or Deakin universities. They can drive on new and upgraded roads and freeways to get to work or to go and see their family. They can use the West Gate Tunnel or the North East Link to travel across the city. If they are sick, they can go to a world-class hospital like the new Footscray Hospital, or they can have their baby delivered at the Joan Kirner Women and Children's Hospital, both built by Labor. All of these things are undoubtedly better outcomes for Victorians.

In sitting here today listening to those opposite talk about how Victorians are not better off, those opposite must walk around with their eyes absolutely closed, because Victorians are undoubtedly better off because of the significant, once-in-a-generation, life-changing investments that Labor has made in this state. You know what else kids like the Leader of the Opposition's son will be able to do under Labor? They will be able to buy – he will be able to buy or even rent – an apartment in Kew, close to his mother, where the opposition leader lives herself, because of Labor's housing policies.

I wonder about our kids and our communities in Melbourne's west, what their future looks like and how dismal that will be under the Leader of the Opposition's plan. Their schools will not get upgraded if they are overcrowded because they will not build schools. They did not build schools last time they were in government. To have the gall to stand here talking about recruiting teachers and nurses and building schools and services – they had the opportunity to build them but did not build any in this state. When we came to government in 2014, not only were the cupboards bare of ideas – there were no ideas at that stage – they had not built anything. We started building, but we were behind, especially in Melbourne's west, where we keep trying to catch up and get ahead of the game. We are behind because those opposite did absolutely nothing. They built not one single thing and invested in not one single service last time they were in government. To stand here and ask for the trust and respect of Victorians – Victorians just need to cast their minds back to what they did last time they were in government, and that was nothing. It was cuts. It was closure. That is the history of the Liberal Party here in Victoria, which is why they have been out of government for 12 years.

This matter – I am not surprised. When I read it, I thought of course they would bring this matter before the house and would again spend time talking down Victoria. There are incredible things that this Labor government has done for Victoria – life-changing things. I have had children here from Ardeer Primary School, children that I know are wearing the glasses they got from our free Glasses for Kids program – a saving of $300. Children from working-class families at a great local school – these are the sorts of people that need to benefit from big government, and they will only benefit under a Labor government.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (17:32): I think it is my first and last opportunity, as an independent, to speak on an MPI, and it is a doozy, it is fair to say. It is a doozy in its predictability in some respects –

of course from the member for Evelyn – condemning the Allan Labor government's legacy of record debt, record taxes and record waste while essential services deteriorate. It is not that it is without some truth, because in fact there are some very, very real and substantial problems, but I think it is really important that we understand at first principles the link between debt and infrastructure and to what extent debt is being applied to a good capital purpose and to what extent it is being applied to things that do not offer the same level of value or to things that are far too expensive because they have been mismanaged.

The member for Laverton just gave a speech where she referred to a range of infrastructure things that are, broadly speaking, good, but we did not hear her speak much about the electrification of the Melton rail line, for example. We did not hear her speak about some of the other infrastructure commitments that have been made by government that have not been honoured. The reality is there is a political compact. When leaders of political parties go to the electorate with a program and a plan, they enter into an agreement with that electorate, and if they get the great fortune to govern in this state, they need to deliver on those commitments. Labor has not delivered on Melton line electrification. It has now walked away from the funding of the Maroondah Hospital. These are big infrastructure commitments. It is not enough to say, 'Look at all the wonderful infrastructure that has been built.' You have to examine not only the value for money of that infrastructure but also what promises have been made around other infrastructure that have been seemingly abandoned.

This MPI does go to the heart of trust as well as to priorities and indeed the long-term direction of our state. Victorians are undoubtedly being asked to pay more, and they do feel, whether it is true or not, like they are getting less for that investment. We have got record debt, undoubtedly. We have got record taxes – true. There is growing pressure on essential services, absolutely. Is there increasing frustration? We need not look very far to find examples of it, not least, of course, in Farrer in recent times, where One Nation staggeringly went from a primary vote of 6 per cent to a primary vote in the high 30s in the space of 12 months.

I cannot recall a single example of a primary vote moving to that extent, up or down, in a 12-month period from any political party at any election in Australia. I hope the boffins in the room – perhaps the member for Essendon – can help me, but I would be staggered to find another example of a 30-plus point change in a primary vote in any direction in the space of 12 months. Are people unhappy? You better believe they are. Has the populist wave hit Australia? Absolutely it has, and we have got to be very, very wary about the consequences of that.

I think people understand that governments need to invest. They understand that infrastructure costs money, and they understand that governments must respond to disasters and emergencies. But the Labor government has now driven the debt van so hard and so fast that it is left with an inability to flex in the case of unforeseen circumstances. Whether it be a war in Iran or a bushfire in Longwood, it does not matter. The government needs to have capacity, needs to have flex and needs to have the ability to deal with the issues of the day. It is not about whether they should spend or not. It is about the fact that when you lose control of the books there are consequences. There are very clear consequences: projects get delayed; commitments disappear – we have seen plenty of those; services deteriorate – lots of evidence for that; and communities are told to wait. That is exactly what many Victorians feel like is happening right now.

The debt trajectory is extraordinary. It is so extraordinary that peak debt is beyond the forwards. The forwards in the budget do not actually capture peak debt in this state. The debt levels are unimaginable compared to what might have been foreseen even just a decade ago, and debt matters because at the end of the day you are going to have to pay the interest on that debt. You have got to service that debt, and that will ultimately crowd out very, very worthy competing priorities.

Interest is about to become, over the forwards, the third biggest spending line item in Victoria. It will be health, education, interest – not housing, not a whole bunch of other very, very worthy activities that government is engaged in, but interest payments. Every dollar spent servicing debt is a dollar that

does not go ultimately into hospitals, schools, transport, emergency services, community infrastructure and housing, as I said. Financial discipline is not just some sort of abstract accounting exercise. It has a very real consequence.

I want to talk a bit, and I know the member for Euroa might very well be pleased to hear me raising this, about the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires. I remember that summer very, very well. It was like Armageddon towards the end of 2019. The pandemic was coming, and we knew that something was up. There were those hideous bushfires. I am getting goosebumps just thinking about it. But in those fires there were 1000 structures destroyed – 400 homes taken out and 650-odd non-residential buildings – and 1.5 million hectares burnt. Compare that with the recent bushfires, where 900 structures were destroyed and 338 homes taken out – comparable figures. Four hundred thousand hectares burnt. Yes, there were fewer hectares in this circumstance, but in terms of the very real human, economic and commercial impact, they are broadly comparable figures.

The response back then, in 2019–20, was enormous. The Commonwealth established a national $2 billion bushfire recovery fund, and the Andrews government established Bushfire Recovery Victoria as a standalone authority and announced $64 million in bushfire tax relief, payroll tax relief, commercial stamp duty concessions, land tax relief, council assistance packages, broad clean-up programs and tourism recovery funding. There was also a $10 million council assistance fund and later a $465 million tourism recovery package. The clean-up program reportedly covered insured and uninsured properties. That came from a government that had some fiscal flex.

Roll the tape forward to 2025–26, and what do we see? Similar figures – 900 structures, 338 homes and 400,000 hectares, as I said. The government says more than $400 million has been committed towards response and recovery, and make no mistake, that investment is essential and worthwhile. The fire-impacted communities absolutely deserve support, but the response has clearly been narrower in scope. There has been no equivalent Bushfire Recovery Victoria–style authority publicly announced, no equivalent national recovery fund, no broad payroll tax relief, no major commercial stamp duty concessions and no equivalent council assistance framework. Even the simple matter of rates relief has not appeared. It has relied much more heavily on existing disaster funding arrangements and targeted grants, very temporary assistance and narrower tax relief measures.

It has included disaster recovery payments, income support and concessional loans and grants, all from the feds, and has just had land tax waivers and replacement home stamp duty from the state. That tells us something important. It tells us about the lack of fiscal flex and the lack of capacity that the government has to deal with those circumstances that are predictable to a degree, but nonetheless when it happens and the scale at which it happens seem invariably to take us by surprise. Why does this arise? Well, it arises for a few reasons. One is waste and overcommitment, so cost overruns, infrastructure delays and scaled-back projects where money is spent at the start of a project and then dribbles over time. Maroondah is a classic example: some number of millions were spent immediately after the election, and then a few million here and a few million there – basically the holding costs. The bureaucrats have done next to nothing in advancing that project in that time. When you compound that over the life of all of the projects being undertaken by government, what you see are cost overruns and a collapse in confidence. Eventually you run out of financial room to move.

Where we find ourselves right now in Victoria is in a state that is dealing with the legacy of the unrestrained ego of Daniel Andrews. The shrine to his unrestrained ego in an infrastructure program that the state simply cannot afford has been running rampant in building every single thought bubble that came into his head, and now we find ourselves in a circumstance where we simply cannot afford that infrastructure pipeline. Rather than being up-front and honest about it – the government has not gone out and said, 'We've cancelled Maroondah Hospital' – they have simply ducked and weaved and pretended that it is all still in the budget papers somewhere, when in fact clearly it is not. That is my tuppence around the state of the Victorian finances. They need serious attention, and they need attention now.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:42): I am so pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this matter of public importance. We recognise this is a matter of importance because certainly you will get less with Jess. At this election Victorians face a clear choice about the future of our state and the future of communities like Cranbourne. We can continue investing in the services families rely on – on our hospitals, on our schools, on our TAFEs, on our emergency services, on our transport and on our frontline workers – or we can go backwards. Make no mistake: the Liberals plan to cut tens of billions from the Victorian budget and slash one in seven public sector jobs. It is not some abstract accounting exercise, it is a direct threat to the services that hold communities like Cranbourne together. I have seen this movie before. Every time the Liberal Party says 'efficiency', ordinary people end up paying the price. When they say 'budget repair', communities like Cranbourne lose services. When they say 'restructure', working families lose security. And when they say 'natural attrition', what they really mean is fewer workers doing more work for longer hours under greater pressure.

The Leader of the Opposition says these cuts will somehow spare frontline services, but Victorians know better. You cannot cut billions of dollars and remove thousands of public servants without consequence, because behind every public sector job is a real service. It is the child protection worker who is helping vulnerable kids, it is the nurse coordinating care and it is the ambulance dispatcher answering a desperate call. It is the planning officers helping deliver roads and school infrastructure in fast-growing communities like Cranbourne. It is the TAFE teacher training apprentices. It is the mental health worker who is supporting struggling young people. You have all heard me: Cranbourne is one of the fastest growing communities in Victoria. It is an optimistic community and a growing community. It is a diverse community. Families are moving to Cranbourne because they want opportunity, they want security and they want a better future for their children, just like I want for my children. But growth requires investment. We need more schools, not fewer; we need more nurses, not fewer; we need more transport services, not fewer; and we need more emergency support workers, not fewer.

The Victorian Liberals want Victorians to believe that they can sack thousands of workers and somehow improve services at the same time. This does not pass the pub test, it does not pass the test of logic and it does not pass the chai and chat test. Let us remember the history here: the Liberal Party has a long record of cuts and privatisation in Victoria. We all know what happened under the previous Premier: schools were shut; hospitals were closed or downgraded. We all remember TAFE being gutted. Public assets were sold off and transportation was privatised. In Cranbourne they even privatised the ambulance service.

Steve McGhie interjected.

Pauline RICHARDS: They even privatised the ambulance service. The member for Melton still remembers, and so does the community that I serve. Victorians remember the damage. Communities still remember losing local services, families remember the anxiety and the uncertainty, and Cranbourne remembers what it means to be treated like an afterthought while essential services are cut back in the name of economic reform. That is why people are rightly worried now, because when Liberals talk about cutting back-office staff, frontline workers know what happens next – the workload shifts onto them, waiting times blow out projects, communities miss out and eventually governments turn to expensive consultants and private contractors, often costing taxpayers more in the long run.

We have already heard warnings from unions, workers and community voices that cuts of this scale will create a brain drain from the Victorian public service and damage service delivery across the state. Who suffers first when the services are stretched? It is not the wealthy suburbs, it is not the corporate boardrooms; it is outer suburban communities like Cranbourne, it is working people, it is pensioners, it is young people trying to get ahead, it is tradies sitting in traffic because infrastructure falls behind population growth, it is patients waiting longer for care and it is parents struggling to access support for children with disabilities. Let us be honest about the broader Liberal philosophy here: it is not just about balancing books, it is ideological, and Maggie Thatcher would love it. The Liberal Party has always believed government should do less, public services should shrink and the private sector should

take over more responsibilities. That is why they privatised the ambulance service in Cranbourne last time they served Cranbourne. That is why they have repeatedly attacked public services and public workers over decades. But the pandemic has taught us something else: public service matters, public health care matters and emergency services matter. The people who serve the public matter, because when crisis hits, it is not the consultants or the corporate lobbyists who save communities, it is the nurses, it is the ambos, it is the teachers, it is the emergency workers and it is public sector workers. These workers deserve respect and not scapegoating. While the Victorian Liberal Opposition talks about cuts, the reality is the Victorian economy is growing.

Responsible financial management does matter, but there is a difference between responsible savings and reckless austerity, there is a difference between reform and destruction and there is a difference between building for the future and tearing services apart. Cranbourne cannot afford a return to the politics of cuts. From the east of the electorate to the west, there are new schools and there are new services. As I leave my home in Cranbourne South, I look right and the first thing I see is a new SES. When I look left, I see the new Cranbourne West Secondary College. It has been operating for five years. This school is beautiful. It is absolutely topnotch. I see a new primary school at the Quarters estate called Quarters Primary School. I see refurbishments for Marnebek, a special development school that was able to make sure that the $30 million that it received was spent on our special development students. When I go further east, I see roads that are unlike anything that we have had before. I would not let my children drive through Hall Road and Evans Road because the intersection was so dangerous; that intersection is now unrecognisable. And when I head further east, I go past the sparkling Cranbourne Community Hospital.

The Cranbourne Community Hospital is a public community hospital where they serve people with ophthalmology, dental, dialysis, mental health services and soon an urgent care clinic as well. We cannot afford a return to the politics of cuts. We cannot afford to gamble with schools while classrooms are growing. We have five classrooms a week of children being born into the City of Casey. We cannot afford to gamble with hospitals while demand increases, and we cannot afford to gamble with emergency services while communities continue to grow. We certainly cannot afford another era where public assets and essential services are handed over to private interests while ordinary families from Cranbourne are left behind. The people of Cranbourne deserve a government that sees them, values them and invests in them, not a government that sees them as a line item to be cut. So when you hear the Leader of the Opposition talk about billions in cuts, I ask the obvious question: which services in Cranbourne disappear? Which jobs in Cranbourne vanish? Which communities in Cranbourne miss out? History tells us the answer. Communities like Cranbourne always end up paying the price, because making life easier, safer and more affordable is what they know the Labor government does for their community. Never forget that the last time that the Liberal Party served the community of Cranbourne and held the community of Cranbourne, they privatised the public ambulance service. We only need to turn to the member for Melton to find out what that meant for our community. It meant paramedics not having the facilities and services they need. This MPI has been a gift to this chamber. It gives us the opportunity to remind our communities what happens when those opposite are given the opportunity. We know it is all austerity.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (17:52): This matter of public importance speaks of essential services deteriorating, and I want to speak to that matter directly because my community is living through that deterioration right now in the most visceral and devastating way possible. On 8 and 9 January 2026 a catastrophic fire tore through the region I represent. 136,000 hectares burnt, one life was lost and hundreds of families lost their homes, their sheds, their fencing and their livestock – in many cases everything they had built and everything that they had dreamed of. A state of disaster was declared. Ninety-eight per cent of every property the fire touched was destroyed. Four months on, we are going into winter and we are still waiting – waiting for their properties to be cleaned up, waiting for a temporary roof over their head, waiting to rebuild, waiting for the Allan Labor government to treat them with the basic dignity that Victorians have come to expect and that the royal commission and every inquiry since into a bushfire disaster has demanded. I am placing on the record a full account

of this government's failures and I am naming what was promised, what was delivered and what was not, and I am naming the human cost of that failure, because behind every statistic in this, there is a person who is struggling to rebuild.

The Longwood fire was one of the most destructive fires this state has seen in over a decade. The state of disaster declaration was warranted. The scale demanded an equivalent response, and we have not received one. This is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of documented binding standards that this government has signed up to. The 2009 Victorian royal commission into the bushfires established after Black Saturday, which killed 173 Victorians, made clear what trauma-informed recovery looks like. It found that a registration process that required traumatised people to repeat their information to multiple agencies separately added to their trauma. It found that post-fire welfare checks must be coordinated, especially for small communities, and discovery, the opportunity for a property owner to search through the rubble. The 2020 royal commission doubled down on these recommendations and went further, recommending coordinated, nationally consistent debris clean-up arrangements. Well, I have news for you. This government is turning its back on those recommendations. Last Friday I was at the Seven Creeks pub in Euroa. I spoke with Michelle from Longwood East, and Michelle told me that that day the state government clean-up contractors arrived at her property and she begged for them to give her the time to go through the rubble to find her grandmother's diamond necklace. She got a couple of hours.

Can you imagine that, chasing through the rubble for a couple of hours, and the contractor said, 'I shouldn't even be doing this.' She is still traumatised. The contractor said, 'I should not be doing this,' and the rubble was removed. She found the necklace, but not without an extraordinary amount of trauma. Discovery is a basic, established standard of every bushfire clean-up program since 2009, and this is not offered to my community. This is shameful. This is not a bureaucratic failure, it is a failure of human decency. This is a government using the machine of recovery to compound the trauma of the people it is supposed to serve. It is heartless, and it has to stop.

I spoke to Christine in Ruffy this morning. Christine was contacted by Emergency Recovery Victoria and asked to waive her rights to her property. ERV concierge Brendan said, 'Well, do you want a clean-up program, or do you want me to remove you from the list?' I have that email on record. This is not trauma-informed care, this is coercion. This is a false urgency applied to a traumatised person, who had already lost her home, wielded by a government staffer to shut down legitimate questions about a legal document. The 2020 royal commission was explicit: clean-up programs must be voluntary, consent must be freely given, and time pressure and forcefulness have no place in disaster recovery. The Labor government's own program violated those principles.

Let me compare what has been delivered. In the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires, Victoria and the feds jointly funded a $75 million clean-up program. By the end of August 2020, seven months after the fires, 736 properties had been fully cleared in East Gippsland and north-east Victoria – 736 properties in seven months. Four months on from our January bushfires, with a declared state of disaster, we have $112 million announced for a clean-up, and 28 homes have been cleaned up in four months. We are living in rubble. We are living in dangerous conditions. We are living with asbestos that elderly people are forced to clean up themselves because of this dysfunctional state government rolled out program. It is not recovery, it is abandonment. And at the current rate, it is going to take years for my community to get back on its feet.

Today, 12 May, the waiver on gate fees and the waste levy has expired. Four months on, the state cannot even do their own clean-up, and yet we cannot even get a free levy at our tips. For one month it is going to be extended. That is this government's answer to families who have taken matters into their own hands, because they have to. They have been cleaning up their own properties because Emergency Recovery Victoria is rolling out such a dysfunctional program, and now they are being financially penalised for doing the job of this incompetent Labor government. I am calling for this levy waiver today to be extended to the end of 2026, and I will not stop until it is extended so my community can properly clean up.

But I have to ask this question – and take it seriously, please: who is in charge of this clean-up program? At the recent bushfire inquiry, my colleague the member for Northern Victoria Gaelle Broad asked very specific and targeted questions: how many properties had been cleaned up, and who made the decision to implement a two-tiered clean-up program that excluded insured properties? The deputy commissioner of recovery answered that that decision was made by the CEO of Emergency Recovery Victoria. That was her job. She deflected responsibility and blamed it on another role. It was her job. She made that decision, and my community is paying the price for it now. I have to question her capabilities, because it seems like she was deliberately misleading the inquiry and deliberately misleading Parliament. Is she capable of the job? I will let the Premier answer that one, but if she would like to meet with me, I am happy to make some suggestions.

I want to get to the point now. I have got a couple of minutes left. I am not here just to document the failures. There are so many, hundreds of them, and my community is stalled because of this government's failures.

A member interjected.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I am here to demand remedies – yes, and you are part of the problem: (1) A universal clean-up program available to insured and uninsured alike, run on the voluntary consent-based model that the royal commission recommended. No more coercion from now on. (2) Immediate extension of the landfill levy waiver to the end of 2026. It makes sense; the state cannot even clean up these properties, and you are asking people who have just been burnt to clean it up themselves. (3) Fast-track permit approvals. If they are rebuilding a shed or rebuilding a home, let them get on and do it. This is standard. This is precedent from every disaster previously. (4) A three-year rate exemption – it is very little. At the moment they are deferring: deferral is debt, Labor; you have got to pay the bill at some stage. (5) A dedicated business revenue loss support process with grants, equivalent to what was provided in the Grampians – a five-grand leg-up for businesses that are on their knees right now. (6) A regional tourism and marketing package for the Strathbogie Ranges and surrounding regions – not a concert, not a media post, not some hollow announcement, but a genuine strategy to get people back into our communities, because we are open for business and we need your support. (7) Modular housing options and stamp duty exemptions. I have people in tents coming into winter. We do not have caravans. There is a hotline that says that caravans will come – well, when are they coming? (8) A long-term, on-the-ground, trauma-informed mental health service operating directly on the fireground – not outside, a couple of hours from our community. (9) Dedicated environmental restoration funding for the Strathbogie Ranges and the region impacted by the bushfire. (10) Full financial transparency: a public account of what has been committed under this government and how it has been spent, because we are sure as hell not even feeling it on the ground.

This government had the precedent, it had the framework and it had the funding mechanisms. Every tool required to do this properly had already been used in previous disasters by a Labor government, by a Labor Premier, under the same royal commission standards. They chose not to use them.

Bills

Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026

Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (18:02): I rise to give the Greens budget reply speech to the 2026–27 Victorian budget handed down by the Allan Labor government. This is my 12th year in this Parliament. I entered the Parliament because I deeply cared about the environment, about climate action and about my community, and I could see that Labor and Liberal governments – successive

governments, time and time again – made decisions that did not have our community, the environment or the future in mind. Instead, in my previous life working in government myself and in non-government organisations, I saw clear examples of where governments, including Labor governments, prioritised their corporate donors over the community and made decisions that favoured the big corporations, the coal and gas companies, the gambling industry and the big multinational toll road companies, against what was good for the community, the environment and the future. I saw a Labor Party that became so captured by corporate interests that ex-Labor ministers went to work as lobbyists for the coal and gas companies as soon as they left office. I saw a Labor Party so captured by corporate interests that Labor took fossil fuel and gambling and toll road company donations like it was totally normal – it is not normal. And then I saw a Labor Party that was so captured by these corporate interests that they made decisions that then favoured those same corporations to protect those corporations' profits, even when it came at the expense of the community, the environment or future generations.

Over the last 12 years I thought that things had changed a bit here in Victoria, but with this budget I am dismayed to say that the Labor Party has reverted to type and delivered a budget that continues to give corporations essentially whatever they want, and does very little to actually fix the big systemic issues that everyday Victorians are facing, which is just such a shame. After the many good things that have been done here in Victoria over the last 12 years, Labor has decided to take a step to the political right and deliver a budget that has such little vision, that essentially is designed to just keep things the way they are now, even though we know that the status quo is fundamentally not working for everyday people and is only working for the top end of town. With the housing crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and structural tax and inequality issues really affecting people's lives right now and their vision for what they think they can do in the future, what a shame that Labor has taken the opportunity to do pretty much nothing to fundamentally fix or change any of it. Where are the days of the big reformist Labor governments who had bold ideas and wanted to make big change? In Victoria those days seem long gone.

Let me give you some examples. Even though in Victoria we are in a difficult budget position, in this budget Labor has chosen to give $4.4 billion in tax breaks to property developers, land bankers, wealthy investors and owners of multiple homes when we are in the middle of a housing crisis and most young people are crying out for big reform when it comes to housing. This is a Labor budget that chose to cut a dodgy eleventh-hour backroom deal with Labor's donors at the Lottery Corporation to give them the longest exclusive contract in history and hand over $397 million in tax concessions to pokies operators while Victorians are now losing more than $7 billion a year on gambling. This is a budget that is pouring another $344 million into demolishing Melbourne's public housing towers, and that is on top of the $2.5 billion that has already been spent demolishing all the high-rise public homes in Victoria to make way for private development on that inner-city public land. Labor's big housing story that they were selling in this budget was 700 social homes a year over 10 years, not even a drop in the ocean compared to the need and something that even Labor's strongest allies in the housing sector came out and criticised.

It is a Labor budget that leaves countless schools, community health services and community organisations without the funding that they desperately need to provide the things that our community needs, leaving Victorians with the lowest funded schools and the worst paid teachers in the country. Whatever happened to the Education State? All Labor seems to do now is throw a small amount of money to pork-barrel a few schools in Labor marginal seats while doing nothing to bring Victorian schools up to the standard that other states have, with no money to fund a proper pay rise for teachers and school staff. It is actually kind of a joke: we have Labor MPs having to resort to doing covert social media videos out the front, secretly, of primary schools because staff will not even let them onto primary school campuses at the moment to make their funding announcements, because of the dire lack of funding for teachers and schools.

Let us look at some examples of schools that need funding that are not getting it. Kensington Primary School in my electorate received money five years ago for some much-needed school upgrades, but

due to cost overruns from the Victorian School Building Authority only half the project was ever finished. Five years later the school is still waiting for that project to be completed, yet they received nothing in this Labor budget. These are basic repairs we are talking about: rotting window frames, wheelchair access so kids with disabilities can access their classrooms, desperately needed insulation, soundproofing and fixing leaks. I guess they have to keep waiting for a government that cares. At Collingwood College, students and teachers have had concrete literally falling through ceilings because of years of water damage and neglect. Students have had their classrooms shut down indefinitely. They got nothing in the budget despite parents and staff begging the government to act before someone is seriously injured. Maybe the fact that these kids come from some of the most vulnerable communities in our city means they are not somehow worthy of good educational facilities.

Labor cannot find money to fix these schools for our kids, but they can somehow afford to give $400 million to fund luxury corporate box upgrades at the grand prix, because heaven forbid that Labor upset the ultrawealthy and their corporate mates at the grand prix. I do wonder if this has anything to do with the fact that ex–Labor minister Martin Pakula is now the chair of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation. Budgets are about choices, and it seems pretty clear what choice Labor has made here: keep things the same, do not make any changes, keep the corporations happy and hope the community will just throw up their hands and not ask for more, because the Liberal government alternative will be even worse. That is what Labor is banking on. This is the reality under Labor.

Here in Victoria everyday people are struggling with the cost of living. Their rent, their mortgages, their groceries, their bills and their healthcare costs are going up, while there are corporations operating here in Victoria that are making obscene record profits. The big four banks made almost $30 billion in profit last financial year alone, and earlier this month they once again recorded billions in profits just for the last six months. Fossil fuel corporations are making billions exporting Australia's gas while ordinary people struggle to pay their power bills and are left with the clean-up costs of climate change, which the gas companies burning their product actually causes. Woodside alone recorded billions in profit last year while energy prices continue to rise and communities are left to deal with skyrocketing insurance premiums and the worsening climate crisis – fires, floods, extreme weather. We will see tonight in Labor's federal budget that Labor will decide not to tax these gas exports because the gas lobby has its hooks so far into the Labor government. When wealth and profits are flowing upwards to the big banks, the gambling corporations and the fossil fuel companies while everyday people are struggling to afford the basics, something is very, very wrong. The system is rigged, and Labor seems completely disinterested in fundamentally fixing it.

While Labor are putting the big corporations first, they are putting people and the planet last. This is a Labor budget that cuts funding for our renewable energy agency, Solar Victoria, by 20 per cent or $30 million a year. There are cuts to Parks Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the environment. There is no new funding to deliver the central-west national parks. I guess the environment just misses out again every single time. Days later, days after making these cuts, the Labor government under Premier Jacinta Allan makes a $500 million –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Can you please use the correct titles.

Ellen SANDELL: It seems like the members opposite are not actually interested in listening to the content. Maybe it is a bit too uncomfortable for them. Days after making cuts to environmental agencies, Labor under Premier Jacinta Allan have approved a $500 million gas project, the biggest gas project in a decade.

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Melbourne has been here for 12 years. The member should know well enough that you refer to members of this place by their correct titles – that is, the Premier or the Leader of the Opposition or the Minister for Small and Family Business. You do not refer to their first name; you do not refer to their last name. And if you are

referring to a member of the other place, you refer to them as Mr or Ms from the other place. It is not that hard. Seriously, you have been here for 12 years. How hard is it?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): I would ask the member for Melbourne to please use correct titles.

Ellen SANDELL: As well as all of these cuts to the climate and the environment, the budget abolishes vital climate and environmental bodies altogether – bodies like Sustainability Victoria, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council, Recycling Victoria and the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority, and the list goes on. That is even before you get to all the critical environmental work that the government should be doing but simply chooses not to. According to the latest state of the environment report, all of Victoria's biodiversity indicators right now are poor or declining, and that is damning. Yet there is no new money to fund the *Biodiversity 2037* strategy. I guess we will just get to 2037 and the government will wonder why none of the targets in this strategy were met, why the environment has not improved and why biodiversity indicators continue to go backwards – because this strategy never got any money even when it was first released.

This is a budget that places short-term politics over long-term community safety. The Labor budget finds a record $2 billion annually for prisons to pander to scare campaigns from the right-wing media and the opposition, but at the same time it makes cuts to crime prevention and specialist youth programs as well as mental health and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs – programs that the actual evidence says are the most effective way to break offending cycles and prevent crime from happening in the first place to keep our communities safe. So is it any surprise then that the budget papers also show that recidivism, reoffending rates, have increased in the past year and that all this new spending on prisons has essentially counted for nothing because it has not made us any safer. Well, I guess if Labor had listened to the experts who told them that, they would have known that was exactly what would happen.

This is a budget that starves our integrity agencies and our anti-corruption agencies of the funding that they need to investigate corruption and hold the government to account. The Ombudsman here in Victoria receives less than half the funding of her New South Wales counterpart, and yet the Labor government has refused to give them and IBAC the funding that they need or to make the funding set independently of cabinet. And I wonder why. It is certainly not because there is less corruption here in Victoria than in other states, that is for sure.

You may hear the line that the Victorian budget is not in a good place right now and that that is why we cannot have funding for our schools or community health or the environment or our multicultural communities or the community services that we all need. The Liberals will tell us we cannot afford any more spending because of Labor's mismanagement, but then the Labor Treasurer in her speech tried to lower our expectations and say that governments cannot fix everything. Actually, the true story lies in neither of these statements. While the government have made some big investments in things that are important – the Metro Tunnel and the COVID response, for example – they have also given billions to toll road companies for mega toll roads that were not necessary and billions to property developers to demolish public housing while refusing to raise revenue from the corporations that can afford to pay and that are making megaprofits – the big banks and the gambling and fossil fuel industries.

Instead of ensuring that our resources are equitably distributed, governments – Labor and Liberal – over many years have made active decisions that allow wealth to be concentrated at the top end of town, and corporations have somehow been able to convince governments that this is just the natural order of things. It is not. It does not have to be this way. We live in a wealthy country, in a wealthy state. We have the resources we need for everyone to have what they need to live a decent life if those resources were equitably distributed, if we taxed the wealthiest corporations fairly. If for once politicians in this place were not bowing down to corporate interests and their donor mates, we could flip the switch. Instead of giving taxpayer money or special treatment to big developers, to gas

companies, to toll road companies and to gambling companies like Labor is doing, we could say, 'How about these corporations contribute some of their megaprofits to give back to our community?' After all, it is the community that gives them the licence to make these megaprofits and that allows them to drill our gas, to use our public land, to make money from huge government contracts or to benefit from laws that give them government protection, like the banks do. It is the community that are the workers that allow these megaprofits to be made in the first place. Perhaps in return we could require these corporations to give some of those megaprofits not just to their CEOs, not just to their shareholders, but to fund the things that our community as a collective needs – good schools and good community health facilities, just as an example. All we are asking is that they pay their fair share, and then we would have enough to think beyond this meagre, reactionary, short-term politics and actually have some long-term vision and offer Victorians something different, something hopeful.

The Greens have shown how this can be done here and around the world. If we taxed the big banks, the gambling corporations and the fossil fuel giants, we could raise billions to fund the things that we all need. We could properly fund our schools and healthcare system and build the public homes that we need. We could make public transport more frequent and permanently free. We could invest in renewable energy much faster, fund home insulation and energy upgrades and bring down people's power bills permanently. We could make sure that every Victorian has access to the basics of a decent life. It is possible. The problem is not that the government cannot fix these things. The problem is that Labor has been so captured by corporations and ultra-capitalism that they have started believing the lines from those same corporations, that things will fall apart if governments do not keep giving them tax breaks and special treatment, but that is just not true. The truth is that people are fed up. We are seeing it in the collapse of the vote for the old major parties. People are looking for something different from a system that only works for those at the top. People are looking for something bold but also something hopeful.

Instead of the fear and the billionaire greed that One Nation taps into and thrives on, the Greens are here to provide that hope and a real plan for everyday people and for the future – the hope that governments can once again be bold and that they can make decisions that make society work for people and have an eye to protecting the future, not just giving in to whatever the right-wing media says or whatever corporations demand to prop up their profits. This country is supposed to be called the Commonwealth. Common wealth – shared wealth, belonging to all of us. It is about time we took that label back and made it mean something again. It is time that we take back the power from the corporations and the billionaires and shift it to everyday people. That is what the Greens stand for, and that is what we will be taking to the Victorian people at this election in November. I look forward to you joining us.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:22): You cannot rely on the Liberals and Nationals to deliver, but I tell you what, you can rely on them to cut. They have history and they have form. For instance, when they were last in, they cut $1 billion from education. They even cut Free Fruit Friday – the audacity of that. I am not meaning to hold that in any kind of jest in any way, because that is exactly what they will do again. The opposition leader has already forecast $40 billion in cuts. She has not been too shy about it, so rest assured she will deliver on the cuts. We can thank her for at least being somewhat up-front about what she will do. Let us look at what is in the DNA of the Liberal–National parties. If we go back to when they were last in government, what was promised? 'There will be no cuts to the public service.' Then they cut $250 million per year from the public service, with 4128 public sector jobs cut or not replaced between 2011 and 2013.

These cuts will be absolutely savage. In Victoria we have been under a Labor government and we have become used to the services that we provide. What will they do? They will cut a billion dollars from our health system. I should say they did – they cut a billion dollars from our health system and went to war with our nurses and ambos. We all remember that; that is still in my brain. I remember the ambos going around and suffering under the previous Liberal government. They cut $1.2 billion from our TAFE, closing – get this – 22 campuses and sacking over 3000 staff. Rest assured they will

do that again. We know how important the TAFE system is in terms of giving our young people good pathways and also people returning to the workforce, which is part of the impetus for the investment in free TAFE, to make sure that we give Victorians the opportunities they deserve but also to build the skills that we need for the jobs that help support our economy.

I am not going to stop there, because we are talking about being honest and up-front. What else did they do? The opposition cut $130 million from Victoria Police and slashed $66 million from our fire services. They wax lyrical about how great they will be when it comes to supporting our wonderful Victoria Police, but history tells another story. Schools – they slashed funding for speech pathologists, psychologists and social workers in schools, slashed funding for the young readers program and cut the $300 School Start bonus. They failed to invest in the new schools our growing state needed. I know that locally in my seat of Albert Park we have had to build a number of schools, and we are proud and glad to deliver on that – South Melbourne Park Primary School, South Melbourne Primary School, Port Melbourne Secondary College and, most recently, Narrarrang Primary School in Fishermans Bend. And, guess what, it is also going to have a kindergarten. We are investing billions of dollars of investment in early childhood education, because we know that it is so important to get those very important skills early in life. It is a great predictor – and I have to say there is a positive and negative there – as to your future and your ability to be able to do the things that you want to do in life and get that job that you rightly deserve. So part of it is also that pragmatic element of making sure that the kinders, where they can, can be built in very close proximity, if not onsite, with our wonderful schools.

I almost had to laugh because the Greens political party was sledging us about our investment in schools, and I was thinking, 'How many schools have the Greens political party built to date?'

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: None. Zero. And how many will they build? None. Zero. Absolutely none. How many have we built? 121 new schools in Victoria, and they smirk at that as if that is nothing. Have they actually visited these schools and seen how fantastic they are? It is important because it is about investing in our workforce as well – our wonderful teachers – and making sure they have great learning environments to operate in, and it is also for our wonderful Victorian children.

Talking about the Victorian budget 2026–27, because again they were lamenting our position when it comes to investment in schools. Let us look at that. For new schools for growing communities, what is in the Victorian budget? $761.8 million for new and growing schools across Victoria. I will say this includes a new campus for South Melbourne Primary School in my electorate. We have got lots of families moving into high-density housing. I know the Liberal–National opposition do not believe in apartments and high-density housing, because how could anyone live like that? I live like that. Somehow I survive. Guess what, a whole lot of families are coming into the electorate, and they are choosing to live in high-density housing because they like to be near great schools and services. We have the highest percentage of arts organisations, I think, in the world, in my electorate, so there are lots of good reasons for people to invest there.

But anyway, coming back to the principle, we are investing in their education, because fundamentally, when the Liberal–Nationals are talking about their horrible cuts, their $40 billion of cuts, what does that mean? They are cutting from Victorians. We invest in Victorians. We invest in their future. We invest in their now. You cannot separate the two when you just talk about expenditure as if it is some sort of independent little outlier out there. You cannot divorce it from what it is actually linking to and what services it actually delivers.

For upgrades for existing schools, we are investing $294.8 million statewide, so I hope that the Greens political party takes a look. Maybe they did not get a good look at the budget. Maybe they did not check it out. I do not think the Treasurer was shy about sharing it with the world. She came into the chamber; she presented it in an honest and upright manner. I think they need to read a little closer, and they will see that we are truly investing in education. We are continuing to invest in education, I should

say. For keeping schools safe and accessible, there is $28.8 million to improve access for students with disabilities and additional needs.

What about kindergartens? The Victorian budget 2026–27 invests almost $500 million to deliver up to 22 kindergartens at school sites, five Early Learning Victoria centres and grants for 27 new and expanded kinders. When we are talking about those sorts of pragmatic elements of managing the household budget, free kinder is an important one. Free kinder is one of Victoria's most significant cost-of-living initiatives. To date, the program has delivered up to $5200 in savings per child for Victorian families. That is real dollars and cents, and that is money that they can otherwise spend on the family budget. I should say, locally – I am just going to share this – Labor has committed $16.51 million to support six projects in the City of Port Phillip – the seat of Albert Park has the City of Port Phillip and also the City of Melbourne – offering up to 307 kindergarten places to the local government area. There are six projects all up. Three were already announced; three have just been announced. That is an investment in Victorian children, because there is nothing more important than investing in the future of our children.

I know the Liberal–National opposition are not too keen on these half-price fares and having free public transport for April and May. Certainly the 20 per cent off the rego I do not think is ticking the box either. Let me tell you, on the doors it is a different story. I do not know about others here, because I know many of my colleagues are also doorknocking, but when you talk through the half-price public transport it actually gets a really positive response, and you do not have to work hard on it. You talk about it, and they go, 'Yes, this is a good, pragmatic measure.' I think we should not underestimate Victorians' pragmatism in seeing the value in that. Also it has had a significant uplift in terms of people using public transport as well, which is good. I would have thought the Greens political party would have been in support of that because getting more people onto public transport reduces congestion and reduces the time that you have to spend in traffic. You can get where you need to go quicker.

On that note, I should mention the Metro Tunnel. We got a little bit of a tick there. I think Victorians deserve a big tick for having faith in the Victorian government to deliver, and we did. We delivered on the Metro Tunnel, because yet again I think when you are talking about expenditure, always attaching it to what services are being provided is really, really important. For instance, for people visiting Parkville – such as hospital staff, getting to and from their workplace in the most expedient and safe way possible – the Metro Tunnel is certainly a big part of that story. When you are thinking about vision and investing in the future of Victorians, major infrastructure investments actually make a huge difference in terms of the quality of life of Victorians, and that is why they are so important. That is why you cannot just sit on your hands.

I know there was some commentary about, 'You can't talk about the war in the Middle East. You're not allowed to talk about that in terms of how you manage the budget and what you give back to the community,' but unlike the Liberal–National opposition, we are not just going to sit on our hands and say, 'Sorry, you're on your own. Too bad. There's a global crisis here, but the government's not here for you.' The Labor government is here for Victorians. We are here for them, and that is why we have implemented some very pragmatic measures, among many, in order to make things just a little bit easier. I think there was a little bit of a distortion, again, from the Greens political party, saying that government does not fix everything. What we are saying is that we are doing what we can in the most pragmatic way, and also there is a two-way conversation here. As I said, when you are on doors et cetera you get direct feedback about what people are thinking and feeling. Certainly, as I was saying from the outset, the half-price fares and the 20 per cent reduction on the rego is going down very well, because it is something people can see and it is tangible. But it is not the red carpet. We are not rolling out something flashy or ostentatious. It is a really good, pragmatic cost-saving measure.

When we are talking about investing in Victorians – that is exactly what this budget does – what does that actually mean? It means more free vision tests and glasses for kids who need them. As someone who, as a young kid from I think grade 3, had to wear glasses, let me tell you, you are not going to get too far in life if you cannot actually read properly. It also ties in well with our mandated literacy reforms

in this state, and we are certainly leading the nation with NAPLAN as well. You can see how it all ties in together, because we do not want Victorian kids falling through the gaps. If they cannot see properly because maybe their parents do not have quite enough money to invest in glasses that they might need, then we are providing them with some good, pragmatic help.

Up to 55,000 Get Active Kids vouchers have been issued for eligible families. I know in my area we have so many wonderful sporting clubs, and they can be like a lifeline for families and for children. Yes, there is a sporting element, but also there is that social connection. It is really setting them up for life. I know that this is a really good and pragmatic measure for households. There are more affordable school uniforms. Some really practical changes have been implemented. Every dollar counts, doesn't it? We know that. This can make a real difference for families.

There is free kinder, which I talked about already, and there are free regular dental check-ups for kids with Smile Squad. Let me tell you, when you are going for a job – and I do not think anyone is going to argue here – you want to have a reasonable set of teeth. They do not have to be perfect of course, but we know that it can be a real drawback when you are seeking to front up for that job if you do not have a reasonable set of teeth. Unfortunately, it is fundamental, and if nothing else, you have got to be able to eat. There are some really significant health impacts from dental decay and from not having your teeth well cared for. But rest assured, Labor is here to support families and make sure that they get those dental services they need.

There are free Ls and free Ps for new drivers. Again, that is something really pragmatic, something measurable. It is not ostentatious, not over the top, and it is something that people can see the practical value in. There is free admission to Zoos Victoria for under-16s. We want to make sure that families have affordable ways to get out and about and to make sure that their kids learn about the world that they live in and about nature as well, so this is really important.

I think the Greens political party was sledging us out on investment in renewables and the transition. Well, let me tell you, when the Liberal–National opposition were last in Parliament, they absolutely strangled the wind industry. The alternatives are: do you want a Labor government that is absolutely pushing ahead – hence the investment in the SEC – when it comes to the transition to clean energy, or do you want a Liberal–National and, dare I say, One Nation government? One Nation were very loud and proud about not believing in net zero and wanting to hear no more about this transition to clean energy. So who do you rely on for that transition? It is Labor. It is Labor governments that invest. History shows us. Who else is going to do it? No-one else is going to do it, let me tell you that.

The Allan Labor government – we are talking about solar rebates, and I am going to round out there – has slashed over a billion off the up-front cost of installing solar, heat pumps and batteries. Who said we do not care about the environment? Why would we put out these investments if we did not care about the environment and Victorians saving money? We are helping more Victorians cut the cost of living by slashing their energy bills. Families can get a $1400 rebate plus a $1400 interest-free loan off the cost of installing solar.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (18:37): I rise to make some comments on the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026. I have been in this chamber now for 12 years. I think that is almost the same as the member for Gippsland South – he came in just after me – and the member for Lowan too. It was 2014. I had been in Parliament for a few years before that. What I hear tonight and today sounds like what I heard going into 2010. There is a lot of almost 'farewell' in some of the government MPs' speeches; they have kind of got the self-justification of a farewell speech. They can all hoo and boo and say whatever, but I have heard it all before. I have heard a lot of it all before. We have heard all the spin. We have heard all the lies. I think Victorians have too. It is a special kind of delusion that Labor members have. There is one journo I had a long conversation with, and there was just this view that to be a Labor MP, I think it was, and to make it into caucus, you have to not be able to make a decision, not offend people, not stick your head above the parapet and have no independent opinions. That sums up most of the Labor party's caucus, doesn't it – it really sums them up.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Off they go. They like to come up. I knew the fish would jump on the hook; I knew they would at 6:40 at night. What is fascinating is to hear these speeches and to hear the kinds of lines that the government are coming out with. I have heard the Leader of the Opposition's name mentioned, I reckon, three times or four times more from the Labor MPs than their own Premier's. When was the last time a Labor MP today, giving an appropriations reply, said the name Jacinta Allan or the Allan government or Premier Allan, whatever it may be? I have not heard it. I have been listening intently to the last few, downstairs and up here sitting up for my time doing chamber duty, and I have not heard them talk about their own Premier, which is fascinating.

When you rate minus 50, I guess you would not want to talk about it. You would not want to talk about your Premier when she is rating minus 50. I think there are only a couple of them rating even lower than that.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Matthew GUY: That is one of the better numbers – just fascinating. With half a dozen of the growth area MPs, according to your own members, running around the place, coming third – according to their own internals – on primary votes, you would not be talking about your own Premier. That aside, I just think it is fascinating because the lies and the delusion are just epic. It is just quite bizarre to think that Victorians are somehow jumping out of bed and saying to each other, 'You know what, I'm so glad we've got this government after a decade plus more. The state's pumping along – powering along. I don't want to go to Queensland.' Remember when Andrews said no-one wants to go to South Australia? He was right.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Matthew GUY: 'Who'd want to go there?' Remember? He was right – no way. It is just that every business group, every major investor and every major indicator – everything and everyone – are saying this state is, sadly, in trouble, and the common factor about it is government policy or previous policy decisions, I might say. The member for Ringwood quite eloquently articulated what happens when you overcommit and then cannot service where you are at, or you pay too much or, as in this government's case, you allow money to be stolen – billions of dollars of it. That is where we have got to after a decade and a bit of this government.

I think Labor MPs run around thinking that Victorians do not notice the quality of their roads, do not notice the extent of their utility bills and do not notice the promises such as Geelong fast rail, Wyndham Vale electrification, Melton electrification, the extension to Cranbourne East and all these rail upgrades that were promised. The Maroondah Queen Elizabeth II hospital was promised and not delivered, the Melton Hospital is late and the West Gippsland Hospital was never delivered. They think that Victorians are mugs and will not notice these things. Victorians do notice. They are smarter and they are not to be treated as mugs by anyone in this chamber – not my side, not the government and not other parties – because the punters know when they have been sold a pup and they know when the government is lying to them, and the government is lying to them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): I warn the member for Bulleen about using unparliamentary language. I think the Deputy Speaker made it very clear about the use of that word, so I ask you to cease using it.

Matthew GUY: That is fair. I am happy to cease using it. I am happy to cease using a parliamentary term has been used for 170 years. If that is the ruling, I will do it. Having said that –

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: She has gone back to Sydney. I say again: I find it fascinating that members of Parliament from the Labor Party walk in here and spout these government speaking notes. I have seen this all before. I have seen them come and I have seen them go –

Natalie Suleyman interjected.

Matthew GUY: Well, Minister, I hope you are doorknocking your seat, by the way, too. Give it your best shot. I bet you could not name five streets out of it either; you are a very insular type. I just say again about the state of the state of Victoria, after a decade of this government, that they have run our finances into the ground. They have left us with more than 10 times the debt that they found when they got into office, and still they are coming into this chamber, most of these members, and their entire speeches are about the opposition leader. There is no pride in their own budget and very little pride in their own Premier. If they did have it, you would think they would launch off about their pride in their budget – their 12th one. No, they have come in here to try and run down –

A member interjected.

Matthew GUY: I heard a number of them. I wrote it all down. I can go through it if you like. They ran down the opposition leader, talking about – I will not use the terms. There was a whole bunch of them. It just shows you, Acting Speaker, where we are at with this government – tired, delusional and full of people who are espousing mistruths. I hope that is parliamentary to you, Sir. If it is, I will use it. But the point is that these members run onto social media and try and come up with ideas and lies about 'The Liberal Party has promised this' – sorry, mistruths. I apologise. I will say what you would like me to. They talked about the Liberals and the Nationals and what we are going to do: 'They'll do this' and 'They'll do that'. But at the end of the day, I think Victorians are just sick to death of it. And why wouldn't they be? We are paying more, and we are getting less.

There is this whole debate about the public service. Literally in every speech I have heard Labor members saying Liberals will cut the public service. But what is fascinating is on Channel 7 – I had fun putting this on my social media; I think nearly 700,000 people have seen it, too – the Premier was asked if she had cut the public service, and the Premier said quite clearly that yes, she had. He said, 'How many? Was it hundreds?' In response the Premier said no, it was thousands. Thousands! Very proudly the Premier said no, thousands, and of course the Channel 7 journalist Paul Dowsley said, 'So it's okay sometimes to cut the public service?' The Premier looked very bemused. Why wouldn't she? But the Premier of the state herself said of this Labor government, 'Go and ask the Treasurer,' because this current Labor government have cut thousands of people out of the public service. Yet in every delusional speech I have heard from the government today they have got up and talked about and warned Victorians about the consequences of cutting thousands of people from the public service. Apparently, hens will cease to lay eggs and chickens will live with cows and whatever – the world is going to end.

Yet they have admitted to doing it themselves. The Premier said thousands have been cut by this government, and the Premier did not say it two years ago or two months ago. The Premier said it last week, on Sunday or Saturday, I think it was, said they had cut thousands, so I am just trying to work out what the difference might be in this kind of delusion. Somehow the speaking notes – going back to what I had said from what we were told, you know: 'You can't have an independent opinion. You can't stick your head up above the parapet. You have got to follow the speaking notes.' Well, clearly that is true, because if it was sticking to fact – the Premier herself comes in here and says to the media that they have cut thousands of public servants to get the budget back in check and then runs in here with all the speaking notes for every Labor MP to run around and say, 'Oh, listen, if you vote for them, you might get cuts. And don't you know what these cuts mean?' Well, maybe you should ask yourself those questions, because the Premier herself has admitted to it.

I just find it stunning that we are getting the same old rubbish. Yet this budget mentioned nothing about – if I go back just to this time four years ago, when I was in this chamber and listened to Labor

members talk about it – how important it was going to be to get Geelong fast rail. Remember that one, Geelong fast rail? We were going to have 250-kilometre-an-hour trains to Geelong, and Labor was trumping that up this time four years ago. They were talking up the West Gippsland Hospital this time four years ago. The member for Narracan will tell you all about that. So they can say all they want – they were talking about the Murray Basin rail being completed. They were talking about Gippsland rail being completed. They were talking about Wyndham electrification being completed – not started, abandoned, never going to happen.

Apparently, we are now going to get Melton nine-car trains, because why? Why talk that up? Because the government has not actually put in its promise from 2018, which was electrifying the network, electrifying those two lines, not just to Melton but to Wyndham Vale as well. That is what the commitment was. It was not a commitment to say, 'Hey, look, we've got this nine-car train promise and we're going to extend the platforms and buy more VLocities' – which are country trains – 'and run them out to the fastest-growing areas in Australia.' That was not their commitment. It was to provide electric trains. Where has that gone? The same way as the Eltham hospital, the same way as the member for Narracan's hospital, the same way as Geelong fast rail and the Geelong convention centre. How many thousands of hospital beds were promised in COVID? I am trying to remember. Was it 5000, 3000, 4000? It was a lottery, but it never happened.

The point of all of this is, I think, Victorians are just coming to a conclusion with all this rubbish. They are just coming to this conclusion. Maybe the member for Geelong – I am very glad she is here – can give a budget reply on the Geelong fast rail, the 250-kilometre-an-hour trains – I am still waiting for them. Apparently Deutsche Bundesbahn was engaged to give advice to the government.

Natalie Suleyman interjected.

Matthew GUY: Well, Minister, your own documents say so, unless you want to dispute your own cabinet.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Through the Chair.

Matthew GUY: Through you, Acting Speaker. But the point is I think the public has just had enough. They have been lied to for a decade or more.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio): Member for Bulleen!

Matthew GUY: Sorry, I apologise. They have been misled for a decade or more. I think the public really just has had enough of the spin and the misleading comments from the government. They are sick to death of a government that has come in and promised the world and has given them a huge debt that is going to be bequeathed to our grandchildren, and at the end of the day they have said, 'We're so good we're going to give ourselves a pat on the back, and you should too.' Victorians have said, 'Actually, I think that's about enough from you people' – and it will be in November, I hope. Thank goodness.

For my community in Bulleen there is nothing in this budget. We did not expect anything from these people. They promised everything and they have delivered nothing. There is nothing for Birralee Primary School. There is nothing for Templestowe College. There are no upgrades to sporting facilities. There are no upgrades for any community facilities in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, because at the end of the day the government could not care less: (1) they are out of money, (2) they only give money to where they think it might possibly be at this point in time electorally beneficial six months from an election and (3) if they have made the commitments they are just going to break them, just like we have seen with a whole bunch of major commitments they made four years ago in this chamber. The punters have had enough of this Labor government. They are sick to death of being misled. They are sick to death of Labor's complete and totally disingenuous behaviour towards the punter. It is time Labor went.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (18:52): I am delighted to talk about the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026. I just want to comment on the member for Bulleen's rant there. The Geelong convention centre actually opens next month, so to say that it does not exist is a bit of misinformation. I suggest he drive past and have a look, because he certainly will not be welcome inside. I believe very strongly, having spoken to my community throughout Geelong, this is a really fair and just budget. It is about addressing the pressures of cost of living that Victorians are facing at the moment, including in my community. For those opposite to talk about cutting $40 billion from the budget and say that it is not going to impact on public service and direct service to people – all of the areas that the budget covers – is just ridiculous, because it will, and my community knows that.

I have not had one person ask me why we are not delivering on what we promised to deliver, because we have. We have delivered on all our commitments in Geelong over the last 12 years. Those opposite spouting off about cutting $40 billion out of the budget is actually resonating with my community, because my community is saying, 'We think this is a good budget.' They genuinely are saying it is a good budget, and they are saying it is a good budget because there are not massive cuts like those opposite are talking about. That really is resonating in my community. They are concerned about the cost of living, and they appreciate all the cost-of-living measures that we have put in place – and there is an enormous list of those things. I do want to talk about what my community has gained from the budget, and it is really important that we continue to fund those projects that meet the demands of our community but also look at the cost-of-living pressures.

One of the key budget items that was delivered for Geelong was the $15 million investment in Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative for their Dreaming Project. This is something that Wathaurong have been working towards for many years now. They had a commitment from the federal government and were waiting on the commitment from the state government, which they now have, which is really exciting for the Aboriginal community in Geelong. It will be not only their health clinic but their gathering place. They will be able to support their community from one location. At the moment they are forced into about five different locations where they are delivering services to Aboriginal people in our community, so this is a really important budget commitment. It is really significant for the Aboriginal community to make sure that they are delivering for their people but also keeping to that self-determination that we all talk about, which is really important, so that they can deliver that. I am very excited for them to deliver the wellbeing and disability care that Aboriginal people deserve and need in our community.

We have also invested $20.31 million in University Hospital for the Geelong paediatric emergency centre. The construction of that was completed last year, and to now have that fully operational is really exciting for my community. It has been something that has been asked for by my community for a very long time, because as you can imagine, in general accident emergency, it is not always a pleasant place for children. To have a very separate accident emergency centre based at Barwon Health, or University Hospital, will make an enormous difference for families who are taking their children there for the incredible health care that Barwon Health provides to our community.

We have also invested $13.27 million in strengthening palliative care in Geelong, and that is a really important priority for Geelong. We know that there has been lots of advancement in how palliative care is delivered to people in our community, and I know that my community is very grateful for that. We have amazing health professionals that work in that space. And to have a facility that will provide that much-needed care is really important for our community, and they do appreciate that.

We also funded the school lawyer program delivered by Barwon Community Legal Service, which is another really important one. It is about early intervention and supporting young people, supporting them to stay at school and to be engaged and connected to the support services that many of them need. That program has been a really significant program for young people in our community.

The other big one for me was Skilling the Bay, which is a great program that has been running for many years now, operated through the Gordon TAFE. This strengthens pathways into education, training and employment for young people, something that we know we need. It has been such a successful program that we now have every secondary school engaged in Skilling the Bay, which helps prepare the local workforce for the future economy, all those areas that are so important for young people and for our business community – to know that there is that preparation, that early intervention, which makes a difference to those young people.

And free TAFE is an incredible and significant thing for my community. I know how much of an impact it has, particularly on low-income families, families with generations of family members who have never really had an education. When I go to graduations, when I visit Gordon TAFE and talk to people who are doing certificate courses or doing a diploma, it is incredible – their stories – that they never thought they would have that opportunity, but now they will. And the new infrastructure that is currently underway from the previous budget, the Centre of Excellence in Disability Inclusion, will make such a huge difference for Geelong, particularly because we have got the NDIS, WorkCover and TAC.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Bulleen electorate roads

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (1649) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – I am very glad she is in the chamber – and it concerns the quality of road signs in and around the Bulleen electorate, specifically on the Eastern Freeway, Thompsons Road, Manningham Road and Bulleen Road. At the moment it is fair to say that the quality and condition of road signs, particularly along the Eastern Freeway – people in eastern Melbourne would understand this – but also in the areas around the North East Link roadworks and also beyond that, is deplorable. They constitute a road safety risk. Some of them are unreadable, and as a consequence they are quite a problem for those seeking to obviously transit through this area, particularly to go certain ways, whether it is tourists going out to Westerfolds Park to see kangaroos or coming out to Heide, whatever it might be.

It is also an issue of self-respect. At the end of the day, we are a city of 5.5 million people, we are a state of 7.25 million people, and we have to present ourselves, as you would expect, in a way that is actually in a First World state with First World conditions. I and the member for Narracan recently on a trip to South America noted similar issues in relation to road sign quality. That is what happens when the government is out of money in Argentina, and it almost feels that way in Victoria, because the condition of road signs and roadside verges is beyond a joke, and particularly coming up, as I said, around the Eastern Freeway, Thompsons Road, Bulleen Road, Templestowe Road and Manningham Road, the condition of and the quality of the road signs there has been raised with me by a number of people. If they are not covered in graffiti, if they are not half missing, if they have not been struck by a truck and not repaired or if they are not on the ground, well, they are probably none of the above, because I do not think I can find or remember one that is in reasonable condition. My request to the minister for roads is to intervene and advise whether it is the department or VicRoads or whoever has responsibility over the whole lot of those signs to fix them, get on with it and actually make these signs readable.

Clarinda electorate open space

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:02): (1650) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on public open space

in the Clarinda district. The Allan Labor government's Suburban Rail Loop will shape our city and state for future generations and ensure Melbourne remains one of the world's most livable cities. Construction on this game-changing project is steaming ahead. The train stabling facility in Clarinda is underway, with tunnel-boring machines onsite and tunnelling to commence this year. The train stabling will be a critical component of the SRL East network. It is also where the SRL East trains will be parked when not in operation and where they will be cleaned, maintained and prepared.

Public open space is critical to the Clarinda district, and we know that the Suburban Rail Loop Authority is committed to ensuring the local community have access to open space to enjoy exercise, play and social experience among nature and greenery while working from home or over the weekend. The Sandbelt Parklands project is a Labor government initiative aimed at transforming former landfill sites, creating a connected green space within the Kingston green wedge. We have worked closely with the community to deliver this vision, one that will provide residents and visitors with the network of public open space that they need and deserve. The whole of the Sandbelt Parklands project will produce some amazing projects for the Clarinda community, including hundreds of hectares of connected parklands for families to enjoy and explore. The SRL will offset land that is built on, and that is why the SRLA is continuing to work through suitable alternative sites for open space to replace the future planned open space at the stabling site. I thank the minister, and I am looking forward to his response.

Mildura train services

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:09): (1651) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to undertake an urgent review into the treatment and care of vulnerable passengers travelling on replacement V/Line coach services and to urgently implement recommendations to ensure what I am about to tell you never happens again. This action follows the deeply concerning experience of Mildura resident 84-year-old Ms Kris Thornton as reported in the Sunny Daily on 3 May. Ms Thornton had planned to travel from Mildura to Melbourne on 18 March, expecting the usual arrangement of coach transfer to rail at Swan Hill. Instead, upon arrival she was informed the entire journey would be conducted by bus – no proper notice, no preparation, no consideration. Apparently V/Line reported that a text message was sent, but a text message to an 84-year-old woman is perhaps not the best form of communication.

Ms Thornton is 84 years old and walks with the assistance of a walking stick. She had packed and prepared for a train journey believing that there would be a catering carriage on said train. Instead she was placed on the coach for what became approximately nine hours in transit with a 10-minute toilet stop for food in Bendigo. Consider that for an 84-year-old woman who is mobility impaired travelling alone: a 9-hour bus trip. Somehow someone thought that this was a sufficient duty of care. She did ask for extended time in Bendigo to make sure she could get something to eat after only having a light breakfast, but that was not accommodated. This is not sufficient for vulnerable Victorians and certainly not for regional communities already enduring some of the longest public transport journeys in the state. Ms Thornton has explained that there was no allowance, as I said, for passengers to adequately access food and drink. This trip for Ms Thornton turned into an eight-day stay in hospital once she arrived in Melbourne. She arrived dehydrated with low blood sugar levels and had to be hospitalised for eight days – disgraceful. For V/Line to say 'We're sorry – thoughts and prayers' is disgusting. What I am asking for is an urgent review into this case and any recommendations from that review to be urgently implemented so that no Victorian has to suffer this kind of treatment ever again.

Werribee electorate youth initiatives

John LISTER (Werribee) (19:07): (1652) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Youth, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate to see firsthand the great impact that our investment in young people's wellbeing is having right across Wyndham. The Werribee electorate is growing rapidly, and it is vital that community infrastructure keeps pace with this growth. Local families and young people deserve access to safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces. I would like to

take the minister to visit the Manor Lakes youth resource centre outdoor space project. The project, which we championed in last year's budget, will provide an enhanced outdoor space for young people to meet up, connect and participate in recreational and community activities. Manor Lakes has had a fairly bad rep, which I think is unfair and unwarranted, and projects like this help give young people better opportunities for inclusion, positive interaction and community involvement. As a teacher and someone who grew up in the Wyndham community I know how important free and accessible spaces are for young people. It can get a bit boring and quite often a lot of the spaces that young people have access to require them to have money or pay to be there, so having a place that is free and has those services adjacent to it through youth resources is really important.

Not every family can afford organised sport activities or programs; however, we are supporting them through our active youth vouchers. Having a safe local place to meet friends and feel connected with the community can make a real difference to that young person's confidence. Young people in our community deserve places where they feel connected, supported and engaged. The Allan Labor government is not only doing this with our youth resource centre project in partnership with council but continuing to support growing communities like Wyndham by delivering projects that connect us together. We have invested in better education facilities; disability inclusion support, which saw $2.2 billion in the recent state budget; and our violence reduction unit working in local schools, particularly at Manor Lakes College, with our early intervention officers and our sports program that we are running there. I look forward to hosting the minister in my electorate to see for herself the benefits of this important project and the other projects we are doing in the youth support space, and I thank my work experience student Charlie Lark for helping me draft this adjournment tonight.

Grant–Downey streets, Alexandra

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:09): (1653) I have an urgent matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister as a matter of priority to make improvements to the intersection of Grant and Downey streets in Alexandra to address the safety issues. Residents in the town have long been concerned with the risks at this busy intersection, where heavy traffic and pedestrians interact. Two weeks ago the long-held fears of residents were realised when a well-known local woman lost her life in tragic circumstances. The loss and the circumstances are felt deeply by the Alexandra community, and I grieve with them and send my heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of all concerned.

This was an accident waiting to happen. This intersection is widely known to be notorious, with many accidents over the years. It is all the more dangerous as it carries traffic from the Goulburn Valley Highway to and from Eildon and the Maroondah Highway to and from Healesville. These are tourist routes travelling through the town centre. There are vans, boats and trailers. On top of that, Grant Street is the main shopping strip in town. It is busy with locals going about their normal business. Further, Alexandra is a farming community and there are many farm vehicles, utes, trucks and horse floats.

I raised this matter previously because people were worried, and I was advised by Minister Donnellan in June 2017 that:

> VicRoads advises me that it has commenced working with key stakeholders to determine the appropriate treatment for this intersection and will consult with the local community and industry within the coming months.

Essentially, low-level treatments were implemented, but clearly that was not enough. The issue becomes now: what are the most appropriate treatments? Pedestrians must be safe, and the risk of collisions between vehicles must also be reduced. The intersection is not suitable for a roundabout – that has been determined multiple times – but what are the options? It might be rumble strips. It might be speed humps. It might be a dedicated pedestrian crossing or crossings or other traffic-calming measures. It might be a combination of treatments. There may be options to reduce traffic volumes through the intersection and around the centre of town, particularly for the number of heavier vehicles. Perhaps TAC could chip in with road safety funding. Regardless, something must be done.

There needs to be proper consultation, too, with the community and with Murrindindi Shire Council. Updates need to be provided to the community. This can be done through local newspapers; UGFM, the community radio station; or even Murrindindi Shire Council. People in the town are desperate for this intersection to be improved. Their worst-held fears came true, and I just ask the government to act with haste in this matter.

Homelessness

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:12): (1654) My adjournment is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action I seek is that the minister brief me on the new assertive outreach services for Melbourne's west that were funded in this year's budget. As the minister knows, this budget allocates an additional $17.4 million towards rolling out an expansion of nine new assertive outreach services to housing and homelessness programs across Victoria, and I am really happy to say that two of these new services will be in Melbourne's west, with one in the Brimbank–Melton area and the other in the western Melbourne area.

For many in my community homelessness is a really serious concern. It is also a concern of mine. It is why last year I was pleased to have the previous Minister for Housing and Minister for Mental Health sit down with me with local homelessness services in the western suburbs – incredible organisations like the Salvos, GenWest, Wombat Housing Support Services and so many others who do just an amazing job at working with folks experiencing homelessness and supporting them into housing.

This was something that we have all said that we really need, and whilst these services do incredible work in supporting Victorians into secure, stable housing, there are just so many people whom they cannot currently reach – rough sleepers who might otherwise not engage with mainstream services and folks who might have mental health issues, who are not in the right headspace to actually reach out to services. These outreach services mean that we will be able to engage with those people and connect them with the help that they need and most importantly, they deserve. For many, this will be the difference between rough sleeping and getting their life back on track. We know that when folks are helped off the streets, our whole community is stronger and so much safer, and that is why I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to be briefed by the minister on how these services will change lives in Melbourne's west.

Palantir Technologies

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:14): (1655) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Premier. I am here to call for the Victorian government to audit every contract that the state Labor government has with the US-based AI surveillance corporation Palantir and come clean with Victorians about the type of data that it has handed over to them. Palantir is an AI and data analytics company co-founded by Peter Thiel, a tech billionaire who was also a major political donor to Donald Trump. It is one of the most secretive and powerful companies in Silicon Valley, used by government agencies, the military and major corporations to surveil customers, workers and citizens. Its AI surveillance technology is being used by immigration and customs enforcement at the moment in the US to surveil and deport immigrants and by Israel to surveil and kill Palestinians. Palantir has even published a pretty disturbing manifesto online, arguing the benefits of American power and implying some cultures are inferior to others, and they have admitted that their technology is used to kill people. Yet under Labor, Palantir is being given government contracts that could have big consequences for our own citizens. According to the *Guardian*, Corrections Victoria alone has handed Palantir nearly $20 million in contracts since 2012. Federal agencies, including defence, spent over $100 million on similar Palantir contracts, and Coles even uses Palantir to spy on shoppers and on workers.

We should be deeply concerned when Palantir is so embedded in institutions across Australia, including here in Victoria, and vacuuming up even more and more sensitive data on our citizens with so little information and transparency about it. Victorians should not be surveilled by AI technology from a US company that has shown such disregard for human rights. One of the worst offenders right

now is Australia's sovereign wealth fund, the Future Fund. Since 2023 the Future Fund's holdings in Palantir have increased from under $7 million to over $165 million. How is that possible – an increase of over 2400 per cent in investment in a company that is willingly and openly arming a genocide and has such disregard for human rights? Labor has a moral obligation to disclose the contracts with this company, and in fact I do not think we should be dealing with this Trump-aligned company at all.

While we are on this topic I want to note this is an especially solemn week for Palestinians. This Friday, 15 May, will be the 78th anniversary of the Nakba, which commemorates the forced relocation of around 750,000 Palestinians and the killing of thousands more. For Palestinians, the Nakba has never ended; they still do not have the right to return to the homes that they were displaced from or compensation for stolen property. They are facing a genocide, a two-tiered citizenship system and illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Kyneton Primary School

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon) (19:17): (1656) The matter I wish to raise tonight is for the Minister for Creative Industries regarding the old Kyneton Primary School, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at the school to announce the site manager and to provide an update on anticipated timelines for the reopening and activation of the site. The old Kyneton Primary School is one of the most treasured and recognisable community assets in the Macedon electorate, and for generations it has been a place of learning, creativity and connection, and local people care deeply about preserving both its history but also its future. That is why our community warmly welcomed the announcement in this year's Allan Labor government budget of additional investment to open the site as a bold, inclusive community and creative hub. It is an exciting opportunity for Kyneton and for the Macedon Ranges more broadly. It reflects the enormous creative spirit of our region and the strong desire from local artists, community groups, creatives and residents to see this iconic space activated and accessible once again. I look forward to welcoming the Minister for Creative Industries to Kyneton in the near future.

Economic policy

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:18): (1657) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for her to adopt the Liberals' 10-year economic plan for Victoria. Under this government, debt has exploded. Our police, teachers and ambos are worse off, and Victoria is the highest taxed state in the nation. When the coalition left office in 2014 net debt was $21.8 billion, and today it is heading to $200 billion. For over a decade Labor leaders have never thought beyond winning the next election. They have traded Victoria's future for their own political survival and robbed future generations to pay for today's overspending. While they offer free this and free that in a desperate attempt to buy votes in an election year, Victorians are waking up to the truth. You cannot believe a single thing this government says. The lies, the spin, the gaslighting – it ends under a Wilson Liberal government. You cannot fix 12 years of short-term thinking with a single budget.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, throughout the day both you and the Speaker have warned members of this place about using unparliamentary language.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member. I mentioned it earlier this morning, and a number of members have been doing it, and I will consult the Speaker on that further. The member for Warrandyte to continue without assistance.

Nicole WERNER: You cannot fix 12 years of short-term thinking with a single budget, and that is why we have released our 10-year economic plan to turn this state around. We will fix the budget, lower taxes and treat every dollar of taxpayers money with the respect it deserves. We will bring investment back into Victoria, cut the red tape that is strangling small businesses and unlock opportunity for young people who want to start something, build something or own something. We will be the government that says to the young tradie, the first home buyer or the battler just trying to get ahead: 'We are on your side. It is time for a fresh start.'

Victorians have a choice this November: a choice between the Allan Labor government, which handed $15 billion to corruption and criminals and hiked Victorian taxes to pay for it, or a Wilson Liberal government with a plan to fix the budget, be honest with Victorians and guarantee the services they rely on. Our plan, despite Labor's scare campaign, is that no-one is getting sacked, unlike the Premier, who in her own words said that it was not hundreds but 'it was thousands' that she has sacked. Our plan will protect every frontline role and freeze back office hiring. That means more police, more teachers and more nurses. Labor is running a scare campaign because they cannot run on their own record. We will do what they have never done – actually be honest with Victorians.

Local Sports Infrastructure Fund

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:21): (1658) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the timeline for the 2026–27 Local Sports Infrastructure Fund. Last week in the budget it was announced that there was $10 million allocated to the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund to deliver new community sporting facilities, and growing communities across the Bellarine know just how transformative this can be. Recently we announced that the Borough of Queenscliffe had successfully secured funding in a previous round to build a new bike park, and that community is very excited and very eager to see that project come to life. But just last week, in a mobile office in Drysdale, I met with two grade 4 students from Clifton Springs Primary School, who were advocating strongly for a new bike park at their own town of Clifton Springs. I know also that many local community clubs across the Bellarine have projects that they think would greatly benefit from this funding, including St Leonards soccer and cricket clubs, Ocean Grove Tennis Club, pickleball clubs across the Bellarine and basketball clubs across the Bellarine. It is important to note that applications to the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund must be submitted by local government authorities, and I know that sporting communities across the Bellarine have been previously disappointed, particularly with the City of Greater Geelong when they have not submitted an application for a certain local project, including proposals for indoor sporting facilities. That is why I am seeking an update from the minister on when those applications for that fund will open, so then I can continue to advocate to the City of Greater Geelong and the Borough of Queenscliffe to work closely with Bellarine sporting communities to ensure worthy local projects are going to be considered.

Responses

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence) (19:23): I note that the member for Bulleen and the member for Eildon raised matters for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and the member for Werribee raised a matter for the Minister for Youth. We had the member for Laverton raise a matter for the Minister for Housing and Building and the member for Melbourne raise a matter for the Premier. We had the member for Macedon raise a matter for the Minister for Creative Industries, the member for Warrandyte raise a matter for the Treasurer and the member for Bellarine raise a matter for the Minister for Community Sport, and I will refer them accordingly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Before we go, on the matter before, as I said, I will mention it to the Speaker, but I encourage members that tomorrow members should be heard in silence when they are on their feet, and also members should understand what unparliamentary language is. I do not think any member would come in here dropping swear words just because they forgot, and unparliamentary language includes other words as well. Let us see how we go tomorrow. The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:25 pm.